



QUARTERLY HR DEVELOPMENTS

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Issue 26, January 2007

Flexibility



Functional Flexibility sometimes referred to as multi-skilling and is concerned with the ability to redeploy employees with appropriate training or retraining to different tasks and activities. It is suggested that the use of functional flexibility is increasing as skill boundaries are becoming less well defined due to the developments in technology.

Functional Flexibility could be viewed as a deliberate strategy to train and upgrade skill, either extending the job content horizontally (job enlargement) or vertically (job enrichment). At another level it could be argued that flexibility represents work intensification with workers undertaking a variety of tasks to meet shortages.

Whatever the case the overall aim of functional flexibility is to achieve greater workforce productivity within work time, by altering the deployment of a workforce according to tasks required across function or hierarchy.

Source: Institute of Financial Services, UMIST

Note from the editor, Chris Mathas

Dear Readers

We kick off our first issue in 2007 with a very hot topic in HRM, that of flexible work practices.

The increased volatility of global markets and the intense competition has sent organizations looking for ways in which to respond to external environmental pressures and internal challenges of achieving cost containment while at the same time improving productivity. Flexibility itself conveys the notions of adaptability, pliability and responsiveness to organizational change so it is only natural that organizations would turn to flexible work practices as possible response strategies to the challenges they face.

More and more organizations are realizing that mobility and flexibility are critical components to ensuring the agility of their business and the satisfaction and productivity of their employees. — If employees are able to structure their working lives in accordance with their personal commitments, they will doubtless be happier and more engaged. On the other hand organizations can employ flexible working practices so that they can adjust the size and mix of labour in response to changes in demand.

Although many of the changes required in order to facilitate flexibility are driven by legislation, and in Cyprus we still have quite a bit to do in this regard, we thought that it would be of great value to look into how some forward thinking employers are proactive in embracing flexibility as a means of ensuring the long-term competitiveness of their organization.

We have also included an article that will provide those of you that are less familiar with this concept with a clear understanding of the concept and its implications for organizational competitiveness.

Flexible Working—Fact Sheet, CIPD

FLEXIBLE WORK PRACTICES

Part-time working: when employees are contracted to work anything less than full-time hours.

Term-time working: A worker remains on permanent contract but can take paid/unpaid leave during school holidays.

Job-sharing: A form of part-time working where two (or occasionally more) people share the responsibility for a job between them.

Flexitime: Allows employees to choose, within certain set limits, when to begin and end work.

Compressed hours: This does not necessarily involve a reduction in total hours or any extension in individual choice over which hours are worked. The central feature is the reallocation of work into fewer and longer blocks during the week.

Annual hours: The period within which full-time employees must work is defined over a whole year.

Mobile working/Teleworking: Employees are permitted to work all or part of their working week at a location remote from the employer's workplace.

Working from home on a regular basis: Workers regularly spend time working from home.

This fact sheet acts as an introductory guidance document to anyone wanting to know the nuts and bolts of flexibility. It considers the different forms flexible working may take and outlines some of the potential benefits and provides advice for implementation. It also highlights relevant legislation and includes the CIPD viewpoint on the issue of flexible working.

"... A recent CIPD survey explored the extent to which employers are making use of flexible working practices and found that organizations were most likely to make available to their employees : part time working (86%), Term-time working (38%), Job sharing (63%), Flexitime (55%)."

"... The number of organizations offering staff the opportunity to work flexibly has almost doubled in the last six years according to the latest Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS). Nearly four in ten organizations said they extended the right to request flexible working beyond the current legislative minimum requirements. Managers are also beginning to show more understanding of employees' responsibilities outside work.' The article then goes on to describe what the key reasons for this increased interest have been.

Obviously in implementing flexible working practices organizations are bound to encounter some challenges such as "...overcoming concerns about operational pressures and meeting customer requirements, line managers' current ability to effectively manage flexible working, line managers' current attitudes to flexible working...". A lot of energy and effort will have to go into effectively communicating and implementing flexible working in your organization.

Tips for effectively tackling implementation of flexible working include "...establishing a clear process of how flexible working works in your organization, ensuring there are clear roles and responsibilities for employees, line managers and HR."

