



Labour Department



Workplace Consultation
Promotion Division

Friendly Employment Practices for Mature Persons and Families

Foreword

The important way forward for Hong Kong's steady and sustainable socio-economic development lies on enhancing corporate competitiveness and unleashing work potential of our talents. With the challenges of an ageing society impending, it is equally important for us to construct a family-friendly workplace and a favourable environment for the employment of mature persons so as to attract more capable individuals to join or return to the job market. We should also encourage employees to extend their working lives to fuel the sustainable development of enterprises as well as the local economy by large.

The key to business success always revolves around the "employee-oriented" philosophy. Today, more employers acknowledge that a family-friendly working environment can help employees maintain a work-life balance and in return help attract and retain talents. As a result, enterprises become more eager to put in place family-friendly employment practices. In tandem with this, many foresightful employers are extending the retirement age of employees or making arrangement for the retirees to return to the job market in different modes of employment, and providing flexible work arrangements and appropriate training to retain valuable and experienced manpower.

To encourage more employers to keep up with the times and to adopt good employment practices, the Labour Department, partnered with Hong Kong Economic Times, compiled this casebook after interviewing a number of enterprises that have put in place friendly employment practices for mature persons and families. It is hoped that these examples can inspire you to move to a family-friendly workplace culture with us and to support mature persons to reach for another career milestone.

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Introduction - Friendly employment practices for mature persons

Mature employees possess a wealth of work-related knowledge and experience. Many of them have established strong ties with customers and working partners over the years. They are also tactful in handling interpersonal relationships. Their exits from the workforce will, to some extent, have a negative implication on the succession of knowledge and skills in an enterprise. Moreover, enterprises can make good use of mature employees' communication skills and personal experience to earn the trust of elderly customers and to develop the "silver-hair" market. In view of the challenges of a shrinking workforce, fostering employment of mature persons offers one of the means to unleash potential labour supply. The retiring silver-hair population represents, in a practical sense, a new source of human resources to enterprises seeking to strengthen their talent pool.

Enterprises that endeavour to keep pace with the times are taking the lead in hiring mature persons in different modes of employment in accordance with their own business needs. Through the exclusive interviews with a number of enterprises, we notice that some of them have already extended the retirement age of employees or put in place re-employment arrangements for retirees, while some others have explored suitable job opportunities and offered flexible employment terms for mature or retired persons. When more employers join the league to support employment of mature persons and take the initiative to meet their needs by adopting appropriate employment practices, more and more mature persons will likely be willing to stay in the job market and continue to make contributions to enterprises and society.

Friendly employment practices for mature persons may include:

- Flexible work arrangements, such as flexible working hours and job sharing, so that mature employees can achieve a balance between work and life.
- Recognition of the knowledge, experience and skills of mature employees by offering reasonable remunerations and opportunities so that they can shine and feel valued at work. It is also important to know about their physical conditions and make appropriate adjustments to their working tools and rest time.
- Training and retraining opportunities for mature employees to acquire new knowledge to cope with the advancement of society, technologies and industries.

Employers should also enhance the working environment and adjust the working procedures as appropriate to facilitate mature employees demonstrate their work capabilities more effectively. Employers may provide them with assistive tools and

equipment like better lighting, adjustable magnifying glasses and font-size adjustable computer screens according to their needs. Employees who can feel their employers' caring thoughts with a personal touch will definitely work with greater commitment.

In fact, the merits of hiring mature persons for enterprises are multi-fold. For instance, mature persons by and large have a stronger sense of responsibility towards their jobs; they are loyal, reliable and ready to impart their invaluable work experience and knowledge to the new and young ones. As a result, hiring mature persons can help reduce corporate training costs and employee turnover, boost productivity and enhance knowledge management efficiency.

As for the mature persons, by staying in or re-joining the job market, they would be able to enjoy income security, preserve vitality and maintain social connection. It also helps improve productivity, thereby bringing benefits to Hong Kong society as a whole.

HSBC

Employing "Smart Seniors"

Creating a new pool of customer service specialists

Seniors today boast better health and education, thus associating retirement with incompetence is now an idea way behind the trend. Given an appropriate opportunity to unearth their potential, seniors can still return to the labour market, inject new driving force into the economy and ease the labour shortage problem. A bank has taken the initiative to hire seniors and provide training to them so that they can move with the times, boost their self-esteem and self-confidence. Rich in life experience, this team of senior employees has become a source of new blood that provides quality service to the bank's customers.

Seniors are appreciated for their wealth of life and work experience. In early 2010, HSBC launched a "Smart Seniors" programme to attract seniors who aspire to re-enter the labour market, a place where they can rediscover the joy and satisfaction of working. There is no age limit for the programme, seniors who have received training after employment will be assigned to work on the frontlines in different branches. The size of this team of smart seniors has now grown to 160, that is eight times the number of seniors employed when the programme was launched 5 years ago.

Take care of family through flexible work arrangements

As HSBC Chief Executive for Hong Kong Diana Cesar indicates, the team of smart seniors has grown in tandem with the development of the programme and played a more significant role. "Initially, the seniors mainly undertook reception duties at special counters. As they have become conversant with the bank's operation, they were tasked to greet and direct customers to the appropriate counters in branch lobbies during peak hours. Even more, experienced seniors have been engaged to share their customer service skills with the new recruits in training classes recently."

Law Chi-hung, a 61-year-old former hotel employee, initiated early retirement 8 years ago after working in the hotel industry for over three decades. Having nothing meaningful to do in the first 2 years of retirement, Law, who was still as energetic as ever, found life unbearable. So he decided to join HSBC's team of smart seniors to put to use again his rich experience in customer service. In place of being cut off from society, Law now gets back his focus in life.

Law admits that he is motivated to work by the desire for a fuller life rather than merely monetary gains. "This job gives me ample opportunities to help customers of all ages. I think I have earned the recognition and esteem from others. I can regain a sense of satisfaction and achievement from the job I do."

Apart from open recruitment, HSBC staff can continue to serve the bank after retirement by joining the team of smart seniors on a voluntary basis. The "Smart Seniors" programme offers part-time job opportunities. Taking Law as an example, he works about 4 hours a day and 3 days a week under the programme. "The flexible work arrangements allow me to manage both my work and family life well. Moreover, it is very considerate of the bank to give the seniors a 5 to 10 minutes' break in each duty session, as prolonged standing may be too demanding for them."

"Smart Seniors" are competent and reliable

Summing up the results of the programme over the past 5 years, Cesar is very happy with every aspect of the performance of the smart seniors. "The seniors have different life experiences. After training, they can make the best use of their strengths to provide services, which is helpful in developing the bank's business," she also points out that senior employees are good at thinking from the customer's perspective and have a sincere service attitude. Consequently, they are able to earn the trust of senior customers and leave the customers with a good impression of the bank.

"Smart seniors can also share the work pressure of colleagues during peak hours so that the branch's service efficiency is enhanced. They are also making an impact on their colleagues for their patience, customer service experience and other knowledge. This is beneficial to the business, employees and customers," Cesar says. However, she remarks that the implementation of the programme requires an injection of certain resources from the bank. Hence, the success of this employment strategy hinges on the commitment and support of the management. "The seniors are so reliable and full of positive energy that it is absolutely worth the investment in the long term."

Family-friendly practices to benefit future generations

On top of employing seniors, HSBC has put in place a number of family-friendly practices. For instance, employees can discuss with their direct supervisors the arrangements for working flexible hours or working at home due to family obligations. In 1990, HSBC established a nursery school to cater for the educational needs of employees' children. With an intake of about 130 children, the school operates from 8 am to 7 pm on weekdays and from 8 am to 2 pm on Saturdays. The long school

hours are meant to facilitate employees to take their children to and from school. HSBC employees of all ranks, departments and qualifications who have passed the probationary period are eligible to submit applications for admission of their children to the nursery school.

