Managing Work Conditions and Life Balance

Introduction

Employment conditions provide managers and employees with a range of flexible working options to help combining personal responsibilities and lifestyle choices with their work commitments.

Flexible working arrangements such as part-time employment, working from home and flex-time allow employees to meet both personal, family and work demands. This facilitates to attract and retain our highly skilled people and enables employees to satisfy their competing demands. In turn, they are more capable to perform well at work and have an increased level of organisational engagement having been given the opportunity to secure a good work/life balance.

Key Principles and Objectives

Flexible working arrangements need to be considered on a case by case basis, with due regard to the work program, team structure and operational requirements. Meeting the demands of the work program is the overriding principle when deciding on requests for leave or changes in working conditions.

Planned leave, such as annual leave is generally negotiated in advance, to help prepare and plan for absences while still meeting work program requirements. As a manager you should encourage the regular use of annual leave to allow your staff to have a reasonable break from work each year and to avoid any substantial accumulation of credits.

It is expected that all employees will use their leave entitlements for the purpose in which they are intended to be used, and seek relevant approvals in a timely manner.

Your Role

As a manager you will be expected to use your judgement and discretion in a professional and ethical manner to make sound decisions with regard to flexible working arrangements. This will require an understanding of the balance between achieving work and team priorities, and meeting the diverse needs of your team. You are required to manage the leave and work arrangements in your team and to deliver on a work program in line with performance objectives.

Managers are also responsible to meet reasonable requests for improved work/life balance by providing flexible working arrangements to allow staff to better balance the demands of their work and family, whilst maintaining operational requirements and workgroup efficiency. If this is done well the reward to the organisation is higher morale, improved job satisfaction and the retention of our highly skilled people.

As a Manager you are responsible for developing, progressing and improving work program delivery with due consideration of the capacity and capability of your team.

These responsibilities include negotiating, planning and approving leave requests, and managing any unscheduled leave throughout the year. You may need to negotiate and manage a variety of flexible working arrangements in order to provide an optimal work life balance while still delivering on the agreed program of work. You are also responsible for ensuring your staff abides within the terms and conditions of their employment.

It is essential that your staff understand the variety and the intent or purpose of the types of leave and working arrangements available, and how to request it. This ensures the right leave is used for the right purpose. As a manager you must be fair, equitable and transparent when making decisions on leave and other arrangements. You may need to monitor staff leave balances in times of extended unplanned absences, undertake further consultation with the Health and Safety section if needed, and also ensure the staff is not accruing excess annual leave.

Key Processes and Issues

Flexible Working Arrangements

Organisations may provide several options to support work/life balance and diversity. These can include:

- part-time;
- working from home;
- flexible working hours in the office;
- job sharing;
- outside employment;
- subsidised transportation to/from home to the workplace (for example, providing a shuttle for part of the route).

Flexible working arrangements can be used for a wide variety of personal and professional needs, not only for family related requirements. They can include creative or sporting pursuits for example. Transfers within or between offices can also be considered as a flexible approach to maintaining the employment of employees while satisfying their personal requirements.

Various leave options, such as study leave or leave without pay also provide employees with the opportunity to vary current working arrangements to better meet their work/life balance or undertake other developmental opportunities.

You will need to objectively review each request in line with work program priorities, team structure, other staffing needs, and any conflicts of interest. Ensure you explore all options, refer to the guidelines and talk with your CSU or DSU for advice. A manager should regularly monitor the arrangement to ensure it is still appropriate, review at regular intervals and negotiate new arrangements if required.

**The Working Day**

The number of standard hours expected to be completed during a normal working week should be clearly communicated to your staff at the outset. If flexible working arrangements have been agreed on, the number of hours worked each day could vary, but should be agreed between each party ahead of time, to avoid conflicts later on.

As a manager you have a responsibility to ensure the well-being of your staff and helping to achieve a good work life balance. This extends to allowing for time during the working day for staff to take reasonable breaks. This can also help towards improved productivity and personal development, so the staff members have an opportunity to socialise with other employees both within and outside their immediate teams. You should refer to the guidelines and talk with your human resources area for break entitlements.

**Flex-leave**

Flex-leave is a system of working arrangements which enables the staff to vary work hours and patterns for productive work outcomes, and to support work/life balance. Flex -leave should be pre-approved and is subject to operational requirements. Managers are responsible for monitoring the correct usage of the system and have some discretionary decision making responsibilities.

**Overtime**

Overtime is used in exceptional circumstance where there are clear operational requirements and reasonable amounts of overtime are required to ensure the timely delivery of the organisations work program. The Enterprise Agreement (or equivalent) provides parameters for requesting overtime and circumstances when overtime is not appropriate. When requiring employees to work overtime, you are required to provide as much notice as possible, and take into account the employee’s personal circumstances including any family responsibilities and Occupational Health and Safety implications. Employees also have the flexibility to negotiate time off in lieu as an compensation to overtime.

Examples from the countries:

- Working arrangements form - Statistics Netherlands

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