

PricewaterhouseCoopers

Working to maintain our people's work-life balance in spite of heavy workloads

The organisation

PricewaterhouseCoopers is the world's largest professional services organisation providing assurance, advisory, tax and HR consulting services to a range of clients.

Workforce

No. employees c13,500 in the UK

% female 49%

% ethnic minorities c7%

% women returning after maternity leave c85%

The challenge/s

Professional services firms, as highly client-centric organisations, tend to be characterised by a long hours, macho culture. Profitable growth depends on providing good work-life policies to attract top talent; our employees are highly self-motivated and set themselves extremely high standards. For such individuals, it can be exceptionally hard to discipline oneself into achieving a better work-life balance. PricewaterhouseCoopers has therefore been leading the drive to flex and adapt corporate structures to respond to the increasing demand – from the business and from our people - for flexibility and work-life integration.

Response

“At PricewaterhouseCoopers we are transforming our business to ensure that we continue to attract people with the skills and talent that we need to deliver excellent client service. The key input to the transformation process comes from our leaders; their behaviour provides a key indicator of their beliefs and it is beliefs that form the foundation of the business culture. Only by demonstrating their own personal commitment to and achievement of a balanced lifestyle and a diverse workforce will our leaders help our people to feel a connection between policies/programmes and daily work-life which reflects our mission to be a terrific place to work.”

Moira, Head of Human Capital, UK Board

Principles – walking the talk:

1. Employees are all different: the meaning of work-life balance varies throughout an individual's life
2. Individuals must take responsibility for their own work-life balance and be considerate of others' needs.
3. PwC seeks to achieve the optimum balance between business and individual's needs.
4. Owing to habitual long hours' working, managers need support in helping their teams to work flexibly.
5. Quality of output is more important than the number of hours worked.

Policies all employees can apply for:

- Flexible benefits
- Flexible working patterns: all staff have the right to request a flexible work arrangement, not just parents.
- Career breaks

- Flexible leave arrangements
- Employee Assistance Programme
- Compassionate and emergency leave
- Lifestyle management support and training
- Discounts/concierge services

Policies for parents:

- Enhanced maternity leave
- Fully paid paternity leave
- Adoption leave
- Parental leave
- Time off for dependants
- Childcare vouchers

PwC LifeStyle:

This intranet site was launched in 2001 and provides practical advice, support and tools to help staff juggle commitments in and out of work.

It was developed with specialists in the fields of work-life balance

It includes information on pregnancy, childbirth, parenting, eldercare, relationship management, stress, time management, nutrition and health.

Business benefits:

Improved staff satisfaction:

- c60% of employees said they were satisfied with their work-life balance, compared to 40% in 1999;
- Improved staff retention:
- Increase in return rate from maternity leave from c40% in 1998 to c80% in 2003;
- Changing attitudes:
- Increasing acceptance of flexible working in its broadest sense, for example, homeworking, flexitime etc, which promotes a greater sense of trust between managers and staff and a greater sense of personal control among individuals.

Issues

Despite this improvement, the fact remains that 40% of our people are not satisfied with their work-life balance and this figure is unacceptable. Our efforts therefore continue to improve the working lives of our people and, in order to measure the success or otherwise of our efforts, we survey our people every quarter using our "You Matter" staff survey.

In practice

Jayne, an Audit Manager in Birmingham, works about 90 days a year for the firm. I moved to a three-day week when my first child was born in 1995 and then to 50% full-time when my second child arrived." Jayne usually works on Mondays and Thursdays, but fits in client meetings and time for training courses, as required. "Last year I worked 125 days. It's fairly flexible, and the key thing is trust. The firm trusts I'll do the work and won't let clients down" she says. "My clients know I'm part-time and have contact numbers out of work if they need them."

The future

At PwC we certainly don't see this as an issue that's going away; quite the opposite. Doing business in the 21st century means doing business against a backdrop of phenomenal change, be it demographic shifts, globalisation, technological advances etc. All of these pose a challenge to the traditional models of employment and work.

There is thus enormous pressure to adopt new ways of working. By promoting flexibility and work-life balance we will have a competitive advantage over others, for the corollary is a business which is flexible and adaptable to anticipate change and one which stays ahead of the game.

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