Key Features

- There is no age limit for the "Smart Seniors" programme. Apart from open recruitment, HSBC staff can continue their service with the bank after retirement.
- Flexible working hours and part-time work help senior employees achieve work-life balance.
- Senior employees are given a break in each duty session, having regard to their physical conditions.
- Experienced seniors have been engaged to share their customer service skills with the new recruits in training classes.
- A nursery school has been established to cater for the educational needs of employees' children. Operating longer hours than ordinary schools, HSBC's nursery school facilitates employees to take their children to and from school.
- In case of need, employees can discuss with their direct supervisors the arrangements for working flexible hours or working at home.

Hong Kong Disneyland Resort

Hiring on merit

Senior cast members get a magical new lease on life

Different opportunities come up in different stages of life. While a full career is a fulfilling and exciting accomplishment, life after retirement can be just as meaningful, the key lies in how to go about planning. Retirees who have chosen to go back to work at Hong Kong Disneyland ("the park") have found it an ideal fit. Their jobs in this fairy tale kingdom are the start of a new page in life that's full of happiness.

Since it opened in 2005, the park has been a keen supporter of equal employment opportunities by recruiting mature persons as cast members (the park refers to its employees as "cast members"). Christine Wong, Vice President, Human Resources of Hong Kong Disneyland Resort, says that age isn't a major factor in hiring cast members. Rather, the park mainly considers its business development and manpower needs, as well as job-seekers' individual abilities and working attitude. She firmly believes that mature persons are able to effectively apply their rich work experience to their present jobs.

Shining in the right job

Hong Kong Disneyland assigns the right jobs to mature employees according to their individual abilities, expertise and physical conditions. Currently, the majority of the senior cast members are working in merchandise sales, food and beverage, guest services and operations divisions in roles also held by other cast members. The park also takes into consideration the cast's different needs when assigning job duties. "Our Merchandise line of business, for example, will try to avoid assigning warehouse duties that require physically intensive work to senior cast members, as far as possible. Also, those who feel tired after long hours of standing may take a break at backstage before resuming their duties," says Wong.

Like other cast members, newly recruited seniors are also required to take part in various training programmes tailor-made by "Disney University", the park's internal training arm. Aside from enhancing their understanding of Disney culture, safe practices and ways to improve the guest experience, the training programmes also facilitate the on-boarding process in various roles around the park. Wong points out that the park provides comprehensive on-the-job training for every job in addition to the time spent in a "Disney University" classroom.

Meanwhile, department leaders will, as far as possible, accommodate senior cast members' individual needs in arranging or swapping shifts. For those who need to, say, look after their grandchildren in the morning, the park will arrange for them to work afternoon shifts, if possible.

Working in the park makes one feel young at heart

Tony Pak, a host with the park's Merchandise team is a great example. After retiring from his full-time marketing job a few years ago, Pak wanted to continue working to maintain his vitality and his ties with the community. At present, he works a 6 to 8-hour shift on 3 to 4 days a week at the park. "I'm very grateful to the park for arranging Sundays off for me so I can spend time with my family." Pak, aged 66, is still full of energy and works with vigour. His work performance as a frontline cast member is on a par with those who are much younger.

Pak says that working at the park makes him feel young at heart and in mind. In particular, his job with the Merchandise team lets him gain invaluable experience interacting with guests from all over the world. "Everyone can find joy at work, and I've had a fantastic experience working in the park. I realise that even though the first half of my life is over, the second half can be just as fabulous." In fact, Pak's job entails not only making sales, operating the cash-register and product promotion, but also occasionally participating in sharing sessions. For example, he shared his work experiences and insights with retiree participants of the "Senior Police Call" in a recent event organised by the Hong Kong Police Force on the joy of re-employment.

Excellent role models at work for the young

The theme park is a fun-filled, magical place for guests. Its frontline cast members always greet them with smiling faces and are fuelled with positive energy. In this regard, Wong remarks that senior cast members are fully competent workers thanks to their rich life experience. "They are patient, attentive to details, well versed in interpersonal skills, and positive and upbeat with a willingness to take on new challenges. They have proved to be excellent role models for their younger counterparts. In fact, they are active participants in the park's activities and get along well with all the other cast members. They strike up conversations with others during break times and create great relationships with them."

Wong has discovered that guests of all ages, from children to the elderly, like to chat with senior cast members. "They are popular perhaps because they are courteous,

excellent communicators and can attend to the guests' needs proactively. As a result, the park often receives letters of appreciation from our guests thanks to them."

Moreover, Hong Kong Disneyland adheres to its business philosophy of "Happy me, happy guest", and is committed to fostering a pleasant working environment for cast members to maintain work-life balance. Last April, the park introduced a 5-day work week arrangement for full-time cast members, including those working on the frontlines, improving their qualities of life and helping them save travelling time and expenses.

Key Features

- Assign suitable jobs according to senior cast members' individual abilities, strengths and physical condition.
- With regard to working hours, department leaders arrange shifts according to the individual needs of cast members, as far as possible.
- Like other cast members, newly recruited senior cast members receive comprehensive training from "Disney University" to help them understand the company's culture so that they can easily adapt to their new working environment.

Hong Kong Kitchen Employment of mature persons preserves traditional Hong Kong cuisine

There is no absolute correlation between age and competence. Mature persons can continue to shine in the labour market as long as they are given the right jobs and opportunities. To promote a sense of worthiness among the elderly, Hong Kong Kitchen, which operates under the roof of non-government-funded social enterprise Gingko House, provides mature persons with opportunities to return to the labour market, so that they can make their own contributions in areas like food production, packaging and canteen operations.

Hong Kong Kitchen's business mainly involves food production and packaging, with an emphasis on "Hong Kong-style food" and "made in Hong Kong". Its business philosophy hinges on "inheritance". "Senior employees have a wealth of valuable knowledge and experience particularly in preparing traditional specialties such as poon choi (big bowl feast), pig trotters with sweet vinegar and ginger, and rice dumplings. Such knowledge and skills will vanish if not inherited," says Gingko House's CEO Joyce Mak. Hong Kong Kitchen plays to the strengths of its senior employees and focuses on the production of traditional Hong Kong-style food items with an aim to preserve the recipes.

Flexible work arrangements with shorter working hours

Unlike its business counterparts, Hong Kong Kitchen employs a large number of mature persons who constitute about 80% of all staff. These senior employees are engaged in various ranks ranging from supervisors to frontline packagers. Mak says that the company allocates work in accordance with their individual abilities, areas of interest and physical condition. First of all, verbal statements of the knowledge and experience of chefs of traditional foods, who have retired from the food processing industry, are systematically transformed into written recipes with images by Hong Kong Kitchen. Other cooking procedures are further broken down into various tasks to be carried out by other senior employees who will follow the instructions in the process of food production and packaging. For example, the production of poon choi can be broken down into steps such as marinating and arranging the ingredients.

Hong Kong Kitchen also puts emphasis on occupational safety. The food and beverage industry is generally known for its comparatively long working hours. In view of this,

the company cuts down the working hours according to the requirements of the specific job and the physical conditions of its senior employees so that they can cope with the work. Meanwhile, the company also implements flexible work arrangements. Senior employees can discuss with their department heads about their preferred weekly working days and daily working hours to cater for their individual needs.

Settling in made easy by close follow-ups

Since food production and packaging involve many steps, Hong Kong Kitchen attaches particular importance to training and communication, keeping tabs on senior employees' performance. The Human Resources Department also conducts performance assessments from time to time and arranges social workers to keep track of their adaptation progress and provide timely counselling to help them adapt to the working environment.

Effective communication with senior employees is also an important issue. "Mature persons are particularly in need of respect from others, and thus appropriate communication methods should be adopted. For instance, detailed explanations of specific tasks are given to the more forgetful staff beforehand; meetings can be served as friendly reminders and help put the message across tactfully," Mak says. For food production, designated officers are assigned to tutor the senior employees and help them understand the job requirements by providing clear guidance and reminders. It is also important to show respect to their comprehension ability, to remain courteous and to communicate with them patiently during the process.

