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Subject Area - General Studies

Work Life Balance

The concept of Work Life Balance.

Introduction

The concept of Work Life Balance has always existed, it just wasn't until recently that experts put a name to it. Employment has been traditionally thought of the means to which you support your personal life, with Work Life Balance principles employers can now gain competitive advantage from creating a more symbiotic relationship with a persons home and work. This allows for lower stress in the work place and greater enjoyment in the home. The results of this are increased performance in the work place and great repertoire for marketing to new employers. As this is difficult to establish in any industry and this is very true with recruitment agencies. The following is breakdown of the Work Life Balance principles along with a company analysis of the Irish Recruitment company CPL.

Work Life Balance

The major concept of Work Life Balance in employment is that the employer gives the employee the ability to handle their responsibilities in and out of work while generating self worth. This can be done by a multitude of ways:

Flexibility

Although hard in many industries the company's structure should enable an employee to work flexible times so that they can satisfy their out of work obligations. This can include anything from leaving early to pick up their children from school to being allowed to work via the Internet when the employee is required to handle home problems like construction work. The requirement of this is simple as the balance of work and life is not something that you can attach an actual number to. Certain weeks your personal life will require more time and other weeks your professional life will need a greater investment, with flexibility in the work place and home you can ensure neither will be neglected.

Achievement

As this is a balance between life and work an employee must have the ability to succeed in their profession. The employee needs to be able to succeed in and out of work to achieve this. The structure of the person's professional life needs to allow for progression in accordance to performance. Through this the person can truly shape their own destiny generating self worth and in conjunction with other work life balance concepts they will be able achieve in home life as well.

Enjoyment

There are many employees who can be happy in any situation as long as they view it accordingly. Enjoying life is something that everyone can do and is integral to the work life balance. A person must be able to work in a setting that they can not only achieve but also enjoy their success. Tied in with the concept of flexibility a person needs to understand

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that in order to do well in work you need to be enjoying work and life. A happy person will be able to perform better through increased energy and drive which helps the organization maintain their competitive advantage.

“Conceptually the idea of Work Life Balance seems relatively simple. If you can maintain flexibility, achieve well and enjoy life you can add value to your life” (Holden and Renshaw, 2004, pg 91). This system gets complicated as employers try to help everyone who has similar responsibilities outside of work which creates a strain on the whole performance. The balance itself is there to support the employees so that they support the firm, symbiotic relationships like this are always fragile from their codependence and true balance is near impossible to maintain in certain industries. Recruitment is one of those hard industries.

Advantages

The main advantage occurring from Work Life Balance policies in an organization is the improved performance from your employees. It has been proven that an employee who has the flexibility in their job to handle their personal lives will produce the following:

1. Higher quality work
2. Less missed time
3. More employer loyalty
4. An overall more enjoyable workplace as all employees are achieving and enjoying
5. More innovative ideas as employees care about their job
6. Strong recruitment marketing for future employees which increase the talent pool

This all results in a greater competitive advantage for the firm which will enable them to reach their own goals (Holden and Renshaw, 2004).

Irish Recruitment Industry

Ireland's economy is booming but is also in close proximity to the powerful pound of the UK. This has resulted in a very cutthroat recruitment industry where people vie for coveted positions. The result of this has been a large hindrance for employees ability to manage their Work Life balance. Several forces are the result of this trend.

Company example- CPL

Background Information

CPL was founded in 1989 to capitalize on the strengthening information technology industry in Ireland. The founder, Anne Heraty worked as a self employed recruiter until she managed to gain enough clients to hire more and expand. The company went public in 1999 for added investor support to promote their current expansion trends. From there the company has grown to employing over 2,750 temporary staff at any one point and being the largest recruitment company in Ireland.

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Current actions to promote work life balance

Educational Policy

Promoting greater opportunities within the work place, CPL has used a very flexible educational policy to promote a work life balance. Within their scheme they are willing to pay for an employees education as long as it is something that will benefit the firm. On top of this any employee currently studying receives five extra days of holiday on top of their regular annual leave to further encourage self improvement. Being an employee with them means that you are entitled to any number of their educational schemes including:

1. Conflict Management- where they learn about how to deal with problems with other employees, clients or suppliers
2. 5 minute manager- learn general management skills
3. Business strategy- learn basic competitive strategy principles
4. Any education- any external education can be funded by CPL and given the extra holiday time.

Leave Policies

CPL strives to ensure that large leave requirements are handled as fairly as possible. They are ranked in the top 25 companies in Ireland to work for and one of their main strengths is the benefits they give their employees for certain personal life requirements. This includes paid leave for pregnancy, marriage, family tragedy, illness. Along with this they also give guaranteed job placement after these leaves should the employees return as added incentive.

Problems

Personal Performance

Recruiters work under a single company name but the main bulk of their wages is dependent on personal performance. A recruiter normally is required to establish new clients for the firm and they are paid in accordance to the amount of employees they place. Within this the recruiters all have their own team of temporary employees in which they find work for from the client field. Being paid in accordance to these principles makes it very difficult for employees to operate within a Work Life Balance as they are required to work longer hours to earn more money as well as constantly recruit new talent to further their goals. Flexible hours in this situation are near impossible to do as CPL expects their recruiters to perform for the client as well as any time taken off directly affects your wages.

