



Doing Good While Doing Well

Background

Cerebos Pacific Limited (Cerebos), a food and health supplements company, is a Singapore based multinational with 3,000 employees working in its offices and factories around Asia, Australia and New Zealand. It operates in three spaces - the health supplements business, the Food and Coffee businesses, managing well-loved brands which have been part of people’s lives for generations. In Australasia, the products it manages includes gravies, sauces, coffee and cooking aids marketed under established brand names including Gravox®, Fountain®, Robert Harris®, Mocopan®, Toby's Estate®, Caffè L'affare® and Gregg's®. Its most popular and well-known product offering would have to be the household brand BRAND’S® Essence of Chicken.

Cerebos Business Strategy

A Value Creating Company
“ Our vision is to be a leading food and health supplements enterprise in the Asia Pacific region by creating value for our employees, our customers and our shareholders.”

Led by Mr Eiji Koike, the company’s President and Group Chief Executive Officer who has helmed the company since 1997, Cerebos has undergone tremendous transformation and is recognised as a successful and sustainable business which creates value for all its stakeholders, aligned with Cerebos’ espoused vision.

“The best way to predict the future is to create it”. Citing the philosophy of the late management guru Peter Drucker to his senior management team in an executive committee meeting in 2010, Mr Koike set Cerebos on a path of transformational change. Its 2020 vision is to be “The most exciting, best learning, most engaged and best paid company.” To achieve this, it defined its strategic priorities and identified 7 areas it aims to be recognised as best practices in the industry, with Human Resources (HR) identified as one of the 7 areas.

Cerebos’ HR Strategy and Work-Life Goals

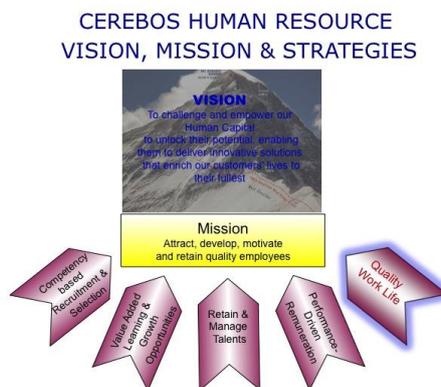


Figure 1: Cerebos’ HR Vision, Mission and Strategy

Cerebos is committed to growing its talent from within and hopes to do so through quality work-life practices amongst other strategies. Its goal for its work-life programme is to create value for employees through promoting a healthy lifestyle and providing a conducive work environment, aligned to its DNA of **'Unlocking Potential'**.



Its Quality Work-Life programme comprises 3 parts — its employee work-life schemes, wellness programmes as well as corporate social responsibility activities. There is a strong emphasis on promoting a healthy lifestyle amongst its employees. Weekly, monthly and annual wellness programmes and activities are continuously being planned and implemented. Cerebos believes that healthy employees are productive employees, essential for building a successful and sustainable business.

"Keeping myself fit and healthy is very important to me. With the long working hours, it is sometimes hard to find time to exercise. However I'm glad Cerebos supports its employees by allowing us to take time off from work to exercise and bond with our colleagues.... I feel much more rejuvenated after exercising and this translates into me being more productive at work as well as off work."

Ms Theresa Tang
Senior Manager, Group Finance

Community involvement also features prominently as part of Cerebos' Quality Work-Life programmes. It has innovatively weaved health and wellness programmes into its CSR efforts. For example, employees can leave an hour earlier each day to exercise, and for every exercise session they attend, including weekends and off-days, Cerebos donates \$5 to the Straits Times Pocket Money Fund. The company has raised close to S\$1.7m for the fund since the introduction of the scheme.

Other Forms of Work-Life Practices

In the area of flexible work arrangements, Cerebos introduced 2 work-from-home schemes in 2012. Employees with family needs can apply to work-from-home for an extended period of time. Other employees can also apply to work from home for up to 2 days a month. In all these cases, their respective line managers are fully empowered to approve employees' applications and duration of the work-from-home period.