Regaining dynamism and sense of worthiness after retirement

Master Tsuen, who is responsible for rice dumpling production, reveals that Hong Kong Kitchen has helped him regain his pre-retirement dynamism. Formerly an interior decorator, Master Tsuen had the opportunity to join Hong Kong Kitchen as a bartender after retirement. As he has been making rice dumplings for his family since the age of 12, so after retirement, he plays a "cameo" role during festive seasons and contributes his skills to the production of bite-size eight-treasure rice dumplings. He discloses that he felt lost after retirement. "But I can still apply my skills in wrapping traditional rice dumplings by working in Hong Kong Kitchen. It makes me feel good and healthier, and gives me a purpose in life. Getting along well with my colleagues makes me feel so energetic at work."

Mei-yuk and A-Ha, aged 72 and 67 respectively, are assigned the task of packing eight-treasure tea ingredients. It only involves two simple steps of weighing and

bagging the ingredients. A former elderly home carer, Mei-yuk says that she had seen many elderly persons who became frail in retirement, and so she wishes to continue to serve the community as long as she is still capable of working. "People need to keep going. It is my pleasure to make a living after retirement," she remarks. A-Ha, who retired 6 years ago and repeatedly failed to gain re-employment, is currently working a three-day week at Hong Kong Kitchen. With the thoughtful guidance of her colleagues and the less demanding procedures, she finds herself fulfilling at work. Both Mei-yuk and A-Ha hope that more employers in Hong Kong will open the door to the employment of mature persons, helping those with financial needs on one hand while giving them an opportunity to demonstrate their skills and continue to contribute to society on the other hand.

The "Lion Rock" spirit and dedication to work

Hong Kong Kitchen has been operating on a self-financing basis without any government funding; and Mak believes that this modus operandi can also be applied to private enterprises. Aside from jobs in the food and beverage industry, receptionists and data entry clerks are also suitable jobs for mature persons. "Mature persons are excellent trouble-shooters. With the 'Lion Rock' spirit, they are dedicated to their work. Just by providing training and making corresponding work arrangements, companies not only make a positive difference to mature persons' livelihood and well-being, but also help reduce their dependence on society. This brings significant benefits to the Hong Kong society."

Key Features

- Design and arrange suitable jobs for senior employees through assessments of their background, abilities and interests.
- Make flexible arrangements in respect of working days and working hours having regard to the senior employees' physical condition as well as family and personal needs. This will enable them to have sufficient rest and maintain a work-life balance.
- Treasure the senior employees' knowledge, experience and skills and give them a sense of respect and worthiness at work through appropriate communication skills.
- Focus on training and give appropriate instructions to help senior employees adapt to the work requirements with ease.

Hong Kong Electric Retirees take teaching reins to pass the torch in a highly professional field

Amidst the society's impending transition to a knowledge-based economy, talents rich in knowledge and experience form the corporate cornerstone for ensuring business sustainability. In view of the shrinking labour force, corporations increasingly treasure their valuable human resources, pulling out all the stops to retain experienced employees. The Hongkong Electric Company, Limited ("HK Electric") is one such company. By extending employment of some of its retiring employees under various options, knowledge and experience in the power industry could be passed on.

The knowledge and techniques involved in electricity generation, transmission and distribution are know-how within the highly professional realm of the power industry. Dennis Wu, General Manager (Human Resources) of HK Electric, says that the company has always attached great importance to manpower training and development alongside an emphasis on succession planning and knowledge transfer. As such, the company has well-established policies for retaining retiring employees in light of the manpower needs of specific departments and the situation of individual employees. Retiring employees are offered fixed-term contracts to stay on and help nurture successors for the respective departments. "Capitalising on the veterans' extended tenure to pass on their expertise is an integral part of knowledge management. This is also of vital importance to the power industry where know-how and practical experience are indispensable," remarks Wu.

The work focus of senior employees in certain positions like engineers will be adjusted towards grooming a "Second Echelon" during their extended tenure. "It is important for us to seize the time and opportunity to facilitate work experience sharing by these veteran employees so as to step up corporate knowledge management and experience transfer," says Wu. He stresses that the company has a sound and practical mechanism to communicate with employees, which includes various employee Joint Consultation (JC) meetings with elected JC representatives. As regards the detailed arrangements of further employment, the company also fully respects the wishes of individual colleagues.

Experienced employees to boost knowledge transfer

Last year, HK Electric set up the HK Electric Institute to launch advanced technical training programmes for employees in a move to enhance the professional knowledge and skills of its engineering staff. "Some of the lecturers are retired veterans who work freelance with the Institute in curriculum design and preparation of class schedules, thereby passing on years of experience and expertise to their successors," says Tony Yeung, Chief Technical Services Engineer (Transmission & Distribution) of HK Electric.

Wu describes this as a "win-win" arrangement. Given the relatively small number of practitioners in the power industry, such arrangement can ensure that expertise and experience are passed on within the industry. From the retirees' points of view, "the role as an Institute lecturer allows them to adapt to retirement lives in stages by gradually adjusting themselves from a hectic to a more relaxed working life," says Wu.

Yeung points out that retiree lecturers are tasked with curriculum design, preparation of teaching materials, delivery of lectures, setting of examination papers, assessment, etc. The programmes are comprehensive and trainees have a lot to gain from the training. "Such knowledge is probably the fruit of the veterans' work experience accumulated over the last few decades. The sharing of personal experience can bring a wealth of benefits to the budding practitioners," he adds. The HK Electric Institute has already organised over 50 classes for more than 1 300 participants. In future, the Institute will enhance collaboration with different universities, tertiary institutions and industry players to further expand the scope of learning for both HK Electric's engineers and the engineers in the industry.

Retiree lecturers to groom a "Second Echelon"

Cheung Chung-sing is the Senior Honorary Lecturer of the HK Electric Institute who has retired from the position of Senior Engineer. Cheung prepares teaching materials based on the requirements for specific topics, as well as the programme content and coverage. "In the present age of rapid technological advances, we have to keep reviewing and learning by stepping up exchanges with colleagues. We also need to take note of, among other things, the latest research papers, while leveraging our own experience as a complementary move," says Cheung, who is glad to be able to do his bit to pass on knowledge for the power industry.

The establishment of the HK Electric Institute not only allows flexibility in programme arrangements and ensures trainees' progress but also enables more systematic

organisation of knowledge and learning with greater effectiveness. Cheung says that he loves his current job and that his role as a lecturer makes him feel valued by the company and the trainees even in his retirement. "The workload is lighter and easier than before. I am particularly happy that I can continue to interact and share my past experience with colleagues," he adds, emphasising that his return to employment is not for monetary gains; rather, it is his wish to pass on his own experience. "I also learned the ropes from many of my predecessors during my salad days," he remarks.

Key Features

- Offer fixed-term contracts to retiring employees as a means of nurturing successors for specific departments and passing on knowledge and experience.
- The work focus of senior employees in certain positions will be adjusted towards grooming a "Second Echelon" during their extended tenure.
- Set up the HK Electric Institute and engage retired veterans as lecturers for certain programmes who work freelance with the company in curriculum design and lecture delivery.

Introduction - Family-friendly employment practices

Family-friendly employment practices are good people management measures adopted by employers to help employees fulfil their work and family responsibilities simultaneously. These good practices also contribute to the success of a win-win corporate management strategy that brings benefits to both employers and employees. As the concept of work-life balance is gaining considerable recognition, employees expect more than just reasonable pay and benefits. Listening to and caring for the needs of employees are also vitally important to talent acquisition and retention.

Employers need only put themselves in employees' shoes to realise that while employees devote much effort to their work, they also shoulder multiple family obligations like looking after their children and parents. A family-friendly working environment can help reduce the stress of employees who have to juggle work and family. When employees are free from the worries of their family commitments, they can work with all their heart. It helps to reduce absenteeism caused by illnesses, occupational accidents or other reasons. This, in turn, is translated into enhanced productivity and work performance. Ultimately, it is the employers who can reap rich benefits from it. Besides, fostering a sense of belonging to the enterprise helps lower the staff turnover and results in direct reduction in recruitment and training expenses. In the long run, family-friendly enterprises can build a positive image and draw diverse talents to form an energetic and dedicated workforce for sustainable corporate development.

