

Empowerment Award Entrant: AECOM

A review of AECOM's flexibility policies with an attitude of "if it works for you, your team and your clients, it works for us" has led to the company getting the best out of its people and retaining female staff for longer.

AECOM's revamp came after the company realised that existing flexibility policies were not being well utilised and so set about understanding why, and how to rectify the situation. That started with research across AECOM which uncovered that many people weren't comfortable asking about the option, or thought it was only for working mothers.

Feedback indicated there was stigma associated with accessing flexible working options, especially for men, and that part-time workers would not be promoted into leadership roles.

AECOM is an engineering firm that provides design, consulting, construction, and management services to a wide range of clients.

"Our flexibility policies were seen as theoretical – not for actual use," says Amy Currie, Senior Business Partner, Human Resources.

"We wanted to bring it out into the open to show that it could work for anyone, anywhere. In order to create a culture that actively supports a diverse workforce, we continue to shift towards measuring output, rather than monitoring where and when work is undertaken," Amy says.

To help create a shift in thinking, new manager toolkits were developed to demonstrate ways that people could make the most of the available benefits, irrespective of gender or seniority. Internal communication drove these conversations to ensure everyone was aware of all options. Flexibility is also highlighted during recruitment and on-boarding, with all vacancies offering flexibility. If a role requires traditional hours, the hiring manager must provide valid justification.

Managers are committing time to training staff to make flexible work arrangements work. In a recent survey, there was a 30 percent increase in people feeling well-informed and equipped to utilise flexible work options.

"The entire conversation has changed – from a subordinate/manager approval process to an open discussion. Regardless of hours worked, all employees benefit from equal access to development, pay, career progression and opportunities. We have also seen higher levels of retention among our female staff members – indicating the changes we have been making in diversity are making AECOM a workplace that is more appealing for the long haul," says Amy.

Australia New Zealand Chief Executive Lara Poloni is a major driving force in making the strategies happen. "We must dispel the perception that accessing flexible work arrangements negatively affects career progression. Throughout my career, I've accessed a number of flexible working arrangements and continue to do so today," she says.

Naomi Macorison, Team Leader – Groundwater & Remediation Services, has school-age children, and has found flexible working options allow her to enjoy a work-life balance without excessive stress and challenges. "I work from 6.30am until 3pm. This allows me to work full-time and still be a

mum. I can collect my two children and take them to their activities. For the first time I feel like I can give my best to my employer, as well as my children.”

Parental leave has also been reviewed. This resulted in the introduction of significantly enhanced paid parental leave policy including full pay for the first 20 weeks, annual leave accrual paid at full value (not averaged earnings) and voluntary employer KiwiSaver contribution during parental leave.

Asra Hewitt, Senior Corporate Counsel, was among the first to make use of the new policy. “I really appreciated the way that AECOM kept the lines of communication open during my maternity leave. Since returning to work, AECOM has allowed me to work part-time and gradually increase my working hours. diversity and inclusion is more than just a policy – it is implemented in a true ‘walk the talk’ manner. It has made me feel both valued and supported while on leave and since returning to work.”

AECOM is also continuing to work on building the number of women in leadership positions.

“We are actively identifying women who are ready for promotion, increasing our pipeline of future female leaders,” says Amy. Twenty eight percent of those promoted in 2016 were women, and with 38 percent females in our 2017 graduate intake, we are making strides towards shifting those numbers in the future. Our aspirations are to reach a 50/50 split – an ambitious goal in a male-dominated industry, especially when the candidate pool skews male to start with.”

AECOM is working with universities, including its in-house ‘Women in STEM’ events, summer internships, and ongoing sponsorship of the Auckland Women in Engineering Society. It is working with schools through Futureintech and runs an internal female-only mentoring programme for senior professionals.

Craig Davidson, Managing Director New Zealand is confident that AECOM’s flexible working policies are having an impact: “We’ve upped our game and the initial feedback we’ve received has been positive,” he says, “It is my personal mission to make sure everyone knows that we take flexibility seriously here at AECOM.”