Cerebos was also ahead of its time by implementing the family leave scheme way before it became common for companies to offer this benefit. Employees can take up to 4 days of family leave in a year, above and beyond the statutory 6 days childcare leave employees with children under 7 years old are eligible for. Furthermore, they enjoy 1 day of Birthday Leave and 1 day of Voluntary Service Leave. True to its value of family-orientation, it also offers pregnant employees a maternity benefit of between \$3,000 and \$5,000 for each pregnancy.

Cerebos' Leadership Strategies

Cerebos believes in helping employees live life to the fullest, weaving their interests and career together to help them attain work-life integration. Support for employees in achieving this work-life integration is a key focus for the leadership team and is further enabled by trust — the leadership believes that by first demonstrating trust toward employees, they will reciprocate by not abusing the flexibility of being able to leave work daily at 4.30pm to exercise. Employees appreciate this ongoing practice and Cerebos has not come across any instances of abuse.

In recognition of his strong leadership and visionary approach in transforming Cerebos, CEO Mr Koike was conferred the *Outstanding Chief Executive of the Year* in 2010's Singapore Business Awards.

While it has a strong top leadership team, through its internal surveys and focus groups, Cerebos also recognises the need to develop the leadership effectiveness of its middle management. Hence the current focus of the HR team is to develop people management and coaching skills of its management team so that they can better engage their employees.

Cerebos' Information Management Strategy

A committee, comprising members from across various departments manages Cerebos' quality work-life programmes. Cerebos' HR Senior Vice President Mr. Michael Yeong heads the committee. This structure results in a nimble and responsive team, attuned to the needs and expectations of the general staff population. Mr Yeong quips, "When a staff provides feedback, I am able to quickly assess the feasibility of the suggestion and take action." This committee, also known as the Quality Work-Life Committee, is responsible for planning activities for staff throughout the year, which contributes towards the ST School Pocket Money Fund. Feedback is also gathered from the staff after each activity so that the committee can improve on the activities the following year.

The company's annual engagement survey also evaluates the effectiveness of existing practices and programmes in enabling employees to attain better work-life integration.

Cerebos' People Strategies

Employee Engagement

Over the years, the company has established platforms and mechanisms to connect with and listen to employee feedback. It conducts employee engagement survey and regular CEO rallies, management dialogues and 'Heart Talk' sessions with small groups of employees. In 'Heart Talk' sessions, employees have the opportunity to raise questions and share thoughts on HR issues while management dialogues provide employees with the opportunity to ask line management about issues relating to the company's direction or business strategy. Such opportunities for the employees to go up close and personal with members of the leadership team go a long way to engaging and motivating employees.

Employee Learning and Development

Employees in Cerebos are eligible for a wide-range of learning opportunities and those who are on flexible work arrangements are not excluded from these opportunities. Career development is a key focus of the company and employees attend a wide range of learning programmes anchored on the company's core and leadership competency model. Eligible employees can also be considered for sponsorship to further their education, right up to Doctoral level.

In line with its HR strategy to grow talent from within, the organisation is focused on designing and developing a talent management framework and strategies to build up its leadership pipeline. Many leadership programmes are conducted for its employees.

Employee Well-Being and Satisfaction

Work-life programmes in the company are widely publicised through a variety of channels and platforms. This includes regular briefing sessions at management and staff rallies, the in-house quarterly newsletter, emails and its corporate intranet, as well as during its orientation and induction programmes for new hires. The quality work-life committee also disseminates health tips to staff on a monthly basis through pop quizzes. A wellness corner has also been set up in its head office located in China Square and lunch-time talks are held regularly to help employees better cope with work and life.

Employee Performance and Recognition

Performance management and development is taken seriously at Cerebos. Newly appointed managers are briefed at point of appointment on the company's performance management system and are regularly trained to be better managers and coaches. Beyond business outcomes, managers are also appraised on their effectiveness in developing their team based on leadership competencies such as 'Driving Change', 'Strategic Thinking', 'Developing People', 'Effective Decision Making', 'Driving Performance' etc.

Outcomes and Conclusion

Cerebos' culture is anchored on the philosophy that "Happy employees result in productive employees." In line with this philosophy it has put in place many innovative and bold work-life measures to create a conducive environment where employees feel cared for, valued and are motivated to put their heart and soul in their work, resulting in the positive business outcomes that Cerebos has experienced. And it is admirable that they achieve all these while making a positive difference to the various communities that they operate in.