The implementation of family-friendly measures may at times increase operational costs, but they can effectively boost staff morale and foster a positive team spirit. The long-term rewards will eventually outweigh the costs. Some of the measures will not entail a lot of expenses, nor are they exclusive to large corporations. When it comes to your notice that employees can work as one to drive corporate performance for new heights during an economic boom and are willing to unite to tide over the difficulties in tough economic times, you will appreciate that it is absolutely worthwhile to introduce family-friendly employment practices for the enterprise.

Examples of family-friendly employment practices:

Flexible work arrangements

Flexible working hours, flexitime, five-day work week, work from home or remote work, job sharing by two or more persons, part-time employment options, etc.

Special leaves to meet employees' family needs

Special casual leave, marriage leave, parental leave, compassionate leave, birthday leave, filial leave on the birthdays of employees' parents, etc.

Living support

Medical protection, child care service, counselling service on stress or emotional management, lactation rooms in the workplace to facilitate breastfeeding for working mothers, scholarships for employees' children and recreational activities for employees and their family members, etc.

Key factors for the successful implementation of family-friendly employment practices:

1. Gain the recognition of management and secure its enthusiastic support in terms of resources and actions.
2. Set up proper consultation and communication mechanisms to gauge the opinions of supervisors and staff to secure a thorough understanding of their concerns about the measures and their actual needs. It will facilitate employers to devise appropriate measures and make corresponding adjustments.
3. Establish clear guidelines for all employees to understand the arrangements and requirements and provide related training to tie in with the implementation of the measures.
4. Launch internal promotion to ensure that employees have a good grasp of the latest information and channels to express their views so that both management and staff are kept informed of relevant measures and their effectiveness.
5. Foster a culture of understanding and mutual trust, exercise flexibility in handling related measures, and encourage the cooperation and mutual support of each and every member of the enterprise, so that everyone is engaged in building a family-friendly working culture.

Sanofi

Adopting flexible work arrangements

Family care initiatives attract and retain talents

To many of us, getting married represents an important stage in our lives. Yet, to nurture a happy and harmonious family requires heavy commitments in terms of time and efforts both physically and spiritually. Multi-national pharmaceutical company Sanofi Hong Kong ("Sanofi") takes full advantage of its business nature to cultivate a working environment that facilitates its staff to build families and raise children. Embracing the philosophy of taking good care of staff health, Sanofi has been successful in attracting and retaining talents to build an efficient and loyal team amidst tight labour market.

Zone Director of Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan of Sanofi, Kelly Lam says, "The company's core business in Hong Kong comprises the sale of pharmaceuticals, vaccines, and personal care and health products. Being a health-conscious enterprise, Sanofi attaches great importance to the holistic health of our staff and firmly believes that the implementation of family-friendly practices is conducive to their physical and mental well-being. For instance, flexible working hours allows employees to start the day at 8 am, 8:30 am, 9 am, 9:30 am or 10 am according to their individual needs, as long as they work 8.5 hours a day as required. Hence, internal meetings are usually held within the core working hours between 10 am and 4:30 pm." Lam reveals that its staff are very much in support of the family-friendly practices to the extent that they often recommend their relatives and friends to join the company. So, the company basically has no recruitment problems.

Permission to work from home in special cases

Employees who have to stay at home for special reasons may apply to their supervisors for working from home. Human Resources Manager Constance Lo is one of the beneficiaries. "During my first pregnancy about 3 years ago, I suffered from foot swelling which made it difficult for me to walk. Thanks to the company's understanding of my situation, I was allowed to work from home using the company's laptop to handle the daily routine. Throughout the period, my supervisor gave me great support while my colleagues shared some of my duties helpfully, and I was very grateful to them for their care. I could find no reason to job hop," Lo says.

The outdoor sales staff are only required to go back to the office to report work progress 2 days a week, while visiting customers on other days of the week. They can update their work schedules and report work records to their supervisors via the computer system. Senior Product Specialist Walter Yung says, "Being a frontline salesman, I can reduce travelling hassles with the flexible work arrangements; staff can also apply for one day's paid leave within a month before or after their birthday as a birthday gift from the company. I am most impressed by the initiative."

Comprehensive medical protection

Sanofi makes use of its connection with medical institutions to provide staff and their spouses and children with comprehensive medical protection, covering general Western and Chinese medical services and specialist out-patient services of as many as 50 consultation visits every year. Additional obstetrics protection is given to pregnant employees or pregnant wives of male employees. Moreover, before the flu season begins, the staff and their families can receive free vaccinations, while their domestic helpers can get vaccinated at a concessionary price. Free seminars are organised in collaboration with specialists in various fields for sharing healthcare information.

"Employees with strong physique can take good care of their families on one hand and work for the company with great devotion on the other. In this regard, we have a multi-purpose room available for employees to do simple stretching exercise. Weight control incentive programmes were also organised in the past. Since last year, a new programme has been launched to offer 3 days off as healthcare leave to encourage the staff to do physical exercise with their families for the sake of their physical and mental well-being," remarks Lam. "Frankly, business is business and we should not overlook profits and returns when managing the company. The fact is, putting family-friendly practices in place does not require a lot of resources, but in return staff productivity and efficiency are boosted. It is indeed a worthy investment."

Lam also says that medical advances have led to improvements to the health of the elderly population in general. After a 4-month staff consultation, Sanofi decided earlier this year to give the serving staff a free choice of whether or not to extend the retirement age from 60 as prescribed in the employment contract to 65, while the retirement age is set at 65 in the contract for new recruits. With their knowledge and social network accumulated, the seniors are encouraged to pass on their work experience.

Key Features

- To facilitate staff to take care of their families, flexible work arrangements are implemented, allowing them to freely choose their working hours within a specified timeframe.
- Colleagues are permitted to work from home in light of their individual needs. Necessary equipment is provided for them to discharge their duties.
- Outdoor sales persons are only required to go back to the office to report work progress 2 days a week, while visiting customers on other days of the week. Unnecessary travelling time and expenses can be avoided.
- Comprehensive medical protection and free vaccinations are provided to protect the health of staff and their families.
- Seminars are organised to provide employees with healthcare information.
- A variety of family activities are organised by staff initiated "Sanofi Circles" to strengthen family ties.
- A birthday leave and 3-day healthcare leave are offered every year to encourage staff to stay with their families and do physical exercise together for the sake of their physical and mental well-being.

Engineering and design consultancy Arup
Providing part-time job choices
Preparing home carers for a career comeback

These days, we all take on multiple roles with different responsibilities at work and family. Given that there are only 7 days in a week and 24 hours in a day, how can we manage to juggle these multiple roles? Flexible work arrangement is perhaps one of the solutions.

Embracing the "people-oriented" principle, engineering and design consultancy Arup ("Arup") is committed to fostering a humane, friendly and pleasant work environment for its employees. Catherine Tsui, Director of Human Resources in East Asia, says that the company needs a lot of engineering and planning professionals to work on a number of recently undertaken large-scale infrastructure projects. "The company makes every effort to retain its pool of professionally qualified staff. We value employees' contribution and output more than their physical hours in the office."

As such, the company has introduced a flexible work arrangement scheme that allows employees to schedule their work according to individual needs whilst meeting the business requirement. "Employees will be more focused at work if their personal matters are handled well. This certainly will have positive effects on the company," Tsui remarks.

Working towards the common goals

"We adopt an open attitude and keep the process transparent. Our supervisors are free to explore with subordinates how flexible work practices can be implemented and discuss the arrangement in details." Tsui says it is important for the supervisors and subordinates to come up with a feasible plan that best suit their needs. Mutual agreement and cooperation are necessary, while other team members may also need to accommodate the arrangement.

In cases where a request for flexible work arrangement is not accepted, the supervisor has to provide justifications to the Human Resources department. "We have to ensure that every request is handled in a fair, impartial and transparent manner," Tsui stresses. There is no one-size-fits-all solution for implementing flexible work arrangements in the company. Rather, flexible work schedules in terms of days and hours can be tailor-made individually. Those under flexible work arrangements mostly made their choice for family reasons or personal commitments.

