

guidelines to suit what will work best for them and their employees.

For example in the case of flexible hours, a hot topic of discussion right now amongst companies, what is suitable for IBM's office staff might not be suitable for a manufacturing plant or the Banyan Tree, she points. However, manufacturing on operations-based industries can then study how to make shifts more effective and attractive without reducing productivity.

In Singapore, the *Hudson Report* shows that flexible hours are the most commonly offered benefit where companies have implemented work-life balance policies and are more widely available now than two years ago. Seventy per cent of the respondents say that they offer flexible working hours, while the next most popular measure, sabbatical leave, is currently offered by only 25% of the companies.

Personal Responsibility

Although companies can do more, the burden should not fall solely on their shoulders, Chiang says.

SOME POPULAR WORK-LIFE STRATEGIES THAT YOU CAN ADOPT

- Telecommuting
- Flexible hours
- Compressed work week
- Part time work options
- Job sharing
- Phased retirement
- Daily flexibility
- Shift swapping
- Cross Training
- Extended Maternity Leave
- Childcare Sick Leave
- Career Break Leave
- Sabbaticals
- Voluntary Service Leave
- Study Leave

ACHIEVING WORK-LIFE INTEGRATION

Cheryl Liew-Chng, director, Employer Alliance, shares her views with HRM



What are the key work-life initiatives that have been effective across the globe?

Key characteristics of effective work life initiatives are based on flexibility and good performance management. Broadly speaking, flexible work arrangements (formal or informal), offering appropriate benefits and convenience services that help companies keep staff engaged and optimise their performance are the ones that are effective.

The individuals will also need to take personal responsibility to make choices and to be open to find win-win solutions. Effective initiative is very much grounded in the context of business and staff needs. Hence any work-life initiative can be effective if it energises and engage the staff, thereby providing companies with a competitive advantage of optimal performance. For example, the idea of facilitating experienced staff that goes "off the ramp" for some reasons, connected to the organisation and back in to the organisation once again is gaining momentum. This initiative allows companies to tap into these talents when they are ready to phase back in a full-time or other flexible arrangements such as project work or part-time work without wasting time in recruiting, training and building the internal network once again.

What are the key work-life challenges that you foresee in the coming years? How can organisations cope with them?

Work will increasingly be more demanding. Companies need to facilitate staff to be in for a marathon and not a sprint by building resilience. Individuals needing to fit life into their work for long-term sustainability. Companies need to be ready to practice formal and informal flexible arrangements to fit into the needs of career cycle flexibility

As for the matter of Increasing pressure on working families. Companies need to look at how they can help staff cope with dependent care (not just childcare and eldercare but dependent of different ages and/or those with special needs). Fundamentally, if people are an asset and value add to the company, we need to find out what people want, does it vary from different workforce segment and hence where should companies focus their work-life strategies to affect engagement in order to increase discretionary efforts from the workforce.

What would be your five quick tips to employers in Singapore on work-life?

- Great work life ideas with high impact need not be costly
- Start small
- Start with pilots
- Flexibility is key
- Focus on the long haul and not just a fad to realize the benefits
- Keep looking for embedded opportunities and turn work life challenges into an advantage. Look from the perspective of "mass customisation" and not one size fits all.