

## *Work-Life Integration for Organisational Success*

### **Background**

Established in 1992, NTUC Unity Healthcare (Unity Healthcare) is the largest healthcare cooperative in Singapore with 54 Unity Pharmacies and 15 Unity Denticare clinics. Its mission is to provide affordable quality health and wellness products and services that enable customers to enjoy total well-being and live their lives to the fullest.

Unity Healthcare has a workforce of 400 employees, many of whom are female and mature workers, attracted to the Work-Life initiatives such as flexible working arrangements. Currently, half of the workforce is aged 50 years and above, and work in store operations, warehouse and administrative roles. A large proportion of these employees are long-stayers - having been with the company for more than 5 years. As the typical Unity Healthcare customer tends to be older individuals, this employee profile complements the overall business.

*"I fully support the flexi-hours arrangement as it allows our staff to better manage their schedules to care for their family while meeting their work requirements. Staff appreciate that the company acknowledges that they have other responsibilities to manage outside the workplace, and are committed to contribute to the business."*

**Mr. Chua Song Khim**  
**Group CEO**  
**Unity NTUC Healthcare**

### **Organisational Work-Life Strategy**

At Unity Healthcare, the management views its employees as its most valuable resource and thus people engagement is an organisational priority. HR Director Ms. Melati Alui shares that the employees at Unity Healthcare are fully committed to their work and are equally dedicated to managing family responsibilities and fulfilling personal interests outside of work. Recognising this, the organisation has devised an effective Work-Life strategy to enable employees to manage both their careers and personal lives effectively- the management views this as a crucial first step in engaging and motivating the workforce.

With a significant proportion of mature workers, health management is a key component of the organisational Work-Life strategy at Unity Healthcare. The HR team has worked closely with the Health Promotion Board (HPB) to organise health

screenings and talks as well as fitness activities held off-site, such as paintball and brisk-walking.<sup>1</sup> In order to get employees' commitment to their personal health, the organisation also has a co-payment scheme for fitness classes such as Zumba, where each participating staff pays 10% of the fee and Unity Healthcare subsidises the remaining amount.



*Staff at Unity Healthcare bond over a distressing game of badminton (left) and bowling for better fitness (right).*

Workplace flexibility is another feature of the organisation's Work-Life strategy. While the employees are at varying life stages, they share a common need for Work-Life integration and time to manage familial responsibilities which often include caring for elderly parents or young children. To address this Work-Life need, the organisation has introduced the following flexible working arrangements (FWAs):

- Staggered working hours where employees can opt to start work at 8am, 8.30am or 9am.
- Telecommuting where employees can opt to work remotely (usually from home), and are provided with laptops to do so.
- Part-time work is available to store-level employees, who can choose to work a 35 hour work week rather than a standard 42 hour week. The salary and benefits are pro-rated accordingly for this group of staff.

The HR team has instituted a transparent and convenient system for FWA applications. In the case of requests for staggered working hours at headquarters, department heads are given the autonomy to approve these requests on a case-by-case basis, and employees are provided with a staff card to track the hours worked. Part-time work requests at a store-level are relayed to the area managers for approval (each area manager has multiple stores within their purview), and the respective area managers then work closely with HR to document the applications and implement the approved working arrangements for the employees.

The management also recognises that skill proficiency and good time management are necessary for employees to stay efficient and productive, particularly when they

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<sup>1</sup> The Health Promotion Board offers a Workplace Health Promotion Grant for approved health and wellness initiatives in organisations.

are on FWAs with minimal supervision. Thus induction, leadership, and products and services trainings are held on a regular basis. All employees are required to attend a minimum of one product training each month. These training sessions raise the efficiency of employees and ensure a high quality of work for all staff, including those on FWAs.

Through strategic planning, the HR and management teams at Unity Healthcare have maintained the momentum of the organisational Work-Life strategy, throughout the year. At least one activity is scheduled for each week of the year, ensuring that all employees have a chance to participate in the various programmes despite their individual schedules. To make for easier planning, these activities also follow a structure for each month; week 1– fruits/healthy snacks day, week 2 – staff lunch, week 3 – Keep Fit programme, and week 4 – Eat with Your Family Day.

### **Organisational Leadership Strategies**

The Group CEO, Mr. Chua Song Khim, and senior management at Unity Healthcare acknowledge the importance of Work-Life integration, and adopt a top-down approach in advocating a healthy Work-Life culture for the organisation. Given the large number of employees distributed across multiple locations, this approach has worked well in educating employees on the importance of Work-Life integration and how they can tap on the Work-Life initiatives available.

Mr. Chua regularly holds dialogue sessions with employees and attends the Work-Life programmes organised, to better understand staff needs, including Work-Life challenges. This signals the importance of Work-Life integration and sets the tone for a healthy Work-Life culture.

The senior management also plays an important role by setting positive Work-Life examples for their teams to follow. These leaders utilise the flex work options as needed – the Deputy CEO works on a staggered hours arrangement to ferry his daughters to school in the morning. By ‘walking the talk’ the senior management show their team members that it is possible to work efficiently while on FWAs.

The emphasis on mentoring at Unity Healthcare has also contributed to the organisation’s Work-Life success. As the senior management values Work-Life themselves, this is passed on to incoming members of the leadership team through the sharing of success stories during the mentoring process. This motivates newer leaders to adopt the same Work-Life values, thus creating a sustainable positive Work-Life culture within the organisation.

### **Information Management Strategies**

Consistent and frequent communication by HR has been crucial to the popularity of the various Work-Life initiatives at Unity Healthcare. The HR team has identified that in addition to creating an on-going calendar of events, it is important to keep staff

informed of the Work-Life initiatives to ensure that they make time in their busy schedules to attend. A well structured communication plan is in place to achieve this; a monthly listing of Work-Life programmes and events is sent out via email in the first week of each month. HR then follows up with a weekly reminder to encourage employees to participate in the events.

Monthly CEO chats are also organised to obtain employee feedback on current practices and policies, and share key updates in the organisation. Each chat session consists of a small group of employees so that each individual has sufficient time to air their views. Employees are also grouped together according to their employment profile, e.g. job role, length of service, etc., to facilitate greater ease of sharing.

### **Performance Management Strategies**

At Unity Healthcare, employee performance is assessed based on measurable KPIs that have been agreed upon by each staff and their supervisor. Annual reviews are held twice a year to monitor staff progress and review overall performance.

With this outcomes-based performance assessment framework in place, employees are rewarded according to the quality of their work, rather than the number of hours that they are in the office – this has effectively increased efficiency and productivity in the workplace.

This performance management framework has also provided the organisation's positive trust culture with a boost; supervisors are agreeable to their staff working on FWAs, as they are assured that each team member is focused on achieving their KPIs, despite when and where they work.

### **Outcomes and Conclusion**

Work-Life initiatives are an intrinsic part of the employee engagement process at Unity Healthcare and have a positive impact on the business. Even as the organisation provides employees with the tools for better Work-Life integration, it has reaped tangible benefits including ease of hiring new employees as well as a high retention of quality talent. With a substantial proportion of their employees in customer-facing roles, having an engaged and motivated workforce also directly impacts in-store service. With the management and HR working in tandem, Unity Healthcare's Work-Life success has greatly benefitted both its employees and the business.