Elise Chan, Associate in Programme and Project Management, has selected flexible work arrangements as a way to balance between work and family. Chan had worked in Arup for about 6 years before taking a career break to become a full-time mother of two young children. It was not until a short-term job opportunity in Arup came knocking on her door that she staged a comeback to her profession by working at least 2 days a week, after a successful application for flexible mode of work.

Find the right balance to stay in shape at work

Chan points out that in practice, she handles company projects as usual, attends meetings with clients, supervisors and subordinates, and conducts site inspections to monitor the works progress. "All of my colleagues and clients know my work schedule. I usually plan ahead for family matters, taking into account my schedule of meetings and site inspections. It is actually not that difficult to implement flexible work arrangements."

Working flexitime, Chan has actually managed to stay in shape by staying abreast of industry trends. She is looking forward to resuming a full-time employment when her children get older. "This is the most suitable transitional arrangement for me because I do not have to give up my professional qualifications and years of work experience," she says. As her children grow up, Chan has extended her working days to 3 to 4 days a week. A promotion opportunity that has recently come her way serves to show that flexible work arrangements will not affect career development.

Extending retirement age

Professional engineers must engage in life-long learning and continuous assessment to enrich their professional knowledge and keep abreast of the technological developments in the field. In this regard, Arup spares no effort in supporting continuous learning through reimbursement of tuition and examination fees for Arup-accredited programmes and entitlement to full-pay study leave. The company has also set up the Arup University, offering programmes in three different levels to enhance the professional knowledge and skills of employees. The first level is the "professional modules" that are mainly conducted by Arup gurus who share their insights and latest developments in their respective specialist areas. Industry leaders are also invited to discuss matters of interest so that employees can keep a finger on the pulse of the profession.

The next level is "master modules" which are tailor-made with reference to Arup's scope of business to strengthen employees' technical capabilities. Tsui says that the

company partners with other universities to offer master modules and provide web-based learning opportunities to employees across the company's global network. The third and the highest level allows employees in Hong Kong to enrol in a PhD programme at The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology or The University of Hong Kong, and receive full tuition fee reimbursement in addition to paid leave for part of the study period.

Besides, the company has also extended the retirement age of new recruits by 5 years to 65 whilst existing staff members have the flexibility to retire between 60 and 65 as they see fit. "Currently, we have a 70-year-old bridge specialist who is very enthusiastic, and he wishes to continue to contribute to the company until he has built a bridge to the best of his satisfaction." Tsui expresses that the company appreciates employees' passion and will accommodate their retirement arrangements as much as possible.

Key Features

- Offer flexible work options to retain talents and strengthen the company's competence.
- Request for flexible work arrangements are handled in a fair, impartial and transparent manner.
- Encourage communication between subordinates and supervisors to explore and work out the details of flexible work practices.
- Allow flexible work arrangements to cater for the needs of the business and the employees
- Support life-long learning through subsidies for recognised programmes and examinations.
- Provide paid study leave.
- Establish the Arup University to enhance the professional knowledge and skills of employees.

UNIQLO

Implementing five-day work week

Retail workers can enjoy two days off a week

To cater for customers' shopping habits, retailers generally operate long hours. Many of them close only on Lunar New Year's Day or even stay open all year round. Breaking the norm of having frontline retail staff to work 6 days a week, a well managed casual wear chain, which relies on its precise division of labour and work scheduling system, has successfully implemented a 5-day work week across its retail outlets. All of its frontline and supporting staff can enjoy 2 days off a week.

Irene Tang, Human Resources Director of UNIQLO HONG KONG, LIMITED ("UNIQLO"), points out that the company's management philosophy is to help employees achieve steady career development and bring home a sense of achievement and job satisfaction. The company also seeks to foster a corporate culture which emphasises employees' work-life balance. To this end, the company fully implements a 5-day work week for both frontline and supporting staff. "To successfully implement the 5-day work week across our retail outlets, we have to conduct a detailed computer analysis of the sales data on specific dates and at different times so as to help shop managers deploy manpower according to practical needs," says Tang. "Colleagues may even propose their preferred days off to the shop manager prior to the scheduling of monthly rosters. Shop managers will try to accommodate the individual needs of employees as far as possible so that they can enjoy their day off." During peak periods, the company hires part-time employees to address the manpower needs. As for office staff, they may choose to start and finish work an hour earlier in light of their personal circumstances so as to take care of their families, pursue studies or attend social activities.

UNIQLO has brought to Hong Kong a typical Japanese enterprise culture characterised by its dedication to meticulous service standard. All employees are required to follow the guidelines devised by the headquarters in Japan, ranging from the mode of operation, service culture, staff training to routine work procedures. For instance, unboxed merchandises can only be kept temporarily in designated plastic containers and should not be left on the floor or on top of cartons. The company provides comprehensive training and operational guidelines to all new recruits, covering all the basics from morning greetings with colleagues and customer service skills to shop cleaning, garment folding, cashiering and handling of security tags. Actually, many shop managers were frontline sales who got promoted after internal training. As Tang

stresses, UNIQLO understands that a sound management system can only be effective on the back of employees' dedication to work. The management therefore takes multiple perspectives in formulating family-friendly employment practices to help employees manage both their work and families with greater ease towards achieving a better work-life balance.

Birthday leave boosts a sense of belonging

Tang believes that an employee-oriented corporate culture is the key to the successful implementation of family-friendly practices. In addition, UNIQLO always implements its management strategies with flexibility. The management reviews staff benefits from time to time, having regard to the practical needs and makes appropriate enhancements proactively. "2 years ago, the company introduced the birthday leave, allowing colleagues to take 1-day leave on their birthday or within the birth month for celebration with their loved ones. It demonstrates the company's care for its employees." Also, employees are involved in setting leave schedule such that they will appreciate the flexibility offered by the company and thus helps boost their sense of belonging. In fact, the turnover rate has been steadily decreasing year on year.

Custom-made family-friendly practices

As a global enterprise with 3 000 employees in Hong Kong alone, UNIQLO offers those with family needs overseas secondment opportunities provided that the business operation allows. "For instance, a female staff has been transferred to work at a UNIQLO store abroad so that she could stay with her husband together who also works there," Tang reveals.

Senior sales Lai Tsui-ping is another case in point. She became a first-time mother early this year. When she returned to work on the shop floor after maternity leave, her domestic helper unexpectedly resigned due to illness and could no longer look after her newborn baby. It made her deeply worried. "Thanks to the special casual leave granted by the company, I was able to take 1-month urgent leave and stay home to take care of my baby," says Lai. "In fact, the shop manager consulted me during my pregnancy and took the liberty to transfer me from frontline sales to a less demanding clerical support post. On my return, I was also allowed to start work after 9 am. It was a great help to a first-time mother like me who had to get up during the night to take care of my baby."

Key Features

- Computer analysis of the retail sales data helps shop managers assess the monthly manpower needs at an early date and make holiday arrangements through coordination among colleagues for successful implementation of a 5-day work week and flexible work arrangements.
- Introduce family-friendly employment practices such as special casual leave and flexitime to help employees achieve work-life balance and to meet their needs fully.
- Accommodate employees' needs for transfer overseas with the backing of a global retail network.
- There are strong ties between the management and employees. Supervisors welcome employees' opinions, which will be reflected to the management for necessary review on employees' needs and enhancement of their benefits.
- Attach great importance to staff training and provide promotion opportunities to help them achieve steady career development.

Fantastic Ladies Cafe

Implementing flexible work arrangements to help employees manage work and family life

What is the most important thing in life to a married woman? "Family" is probably the answer. It is so true that life, however, can be demanding at times and quite a lot of women do find it difficult to juggle work and family. A restaurant owner understands the difficulty women face and implements flexible work arrangements to support women employment while giving them room to meet their family commitments.

Fantastic Ladies Cafe, a restaurant run by a social enterprise, started operation 8 years ago. Ma Lai-wah, General Secretary of the restaurant's founding organisation, The Free Methodist Church of Hong Kong-Social Service Division, says that the restaurant was opened in the midst of Hong Kong's economic downturn. The financial support of many families was shaken as the husbands lost their jobs. Some women then turned to The Free Methodist Church of Hong Kong for job opportunities in a bid to make ends meet.