This is slightly different for the placed temporary employees but they still are required to perform exceptionally well in each job they take to ensure that they will be given another. The jobs they take are normally to cover someone who needed leave for personal responsibilities or to handle increased work load, either one the employers expect the worker to fill in the gaps and take little to no time off for themselves.

Personal performance standards do not just hurt the required working hours for the employee but also takes away from the job enjoyment. Trying to find new clients can sometimes place the recruiters into direct competition with each other that increases the overall stress in the work place.

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This leaves room for professional achievement but little for personal enjoyment which is detrimental to the balance.

Client Orientated hours- Not work load orientated

The recruiters and temporary workers both are required to adhere to the volume of jobs available instead of a standard work load. CPL employees do not know when the demand for their services will increase or decrease and neither does CPL management, what this ends in is you are required to work around your client's needs. Working around the needs of your client disables your ability to take flexible hours for your self as if CPL cannot handle the clients needs when they need it then they will just go to the next recruiter. Not having a standard amount of work to complete in the course of the day automatically hinders the employees Work Life Balance. Having low volume of work does not mean that the employee can take time off for personal reasons as that may not be required at the time. For a person to establish work life balance they need to have both flexible.

Cutthroat industry standards

The recruitment industry is extremely competitive as they all strive for the same competitive advantages. The cost of the temp employees is dictate by the job not by the standard at which the temp agency operates. That means all recruiters are trying to operate on the highest quality to ensure they maintain high volume performance. Having an entire industry based around this means everyone needs to be fighting for their own positions or they will lose contractors and clients. Recruiters are expected to work those extra hours in order to produce results and increase client relationships for future work. CPL is an industry leader in Ireland for these reasons which once again gives strong opportunities for employees to achieve and enjoy their professional life but difficult for the flexibility requirement in their personal life.

Volume orientated performance

A recruiter is paid based on the amount of employees they place in jobs. The nature of this payment means right away that in order to succeed the recruiter will be required to sacrifice more time. Work Life Balance in this situation cannot exist as for the employee to achieve and enjoy one, they must sacrifice the other.

End Result

Work Life Balance in the recruitment industry is near impossible to maintain. Employees are required to work around the requirements of the clients instead of what is set forth by the company. On top of this employees also are paid in accordance to the volume of service they provide with a requirement to continue to produce high quality. This results in a system which requires the employees to achieve only within the company and is forced to constantly be on call for client requirements. This makes it very difficult for employees to establish a solid Work Life Balance as all their professional achievement is based on catering to the job first.

Recommendations

Remote Working

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As recruiters are basically operating as small businesses on their own within CPL, they should have the option of working from home if required. Company calling cards and remote internet access will allow the recruiter to stay in touch with clients and employees at all times to handle any problems should they arise. Although this should not be the norm, it will allow for employees to establish a more balance life outside of work so that they can lower stress and perform better within the job.

Client Contacts

As the normal case for recruitment agencies is that each recruiter has their own contractor squad and own set of repeat clients it would be very effective to the Work Life Balance for recruiters to stop working on a personal performance standard and focused more on their ability to perform as a team. By having key contacts for a client but not necessarily only one contact can enable for some flexibility in the work place along with a more diverse employee pool to satisfy the client needs. This also helps with increasing the enjoyment and achievement within the organization as employees are now working towards a great good together instead of being in competition with each other.

Cross Training

CPL had it right by offering educational programs for their employees. Educating the employees allows for them to not only be happier in the job but also gives them opportunities to stretch out into new fields which can be very fulfilling. Within this they should try and institute cross training practices to create an internal structure in the organization that can support many stresses. Having employees who can cover for each other will create a sense of unity along with enabling people who have other responsibilities to handle those as well. These concepts are key to the Work Life Balance.

Employee Services

CPL is a large enough organization that they should look into having services which can help support employees personal lives. Several example services to support the employees Work Life Balance are as follows:

1. Day care center
2. Dog walking service
3. Activity days for employees
4. Career counseling
5. Benefit packages

Implementation Plan

Remote working is something that can be started right away as it only requires minimal IT servicing to set up a remote portal. Calling cards or company mobiles can also be purchased and given out with little work. The cross training program can fall under the current policies that they have for education but will require an analysis of current operations to see what training will be required. Employee services will require a longer implementation period as the needs and plausibility of each service will need to be accessed then the resources will need to be found in order to create the

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required packages.

Conclusion

Work Life Balance is hard to be developed in industry which is highly competitive and based on personal performance. An employee cannot establish a balance as there is a teeter totter effect occurring with work performance. For an employee to succeed within a recruitment agency, they need skill but they also need to invest time. Recruiters themselves see a direct comparison to the amount of time they spend in a job and how much they earn while the contractors need to commit large amounts of time to a job where they cannot satisfy any other personal responsibilities as the client is paying for stability. As a company within recruitment CPL is trying to help establish this balance but their current situation makes it hard for them to be a front runner on these ideals. CPL can institute policies which will help alleviate the strain on an employees balance but it will always be difficult to establish equilibrium as per the industry standards.

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