



EQUINIX

## *Creating a Healthy Work-Life Culture makes Business Sense*

### **Background**

Equinix is a multinational company offering clients a global platform of data centre facilities to host IT infrastructure. In Singapore, the company employs over 200 staff, including operations, finance and legal teams who are located in 3 different places; two data centres and one central town office.

### **Equinix's Work-Life Strategy**

At Equinix Singapore, the management believes that happy and healthy employees can deliver better business results; as employees take less medical leave and are in optimum physical and mental health, they are likely to be more efficient and engaged at work, thus making a positive impact on the company's bottom-line.

This philosophy of creating a 'happy and healthy workforce' undergirds the Work-Life initiatives at Equinix. The company offers a plethora of Work-Life initiatives that encourage employees to keep fit and healthy. This includes gyms in all their offices, and various classes including yoga, abdominal fitness training, nutrition and grooming. Equinix has also come up with creative ways for employees to meaningfully give back to the community even while keeping fit. Most recently, Equinix was the title sponsor for the St Luke's Charity Cycle 2013 in which 53 participants cycled 250km in Batam, Indonesia, raising close to \$500,000 for the beneficiary charity.

Mr. Clement Goh, Managing Director for Equinix South Asia shares that Equinix Singapore strives to be more than an ordinary workplace – as employees spend a significant portion of their time in the office, offering these health and fitness programmes creates opportunities for team bonding and for employees to pursue their personal interests as a group.

Equinix also has a well-established culture of flexibility; flexible working arrangements (FWAs) such as telecommuting, staggered working hours and temporary part-time work are available for staff to utilise as needed. The Work-Life strategy at Equinix is needs-based, and the company assesses each request for FWAs on a case-by-case basis in an effort to offer maximum flexibility to staff without compromising the day-to-day business operations. Examples of employees tapping on flexibility initiatives include staff on a temporary part-time work arrangement in order to care for young children and a mature worker who works reduced flexible hours which takes his health and energy levels into consideration.

The positive trust culture within Equinix is one of the critical factors in its Work-Life success. Employees are not closely monitored when they choose to utilise the various flex options; rather than measuring the number of hours that staff clock in the office, supervisors focus on the quality of work produced by each employee and whether set targets are met. For example, an employee who participates in a late-night conference call may opt to come in later the following day without making a prior request, as long as they complete their work and meet deadlines as required.



Creating team synergy and strong working relationships is a key challenge when managing a mobile workforce due to limited face-to-face interaction. Equinix emphasises team bonding and intentionally organises activities to foster better working ties between colleagues. The Management has appointed a 10-person Equinix Recreation Club (ERC), which comprises staff representatives from the various offices and departments in Singapore. This committee plays an active role in organising recreational events for their fellow colleagues. By regularly rotating the committee members, the company gives various employees a chance to take ownership in the Work-Life initiatives at Equinix.

### **Equinix's Leadership Strategies**

At Equinix, the leadership believes that the organisational culture must be set at the top of the hierarchy, in order to be truly effective. Thus, at the topmost level, the leadership models good management practices, encourages their immediate reports to tap on flexibility solutions and are mindful not to micro-manage the staff that utilise them. By personally utilising these flexible working arrangements, middle managers experience first-hand that FWAs are useful and effective, and will subsequently encourage rank and file staff to leverage these for better Work-Life integration. Thus, the Work-Life culture has a gradual ripple effect, and becomes well-embedded in the larger organisational culture and values system.

Managing a mobile workforce and avoiding potential misuse of FWAs is an on-going concern for companies that have embraced flexibility. At Equinix, the senior management has a well-defined set of criteria for evaluating long-term flexible work requests; the employee must be a well-performing member of the team who consistently contributes to the business and is able to work with minimal monitoring. One example is of their legal counsel who works a 3-day week; she has a valuable skill set specialising in specific country contracts and is a self-starter, who requested a shorter work week to pursue personal interests. Based on their assessment framework, Equinix was able to speedily implement a tailored flexi-work solution for this staff.

Open and transparent communication between senior management and employees has been crucial to the effectiveness of the company's Work-Life strategy. Mr. Goh makes it a point to stay accessible to all staff by coming in early to the office each day. Staff with Work-Life concerns and feedback on existing Work-Life initiatives can use this opportunity to speak with him directly.

## **Information Management Strategies**

At Equinix, the Management seeks to embed Work-Life integration in the core company culture. It has devised various methods to inculcate the importance of Work-Life integration in its employees as well as empower them with the tools to achieve their best at work and in their personal lives.

### **Creating the 'Heartware' for Work-Life Integration**

New hires are introduced to the company's Work-Life culture within the first day of work as part of the orientation process. Here, they are informed of the various Work-Life initiatives available to them and briefed on how and when they can use these. This sets the Work-Life tone for new employees, enabling them to assimilate well into the Work-Life culture at Equinix.

Equinix also trains its managers and supervisors to effectively manage a mobile workforce. When employees are promoted to be people managers, they are flown to the US to attend an in-house training programme on management essentials; this includes a component on communication and conflict resolution which addresses various 'hot button' issues in Work-Life integration, such as managing employee expectations and monitoring staff performance remotely.

### **Communication Channels**

The company also practices transparent and expedient communication across the organisation, which enhances their overall Work-Life strategy. When employees are placed on an FWA, members of their team are informed ahead of time. This minimises misunderstandings and potential claims of preferential treatment.

Feedback mechanisms are also in place to continually refine current Work-Life practices to make them relevant to the changing needs of staff. Annual staff satisfaction surveys and focus groups are also carried out to get detailed feedback on the relevance of current Work-Life measures. Managers also spend time gauging the Work-Life climate on the ground, through informal chit-chat sessions and meals with their staff.

### **Investing in 'Hardware' to Enable Flexibility**

Equinix has invested in IT infrastructure and software to create an effectively flexible workplace. This includes VPN access and office-issued laptops for all employees to enable telecommuting. In keeping with current technological trends, the company has also enabled personal devices such as handphones and tablet PCs to allow easy access to work emails.

At Equinix, face-time and interpersonal communication is not sacrificed despite employees working in multiple remote locations. Video conferencing capabilities are available within the office and employees working remotely can also utilise Webex for meetings with colleagues and clients.

### **Performance Management Strategies**

Equinix has developed a performance matrix to effectively manage its mobile workforce and accurately assess their performance. Some of the key characteristics are:

- Performance assessment is based on set measurable targets and objectives and not the number of hours worked.
- Performance reviews are structured as an on-going process through the entire year, including:

- Monthly one-to-one meetings between managers and employees.
- Bi-annual semi-reviews to assess employees' progress on targets, and offer advice on areas for improvement if required.
- Annual formal employee performance reviews.

### **Outcomes and Conclusion**

Over the past year, Equinix has seen significant tangible returns from its Work-Life strategy. Notably,

- Medical leave-taking has decreased by 30%.
- The company experiences a low turnover rate of 3-4%.
- 30% of its employees have worked at Equinix for more than 10 years.

By offering Work-Life initiatives that allow employees to perform their personal best in every arena of life, Equinix has nurtured a team of highly dedicated and motivated staff who will go the extra mile for the company – Equinix has also seen strong business growth of 30% per annum. This company has achieved its aim of creating a work environment in which employees can 'work and have fun'.