Shorter hours of work to facilitate parenting

To help these women who were juggling work and family, Fantastic Ladies Cafe departed from the industry norm and implemented flexible work arrangements. The common 9 hours or even longer work shifts in catering industry were shortened to 4 to 6 hours in Fantastic Ladies Cafe and its employees can also choose to work in morning or night shifts. "Our arrangements are premised on the idea that employees in work can also spare time to take their children to school, pick them up, or even go to the market and prepare meals for their families," says Ma. Ma also points out that the mission of Fantastic Ladies Cafe is to create job opportunities without causing employees any family problems. "We remain committed to our founding principle and that is why we offer our employees flexible work arrangements so that they can plan their own schedules for both work and household chores."

In its early days of business, Fantastic Ladies Cafe departed from the business norm and made Sunday a rest day for all. "For restaurants, Sunday is typically the busiest and most profitable day of the week but we took this bold move to allow our female workers to take care of their families," says Ma. As a business, however, Fantastic Ladies Cafe has to face the practical profit-and-loss problem eventually. The "Sunday off" policy lasted about 4 to 5 years before a review was prompted by the sliding

business volume. "Despite this, we remained open and transparent to our employees. We were honest about the restaurant's difficult situation and made known our desire to open for business on Sundays so as to boost turnover." Ma was only too happy seeing the restaurant's employees understand its difficulties and started working in rotation on Sundays to help turn the business around steadily in the face of adversity.

Five-star chef shows the ropes

"Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day; show him how to catch fish, and you feed him for a lifetime." Working by this philosophy, The Free Methodist Church of Hong Kong not only focused on the recruitment of women by Fantastic Ladies Cafe but also provided a 3-month training in culinary skills and cafe operation from scratch to ensure that the hires understand how to run a western-style restaurant. To help these women grasp the essence of western cooking, the restaurant also engaged a five-star hotel chef to impart the basic skills and knowledge of preparing western cuisine. Today, the restaurant's employees have found their feet. They are capable of preparing every dish on the menu and even undertaking menu design and tasting. It is no wonder that the menu of Fantastic Ladies Cafe now offers a choice of more than 40 meal sets, up from four in the beginning.

Chef Lau Siu-Fung signed with Fantastic Ladies Cafe right at the commencement of operation of the restaurant. She stands as an excellent example of an employee benefiting from flexible work arrangements. She recalls that her children were still at school during her first days at Fantastic Ladies Cafe. Fortunately, they had already developed self-care ability and could eat unattended. "I was working night shifts then. Before work, I would do the household chores such as going to the market and cooking meals, so that the children could eat on their own when they came home after school." She frankly remarks that, over the years, Fantastic Ladies Cafe has supported her family, giving her time to take care of her children. And now such support is extended to the third generation. She can take care of her grandchildren in the morning before work.

Sous chef Lee So-King is also grateful for Fantastic Ladies Cafe's support, which allowed her to make time to take care of her daughter who was still a primary school student. "Children of such a tender age are most in need of parental care. Fantastic Ladies Cafe allowed me to exercise flexibility in scheduling my daily chores and work, so that I can go through that important period with my daughter." Besides, mutual support among colleagues, who offered help and stood in for each other, fuelled her determination to fulfil her role as a mother. Now that their children have all grown, both Lee and Lau are happy to have some personal time to take part in the company's activities or go on

a trip with their colleagues. They find life more pleasant and carefree than it was years ago.

Fostering inter-generational social inclusion

Today, Fantastic Ladies Cafe has developed into a sizeable company. In addition to its main shop in Tuen Mun, the company has set foot in Tsuen Wan, Yuen Long, as well as Hung Shui Kiu where a number of male employees were brought in. Ma reveals that the restaurant has even expanded its philosophy of business operation to include "inter-generational social inclusion" and has opened another restaurant in Chai Wan in May 2015. The new shop hired both retirees and young people such as students serving as a platform for employees of the two generations to learn about each other's strengths and how to get along with one another, removing age barriers and generation gaps.

Key Features

- Shorten the working hours of employees in the catering industry and provide flexible shift rosters with the options of morning and night shifts, allowing female workers to make time for childcare and household chores.
- Arrange rotating Sunday shifts so that employees in the catering industry can take turns to spend quality time with their family during holidays.
- Encourage mutual support and co-operation among co-workers to jointly build a family-friendly workplace.
- Engage a hotel chef to impart the basic skills and knowledge of preparing western cuisine to frontline workers to help them acquire the skills for making a living.
- Adopt an open management approach to give employees free rein to design the menu and run the restaurant.
- Expand the recruitment focus from hiring women to include promoting "inter-generational social inclusion", and provide a platform for the elderly and young people to remove age barriers and learn to get along with each other.

Hip Shing Hong

Encouraging leaving work on time and granting employees caring leaves to help enhance the sense of belonging

The hustle and bustle of Hong Kong's city life seems to have made working overtime a norm for many workers. To encourage work-life balance among employees, Hip Shing Hong (Holdings) Company Limited ("HSH") has implemented a no overtime policy. It also grants its employees "Children birthday leave" and "Caring leave" so that they can have more time to manage their family obligations. These measures, in turn, help raise work motivation. Furthermore, scholarships are offered for the benefit of their offspring.

As HSH discourages working overtime, more than 90% of its employees can leave the office within 30 minutes after 6:15 pm. The company's Managing Director David Fong Man-hung, who advocated the no overtime policy when he joined the HSH management team more than 20 years ago, says, "Leaving work on time gives employees more time to enjoy their family and personal life and helps promote family harmony. Time is fleeting, particularly the period when young children crave for parental care, so we understand very well that working parents would like to have more time to look after their young children. For colleagues who are unmarried, we are equally delighted to see them using their spare time to develop their personal interests and social life. Employees who are cheerful will have greater work motivation, and ultimately, it is the company that reaps the benefits."

Fong believes that nowadays, the business model and staff have changed a lot in terms of mentality. Productivity can no longer be merely measured by working hours. He stated, "Employees having a fulfilling family life can maintain a good mentality at work, which will in turn boost productivity. Hence, HSH promotes a work-life balance policy which not only allows employees to have proper rest time but also helps cultivate a better family life. When employees are aware of the need to leave work on time, they will make more effort in accomplishing their work within working hours, thus enhancing the overall efficiency." The initiative of leaving work on time hits several goals at one go. It is not only environmentally friendly but also economical in terms of the substantial savings in electricity costs. In the meantime, the company has implemented a 5-day work week and flexitime arrangement so that employees can flexibly choose to start the day at 8:45 am or 9 am.

"Children birthday leave" and "Family care leave"

With "Care" as one of its core values, HSH considers its employees a valuable asset. It is hoped that with the assistance given to them in managing work and family life, they will have a greater job satisfaction and sense of belonging to the company. On top of the initiative to leave work on time, there are other family-friendly employment practices as revealed by Fong, "We have 'Children birthday leave' and 'Caring leave'. The former refers to 2 hours paid time-off to be taken on children's birthdays, while the latter allows employees to take 2 hours off work for a maximum of 4 times a year to handle important personal or family matters."

Joe Fok, Site Inspector of HSH Property Development, who joined the company three and a half years ago, has a son and a daughter. He says, "Young children are prone to illness. "Caring leave" allows me to get home earlier to take care of them. Being able to take good care of my family not only helps me to concentrate on my work but it also boosts my loyalty to the company. I go the extra mile at work in return." Aside from "Children birthday leave" and "Caring leave", the needs of employees who play different roles at home are met with the provision of 4-day paid marriage leave and 3-day paid compassionate leave.

Staff care approach also benefits the offspring

Fong emphasises, "Everyone devotes much time and efforts to take care of his family. If the management team can put themselves in the shoes of employees and treat them well, the talents so retained will bring more rewards to the company in the long term. If the management is preoccupied with short-term expenses and denies family-friendly practices, it will eventually find that the losses outweigh the gains." In a move to take forward the staff care approach to benefit the offspring, scholarships are granted to the children and grandchildren of employees as subsidies for education from kindergarten to university. Academic Achievement Awards are also available with scholarships being awarded to the top 3 students who attained the highest scores at the primary, secondary and university levels respectively, as an encouragement for them to make unremitting efforts to pursue academic excellence.