Source: www.cipd.co.uk

Questions or comments? Email us at hermich@spidernet.com.cy

Flexibility *(continued)*

Offering flexible and remote working options at IBM—A case study by S. Meredith

Is flexible, mobile working the new way of doing business in the future? One thing is certain, there is more demand for it than there is supply. IBM is one organization that has said flexible work practices and mobility must be taken seriously.

Work flexibility is seen as an added benefit by employees and as such it has become an important tool in attracting and motivating key staff. It is also essential in the degree of responsiveness that they have to their customers.

Flexibility on when and how and where a job gets done is expected by the new generation of employees. Even costs favour a move toward flexible working practices. IBM had therefore set a goal for mobile working for 75% of its workforce by the end of 2006.

This case study shows that effective implementation of flexible work practices requires an objective based way of working, whereby individuals structure their working day providing the job gets done. It also requires the establishment of HR best practice principles, effective management training and guidance of how to manage staff at a distance, provide vital connectivity in other words access to information required for the day-to-day job.

Advanced technology is a source of pressure in making remote working possible. The writer advises organization to adopt a measured approach to the implementation of flexible work practices, undertaking trials with small populations and evaluating their success. Brief reference is also made to CIPD research on factors that affect mobilization.

Source : Strategic HR Review, Volume 5, Issue 1, December 2005

The CIPD believes that flexible working arrangements can play a valuable role in organizational performance. HR's role is not to promote flexible working as an end in itself, but to look for opportunities to use flexible working where employee and business needs coincide.



Employees who work flexibly tend to be more emotionally engaged, more satisfied with their work, more likely to speak positively about their organization and less likely to quit. (WERS) The challenge is unlocking the potential of flexible working for both the business and employees.

Flexible Futures by Susan Greenfield

2030: A WORKPLACE ODYSSEY

Get up at 6am. Send the children off to school by 7am, then spend the next few hours in virtual meetings with 3-D images of your colleagues. All the time, CCTV and electronic monitoring will ensure that you work to your maximum productivity.

You may then spend an hour or so with grandma before picking up the children, putting some alpha parent time, then recouping the lost hours by working from 10-11 pm. In essence, your work day will be malleable, fragmented and individualized — but very long.

So more than ever, frustration and mental fatigue could be part of the working day.

The increased flexibility required for our complex portfolio lives is going to lead to a blurring of the line between work and private life. We will increasingly sort out our electronic domestic jobs — like booking holidays or shopping on line—from the office, while using enhanced IT to do more and more work from home.

But, as more people work from home, the "beehive" mentality of humans will surface as an increasingly important factor — the perhaps obvious human need to feel part of a busy, thriving community, which is not met by living as an isolated hermit with no immediate incentives or constraints on performance.



This article takes a look at the implications of flexible working for the way of life of individuals and organizations. The author predicts changes to the way we work will lead to a cooperative culture and more flexibility. But employees will still have to constantly update their skills to compete in the jobs market of the future.

"... In an ideal world, the not-so-distant-future workforce will consist of flexible, curious commercially savvy individuals who are fully aware of their strengths and weaknesses."

This has obvious implications for the way we deal with career planning and structuring training and development opportunities within an organization. But what about at a corporate level?

"...we shall start to see an ever-increasing proliferation of alliances of smaller, more virtual units that, although independent, will network with each other. An immediate result will be a more cooperative culture — yet with less security— involving more frequent changes of jobs."

"... there will be a big shift towards personal and communication skills rather than maintaining and expertise based solely on knowledge and intelligence. For most of the next generation, flexibility in learning new skills promoting or adapting to change will be the major requirement as they work their way through smaller companies."

"A critical issue is likely to be the degree of stress involved as everyone tries to learn new skills, anxious that, any day now, their current expertise will be deemed obsolete."

"All training and development will be highly personalised, even to the point where the traditional education system could collapse. The emphasis may instead be on learning by doing i.e. by having an experience rather than studying."

"WE need to use our ingenuity to harness new technologies and use the opportunities of business to generate "learning by doing"..."

Source : People Management, 23 October 2003, www.peoplemanagement.co.uk

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