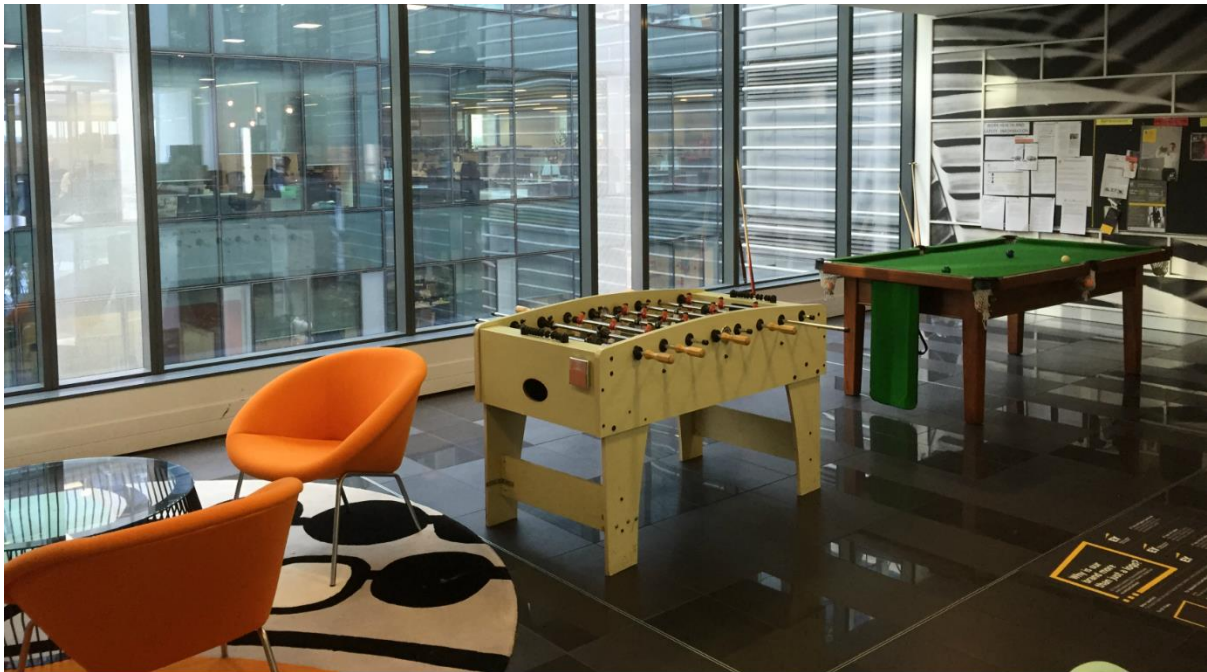


Work Life Balance Award Entrant:

EY



Professional services firm EY's new flexibility programme, which was introduced last year, is proving very successful with many of its close to 800 employees measurably happier for it.

A recent survey within the organisation showed 21 per cent more employees who access flexibility are satisfied with EY as a place to work, compared with those that don't. Engagement is also 9% higher for those working flexibly, compared to people who are not.

The flexibility policy, called "Workplace of the Future" has allowed employees to do their best work when they know they need to and benefit from flexibility when they can. Employees feel trusted and empowered in their daily lives to make choices that make sense to them.

The policy has brought about big changes in team culture.

People have had to adapt their mind sets: just because someone is not physically in the office does not mean that they are not working. In the past "working from home" had some negative connotations, and people may have assumed this was code for "slacking off". However, leadership set the tone, flexibility options were well communicated and supported meaning many people started to adopt the new ways of working.

It has become much easier to work flexibly. Whereas previously a flexible working arrangement had to be separately negotiated and contractually documented, the firm now operates from a simple basis of trust. Focus moved from physical presence at a desk, to the ability of people to meet client deadlines.

At first, those office based teams asked for guidelines – how much notice would they need to give, who would need to approve them working from home, could they take time off and make it up the next day? But as the months have passed since the initial implementation, people have now gradually eased into their new flexibility without the need for lots of rules and approvals.

One of the visible markers of the uptake of flexibility is the fact that desks are often clear and people have left the office before 5pm. This is not an indication that they have stopped working, because often people will log back on later in the evenings to do work at a time that suits them, perhaps after putting the children to bed.

Many people choose to manage their commuting time by spending at least part of their day working from home. As a result, some people are known to be online from home first thing in the morning but usually arrive at the office around 9.30 – 10 am.

Implementation of the policy has required greater use of smart technology – online meetings, online screen sharing, video conferencing, instant messaging, and communication of where each person is located on a daily basis. As a result of this, the need for face to face meetings has reduced as people have realised they can have the same interactions without necessarily being in the same room.

A “Flexibility week” is planned to showcase the support of senior level people. The aim is to encourage more people to embrace flexible approaches to typical everyday working scenarios, and to use the available technology to do things differently.

EY also demonstrates flexibility with holidays. Staff can buy additional annual leave which allows them greater leeway in planning for once in a lifetime trips, or pursuing outside interests in their spare time. Everyone is also entitled to spend one day a year on a volunteer activity of their choice.

Running alongside its flexibility programme, EY also has a strong focus on wellbeing. Staff have access to confidential Wellbeing Assessments which measure wellbeing across a number of factors: health, work, finance, values, family and community.

The firm has an in-house fully staffed gym in its Auckland office which 30% of staff have joined. Staff can attend the gym and group exercise classes, at any time to work around clients, i.e. not only a lunchtime. Many senior partners and leaders are active members of the gym.

Additional weight loss and healthy eating programmes running from the gym, have been very successful, have had lasting impacts on people’s health, in some cases creating life changing habits.

There are also large clubroom areas where people can gather, share ideas, catch up over coffee or even a game of table tennis or pool.

A meditation/prayer room is also available, which is used throughout the working day for people to take time for themselves and to refocus.

A massage therapist also visits on a weekly basis and lots of people take the time to enjoy a 15 or 30 minute massage during the working day.