Revitalising industrial buildings with the concept of work-life balance

In support of the revitalisation measures for industrial buildings introduced by the Government, an old industrial building of HSH in Wong Chuk Hang has been converted into a commercial complex "Genesis". Incorporating the concept of work-life balance, Genesis provides a variety of facilities, including a large specially designed gym room and a recreational green terrace. There is also a children activity room which can

serve as a temporary care centre for parents working in the commercial building when the need arises.

Key Features

- Children birthday leave and special casual leave for employees to leave work 2 hours earlier.
- Marriage leave and compassionate leave to meet the family needs of employees.
- Encourage employees to leave work on time so that they can get home earlier to spend time with their families.
- Implement a 5 work week and flexitime arrangement so that employees can flexibly choose their working hours as needed.
- Scholarships for the children and grandchildren of employees to subsidise their kindergarten to university education in addition to Academic Achievement Awards.
- Incorporate the work-life balance concept into the blueprint of commercial building designs.

Lotus Tours

Introducing extended maternity leave

Giving parents more time for their newborn baby

The joy and excitement of welcoming a new life into the family are simply beyond words. But the mere thought of being unable to look after the baby round the clock when maternity leave is over leaves many working mothers anxious. Those company management who show empathy for such feelings and adopt appropriate employment practices will surely win the hearts and minds of their employees. This is exactly the case of Lotus Tours Limited ("Lotus Tours"), an employee-oriented travel agency. The company has in recent years enhanced its maternity and paternity benefits, giving its employees more time to enjoy precious moments with the new member of their families.

Travel agencies always put customers first. Lotus Tours' General Manager - Technology & Human Resources Tony Chau says that travel agencies are part of the service industry and employees providing quality services for customers are their greatest asset. As a firm believer of the notion that happy employees make for happy customers, the company seeks to provide employees with an agreeable working environment alongside comprehensive training. "We make efforts to promote a people-oriented management strategy and tailor appropriate family-friendly employment practices to cater to staff needs. For instance, we were the first to introduce 3 days' paternity leave as early as 5 years ago and bumped up our maternity leave from 10 weeks as stipulated by labour laws to 12 weeks, in a move to help employees relieve their worries and manage work and family with greater ease."

First 12 weeks of maternity leave on full pay

"We review our employee perks from time to time to identify room for improvement, so as to sustain a cheerful and dynamic workforce," remarks Chau. He points out that in considering effective family-friendly employment practices, the company's primary considerations are viability and the possibility of scaling up the maximum number of beneficiaries. In view of the generally higher proportion of female employees in travel agencies, the company decided to start with maternity benefits, allowing female employees to regain strength after delivery and giving them sufficient time to make appropriate child care arrangements before returning to work.

To ensure clear sailing, Chau stresses that like the formulation of other company policies, Lotus Tours drew on overseas experience in implementation and engaged department heads in discussion to get to know their concerns and find solutions before putting the new practice in place. The company did not roll out its extended maternity leave package until 2011, when the unanimous support of all department heads and colleagues was secured. Under the new arrangements, female employees may, in light of their individual circumstances, apply in advance to their department head for an extension of maternity leave from 10 weeks normally granted under the Employment Ordinance to a maximum of one year. "The first 12 weeks of maternity leave are offered on full pay. Subsequent salaries are calculated on a regressive basis. Starting from the 13th week of maternity leave, salaries are calculated on a pro rata basis, and then the proportion decreases as the extended period gets longer. Our employees have agreed to such arrangements."

Chau recalls that manpower arrangement was the biggest challenge to the implementation of extended maternity leave package. Staff taking a long maternity leave may have an impact on the operation of the company should there be insufficient coordination or a lack of appropriate support among departments. "Lotus Tours has taken all these into consideration at an early stage and made flexible arrangements. We believe that the coordination and support among colleagues are instrumental in the smooth implementation of the arrangements. As such, the company provides comprehensive training to equip our employees with multiple skills so that they can be seconded to other departments to provide support where necessary to help maintain the operational efficiency of the company."

Company's enhanced image helps attract talent

Since the introduction of the extended maternity leave package, Chau has been happy to see colleagues having more time with their newborn babies, and they are more proactive at work on their return. Employees generally realise the company's respect and care for them, and have a much greater sense of belonging. "The arrangements were made public through colleagues' online social platforms and media coverage, which enhanced the company's profile and image. As a result, more talents are attracted to the company, creating a win-win situation for the employees and the company."

To care for male employees with the same family commitment, in 2011, Lotus Tours also extended its paternity leave to a maximum of 3 months with the 5 five and a half days on full pay, followed by leave with pay granted on a proportional basis. Chau

adds, "The company also provides birthday, marriage and examination leaves in addition to the change from working alternate weekend to working a weekend every three weeks, so that all employees can have more holidays and benefit from the arrangements."

Wing, who works in the Accounts Department, took a 5-month maternity leave last year. The new mother frankly says that it takes time for her to recover after delivery. Neonatal care can also be a steep learning curve. When it comes to maternity leave, it is definitely the longer the better. She was happy with the company's extended maternity leave package, which allowed her to fully recover and her child to gain some strength from birth before she resumed her job at Lotus Tours.

"A baby went through tremendous changes in the first few months after birth. I was only too happy to be with him and see him grow during that period. Such precious moments, once missed, will never return," says Wing smilingly. She says that her relatives and friends were green with envy about the extended maternity leave arrangement she opted. They even expressed their desires for a job at Lotus Tours. It is clear that such empathetic arrangements for employees are indeed very popular and are exemplary examples for other companies.

Key Features

■ In view of the higher proportion of female employees in travel agencies, the company started enhancing maternity benefits when formulating family-friendly employment practices. Full-pay maternity leave is increased to 12 weeks coupled with an option to extend the leave period to a maximum of 1 year with pay granted on a proportional basis so that female employees can take better care of their newborn baby.

■ Fully aware of the equally important role a man plays at home, the company was the first in the industry to introduce 3 days' paternity leave years ago, and subsequently allowed it to be extended to a maximum of 3 months. Full pay is granted for the first 5 and a half days of paternity leave, and pay on a proportional basis for the remaining leave period.

■ Across-the-board fringe benefits for all employees include entitlement to birthday leave, and a change from working alternate weekend to working a weekend every 3 weeks.

■ Comprehensive training is provided for employees so that they can be seconded to provide support for other departments to ensure smooth implementation of the arrangements.

■ The management attaches great importance to communication with employees. Views of different parties are gauged through discussion to ensure that staff at all levels of the company understand and support the arrangements prior to implementation.

Towngas

A pleasant ambience specially for lactating working mothers

Studies have shown that breastmilk provides much more nutritional values than infant formulas and therefore can best cater to the needs of infants. But a lack of support in the workplace has forced many working mothers to give up breastfeeding shortly after returning to work as they find it inconvenient to express breastmilk at work. In a move to support postnatal employees to continue with breastfeeding, The Hong Kong and China Gas Company Limited ("Towngas") has provided a Mother Care room with well-equipped breastmilk storage facilities. The company has also implemented a 5-day work week, flexible work arrangements and other initiatives to offer employees all-round support to accommodate their family needs.

Towngas employees have an average length of service of 20 years. Over the years, the rate of annual manpower wastage has remained in the single digit, less than half of that of other enterprises in general. Kit Fan, Head of Corporate Human Resources of Towngas, believes that this reflects the effectiveness of the company's family-friendly practices on talent retention. She adds, "We strive to maintain a people-oriented management philosophy, actively creating a caring working environment for our employees in order to enhance their sense of belonging and service quality at the same time. For example, although only about 21% of our nearly 2 000 total workforce are female, the company is concerned about their postnatal breastfeeding needs."

