

A Holistic Work-Life Strategy for Greater Employee Engagement

Background

Established in 1999, the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) is a statutory board of the Singapore Government which aims to develop Singapore into a dynamic global infocomm hub and leverage infocommunication for Singapore’s economic and social development. IDA’s leadership has recognised that building an impactful and effective organisation will be crucial to achieving this mission and seeks to actively engage its 1,800 employees who are based at the main headquarters at Mapletree Business City and at other government agencies managing their IT departments.

IDA has articulated this in its People vision - to make “IDA, a great place to work, inspiring people to grow and be the best they can be”, with the goal of developing a highly effective and engaged workforce.

Organisational Work-Life Strategy

Prior to 2008, IDA’s work-life effectiveness (WLE) programmes tended to be more ad hoc. A 2008 public-sector wide survey on work-life harmony revealed that IDA employees faced challenges such as high levels of stress, less family-time and a lack of overall organisational support for work-life harmony. An internal Organisation Climate Survey corroborated these findings, as a large proportion of staff expressed their desire for greater work-life harmony. Externally, business trends showed heightened competition for talent in a tight labour market, and having an organisational culture that supported work-life harmony was identified as a good business strategy to attract, engage and retain talent.

This combination of factors led IDA to develop a holistic work-life strategy that is embedded within the Personal Development component of its talent engagement framework (PEOPLE Framework).



IDA's work-life strategy adopts a 3-pronged approach:

1. Create a supportive work-life culture

The senior management and HR have recognised that when employees are empowered with the tools and autonomy to work flexibly, they often manage their time well and achieve a high level of productivity and efficiency at work. To facilitate this, various flexible working arrangements (FWAs) have been made available:

- √ Flexi-working hours where staff may start work between 7.00am and 10.00am and end work between 4.30pm and 7.30pm.
- √ Telecommuting twice a month where staff may work from home if they have no meetings on certain work days. Staff are also given a Personal Productivity Tool allowance to enable flexi-working, anywhere computing and to enhance their personal and work productivity.
- √ Flexi-fit arrangement where staff can take time-off to exercise during office hours.
- √ Part-time employment where staff may opt to work part-time to better manage work and other responsibilities.

The organisation does not implement a formal application process for the utilisation of FWAs as they believe in mutual trust and understanding between supervisors and employees. Instead, supervisors and employees discuss work deliverables and agree upon a flexible working arrangement that allows the staff member to meet personal responsibilities without compromising work goals. The final approval for flexible working is given via email.

2. Champion personal work-life effectiveness

HR has developed the "Live a SMART Life" Programme which focuses on five aspects to help staff effectively manage their personal and work priorities; these are 'Shining as an IDA staff', 'Managing relationships', 'Achieving a positive lifestyle', 'Reaching out to community' and 'Taking charge of personal growth'. Different initiatives are implemented under each of the five aspects. For example, lunchtime talks on personal effectiveness are organised to help employees 'shine as an IDA staff' and annual health-screenings are organised to help staff 'achieve a positive lifestyle'. IDA has also established a recreation club, FUN@IDA, which partners with the Management to conduct activities that encourage greater work-life harmony for employees, such as Family Day and Kidz@Work, where employees can bring their children to work for a day. FUN@IDA also adopts charitable organisations such as the Children's Cancer Foundation and provides staff with volunteer opportunities to give back to the community.

3. Create a conducive physical work environment

IDA's office space has been designed to promote staff wellness, interaction and encourage open communication and collaboration. The office layout has agile workplace concepts that enhance work mobility and flexibility as well as optimise shared resources. Every office floor also has a People Hub equipped with furniture

and facilities to create a conducive environment for staff to interact in a relaxed setting.

Organisational Leadership Strategies

Leadership support has played an important role in the success of IDA's holistic work-life strategy. The senior management actively champions flexibility measures and other work-life initiatives in order to signal the importance of work-life effectiveness. For example, the organisation's work-life strategy was launched by the then top executive at a staff conference in 2009. The management also models healthy work-life behaviour, supporting initiatives such as Blue Sky Fridays, Eat with Your Family Day and enabling flexible work arrangements within their respective divisions.

People managers undergo leadership development programmes such as 'Leading Others' (for team leads) and 'Leading Leaders' (for division heads) based on Kouzes and Posner's Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership Practices Model (KP5) and the GROW model, to equip them with coaching skills to identify and address work challenges within their teams.

Information Management Strategies

Maintaining clear and consistent communication channels is vital for a large organisation such as IDA; providing regular updates on work-life initiatives and organisational goals and priorities is a must. The senior management regularly engages in dialogue with employees through multiple platforms, including:

- Two annual staff conferences which serve as platforms for senior management to convey corporate-wide directions, strategies and gather staff feedback.
- Regular meetings between senior management and line managers to align line divisions with organisational goals and remind line managers of the various work-life initiatives available. At these meetings, line managers are also invited to share implementation challenges that they face.
- EDM, intranet and social media are used at the staff level, to reinforce the organisational vision and publicise work-life policies and programmes.

Performance Management Strategies

IDA has an outcomes-driven performance management system. Here, an employee is assessed on the quality and quantity of work delivered; at the start of each year, employees meet with their supervisors to set key measurable goals that they will need to achieve. Employees then receive feedback and input through on-going dialogue with their supervisors. With the focus on measurable work outcomes, employees have responded well to the autonomy given to them via flex work options, and they maximise their time to ensure that work goals are met.

IDA identified that its biggest barrier to work-life harmony was the heavy workload that employees faced. This was addressed by developing managers' capabilities to manage workload and address inefficiencies by adopting shorter meetings and process re-design. HR also assisted managers to review and redesign work

structures and roles to alleviate heavy workload and explore better ways to achieve business outcomes.

Outcomes and Conclusion

With strong leadership and strategic HR support, IDA has devised a successful holistic work-life strategy that gives the organisation an edge in a competitive hiring environment. The organisation generally maintains a higher staff retention rate compared to the industry average. With the strong organisational support for work-life effectiveness, employees are also highly engaged and motivated to perform at work. IDA is a clear example of how investing in a clear, consistent work-life strategy can positively impact an organisation's overall performance.

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