Access control ensures ease of mind

In order to provide working mothers with an undisturbed, safe and hygienic environment to express and store breastmilk during working hours for feeding at home, Towngas set up a Mother Care room with breastmilk storage facilities in 2013 when it enhanced the rest room facilities for its employees. Female employees can make reservation via email to use the room for expressing breastmilk. As Fan points out, "The Mother Care room has no specific opening hours, and the female employees can also use it outside working hours. The room is fitted with an access control device which restricts access to registered female employees only." She further says that Towngas places top priorities on safety and reliability when serving the customers. With the company's all-round care for the employees' needs, they become more committed to their work and, in return, quality customer service is ensured.

Purchasing and Logistics Manager Katherine Leung, who has been with Towngas for about 15 years, is a lactating mother and one of the users of the Mother Care room. As she reveals, "I gave birth to my second daughter in 2014 and have been using the new Mother Care room since returning to work after maternity leave. The Mother Care room provides a clean and quiet environment for me to express breastmilk in a pleasant mood. My younger daughter is now over one year old and I can still continue to feed her entirely with breastmilk, which is not easy for other lactating working mothers." She says that her younger daughter is noticeably healthier than her elder daughter whose diet was supplemented with infant formulas since she was four months old. Leung can now work at ease as she does not need to take leave frequently to take her younger daughter to see the doctor.

5-day work week benefits over 70% of employees

Towngas attaches great importance to family harmony and a caring management culture is adopted as the company's operating principle. In order to give its employees more time to rest and enjoy family life, the company implemented the 5-day work week in stages in as early as 2008. Fan explains, "As a public utility company providing 24-hour services, Towngas needs to implement the 5-day work week in phases in order not to interrupt our business operations. At the first stage, all back-office supporting staff took the lead to work under a 5-day week pilot scheme. At the second stage, with the experience gained, we extended relevant arrangements to some of the frontline staff (such as network fitters, technicians and project supervisors). Currently, more than 70% of Towngas employees enjoy a 5-day work week." Outdoor Sales Manager Martin Kwong, who has been working in Towngas for about 28 years, is one of the beneficiaries under the scheme. Kwong says, "Some colleagues in my department are required to work on Saturday once a month and are entitled to take a day off in lieu during the week together with a regular rest day on Sunday, so they can still work a 5-day week."

Flexible work arrangements and living support

Towngas also makes flexible leave arrangements for employees who need to take care of their ill family members or attend activities for parents organised by their children's schools during working hours. As for employees who have special needs to look after their young children or elderly family members, as well as those who need more rest time due to pregnancy or illness, the company can also consider their requests to switch to job-sharing or part-time work on a case-by-case basis.

Aside from providing medical insurance, Towngas has set up a clinic at the employee rest room "Happy Zone" in its North Point headquarters, offering free general outpatient services to the employees and eligible family members (including spouses and children who are full-time students under the age of 25). Towngas also offers a 24-hour hotline "Warm Express" manned by counsellors from a non-governmental organisation to provide a confidential and professional emotional support service to its employees. Towngas employees may also take part in the Company's recreational activities during their free time. The Company's Sports & Recreation Club organises travel tours, recreational activities and interest classes for employees and their families, which are largely sponsored by the company. The Towngas Volunteer Service Team also organises "Farming for Fun" for employees and their families to spend quality time by farming together. In addition, the Company offers university scholarships for the employees' children to meet family needs.

Key Features

- A well-equipped Mother Care room with breastmilk storage facilities is provided in the office.
- Aside from medical insurance, a clinic located at the staff rest room in the headquarters offers free general consultation services to employees and eligible family members.
- Provide employees with a confidential and professional emotional support hotline service manned by a non-governmental organisation.
- Various recreational activities, interest classes as well as parent-child and volunteer activities are organised and sponsored by the Company.
- University scholarships are offered to the children of employees to meet family needs.
- Staff who benefit from the implementation of the 5-day work week include supporting staff in the office, frontline project staff as well as network fitters, technicians and project supervisors.
- Flexible leave arrangements allow employees to attend to family matters. For those who have special needs to look after their families, the Company can also consider their requests to switch to job-sharing or part-time on a case-by-case basis.

NWS Holdings

Fostering ideal work-life balance for employees through communication and creativity

Hong Kong is known for its hectic city life. Many employees devote most of the time to their work, so much so that their families and personal well-being are inevitably overlooked. In recent years, however, employees have become more conscious of work-life balance. In the face of the prevailing labour shortage, many companies have rolled out various supporting measures and initiatives to help employees juggle work and family matters in a bid to attract and retain talents. NWS Holdings Limited is one such shining example that goes the extra mile in employee communications and leverages on creativity to introduce a number of family-friendly practices.

Elina Lam, General Manager - Human Resources of NWS Holdings Limited of says that in embracing the "people-oriented" principle, the Group has pulled out all the stops to implement practices for the benefit of its employees and their families over the years. "These practices are introduced primarily to cater to staff needs. Communication is most important in the process. To this end, a survey was conducted to gauge staff opinion before working out the specifics of individual practices. A touch of creativity is also indispensable to make the practices both accommodating and appealing in order to attract the active participation of staff and their families for optimal results."

University scholarships for employees' children

Nowadays, talent retention has become the trend in human resources management. Lam says that in addition to remuneration and fringe benefits, companies may consider adopting family-friendly practices as a means to boost employees' loyalty and sense of belonging. "Since the Group was listed 12 years ago, the staff turnover rate has remained at a single digit level. The majority of our staff have been working for us for 7 to 8 years."

Aside from various special leaves such as birthday leave and examination leave, the Group also adopts a 5-day week and provides a Caring Room for female employees to express breastmilk. Monthly employee birthday parties are organised and healthy snacks and fruits are given out regularly. The Group has also set up the NWS Scholarships for Employees' Children Scheme to extend its care to employees' family members. Since its inception in 2012, the Scheme has served as a token of

encouragement to employees' children for their outstanding academic or non-academic performance. The scholarships are presented at the annual NWS Awards Presentation Ceremony to highlight their achievements.

"The Scheme has been well received by our staff. The Group is also glad to see our employees' children excel in academic and non-academic fields such as sports, fine arts or even volunteer work. It is our pleasure to give them recognition and encourage them to broaden their horizons by caring for the community while pursuing academic excellence and extra-curricular interests," says Lam.

Catalyst of work-life balance

The Group organises a wide array of activities for its employees and their families, ranging from family movie day to the NWS Adventure Day 2013 in Hong Kong Disneyland. These activities were well received by its staff including one of the Group's managers Anissa Mak. Due to work obligations, Mak often commutes to the Mainland with occasional overnight layovers, leaving little time for her family. "Thanks to the Group's arrangement, I can enjoy wonderful holidays with my children by participating in different parent-child activities while saving me a great deal of planning time. This definitely helps me in maintaining a work-life balance. My family and I are looking forward to the NWS Adventure Day 2015 to be held at Hong Kong Disneyland in the coming September."

Meanwhile, NWS Holdings has formed its own corporate volunteer team, NWS Volunteer Alliance, to join forces with various charity groups on an on-going basis, engaging employees and their families in community services in their spare time. This helps open up new avenues for them to play to their strengths or cultivate personal interests through participation in different interest groups for enhanced cohesion. Mak often brings her friends to join the activities organised by the Alliance. "For example, by giving out resources to grassroots families, my friends and I can stay in touch with the needs of other social groups. Providing a platform for employees to serve the community is far more meaningful than simply offering staff benefits."

Aside from communication and creativity, Lam remarks, management participation and support are also instrumental in optimising the effectiveness of these practices.

"Members of the Group's management not only encourage the development of related practices, but also often demonstrate their enthusiasm by taking part in various activities such as hiking with the staff. It shows their support to the activity on one

hand and provides an opportunity for them to foster communication with employees on the other.”

Key Features

- Set up the NWS Scholarships for Employees' Children Scheme to extend its care to employees' family members.
- Organise a wide range of activities for employees and their families, ranging from family movie day to a NWS Adventure Day in Hong Kong Disneyland.
- Form the NWS Volunteer Alliance to engage employees and their families in community services in their spare time.
- Provide a Caring Room for female employees to express breastmilk at ease.
- Organise monthly employee birthday parties and regularly give out healthy snacks and fruits to employees.
- Adopt a 5-day work week and provide special leaves such as birthday leave and examination leave.

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