

Flexibility based HFE practices to resolve work-life balance issues of IT
service desk professionals

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PREFACE

This document represents guidelines to use flexibility based HFE practices in order to resolve work-life balance issues of IT service desk professionals. This is the sole work of the author.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Most of the businesses and companies today are dependent on IT infrastructure. Businesses and companies continue to investment on IT in order to gain better productivity. The information technology has become more complex, rapidly changing, more innovative, more advanced, more difficult and more challenging. Expectations on IT reliability, quality and consistency continue to rise. IT service desks were created in order to meet these expectations and provide quality services to internal customers or external customers or both. IT service desk professionals make use of processes, methods, tools, techniques, knowledge, experience and expertise of IT service desk professionals to accept customer's requests and complete these requests in a timely fashion to make the customers delighted. IT service desk related work often requires employees to work different shifts and to be on call 24/7. As organizations are becoming leaner with downsizing and outsourcing approaches, IT service desk professionals are required to do more work and take on more responsibilities. As IT service desk professionals are frontline of the organization, it is very important that these professionals are happy and maintain proper work-life balance. This paper is created with the objective of helping organizations and operations managers to apply flexibility based HFE practices to resolve work-life balance issues of IT service desk professionals. Even though the focus is towards resolving work-life balance issues of IT service desk professionals, concepts and guidelines can be applied to other employees and organizations wherever applicable.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND

This paper was created based on the skills and knowledge gained during the learning Of “Human factors in QAS” course, author’s experience with IT service desk operations and based on informal feedback obtained by IT service desk professionals. There was one main text book that was used as part of this course. Ergonomics – How to design for ease and efficiency (Kroemer et al., 2003) explains the concept of HFE and stresses the importance of applying HFE to improve quality of human life. _

Work-life balance is needed to help IT service desk professionals maintain a better balance between the demands of the job and the healthy management of life outside work. Role overload, work-to-family interference, family-to-work interference and caregiver strain etc. are few of the contributing factors associated with work-life balance issues of IT service desk professionals. Advances in the Information Technology lead to flexibility based programs that did not exist before. These programs include the following and these can be applied in order to resolve work-life balance issues of IT service desk professionals.

- Flextime
- Sharing the job
- Part-time working
- People oriented job redesign
- Flexible leave
- Self funded leave
- Flexible schedules
- On-site child care programs
- Subsidized child-care programs
- Sick-child child care
- Promote knowledge sharing among employees
- Promote work-life balance programs and benefits as one package
- Create and encourage an annual or quarterly “bring your family to work” day through workshops or other means
- Establish a “disconnect from office” policy during vacation – No Blackberry, No laptops etc.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The concepts explained in the text book Ergonomics – How to design for ease and efficiency and other reference books listed under “References” section were analyzed based on experience of dealing with IT service desk functions. Feedback was obtained by the IT service desk professionals in order to come up with HFE countermeasures that help in resolving work-life balance issues. The concepts and practices suggested in this paper have to be interpreted carefully and adapted for use. Additional guidelines may need to be added depending on the organization structure, culture, needs and other factors.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following flexibility based programs are proposed in order to resolve work-life balance issues of IT service desk professionals.

- Flextime
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- Part-time working
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Flextime refers to arrangements wherein work schedules are shifted and arranged outside of the normal shift hours. Employees still work same number of hours in a given week. However, employee had more discretion over when work gets accomplished (Kroemer et al., 2003). One example is compressed work week, in which employees work four ten-hour days and have an extra day off each week. Another example is employees report to work early and leave early or design their schedules to the particular family related demands they may face in a given week. Workers utilizing flextime are required to be at the workplace during core hours, but have discretion in selecting the hours before and after the period in which to work.

Sharing the job involves multiple employees working part-time and share the same shift and job. This can be effective for employees who wish to remain employed, but at substantially reduced hours due to family or other responsibilities. IT service professionals in dual-earner couples usually show interest in part-time positions.

Part-time working involves reducing the work hours during emergencies and return to full-time job when circumstances change, allowing employees to retain at least a reduce benefits package and remain connected to the workplace. IT service professionals in dual-earner couples usually show interest in part-time positions.

People oriented job redesign will make jobs of IT service desk professionals interesting, challenging and gives a sense of achievement and accomplishment. Unnecessary work can be eliminated using tools and can contribute to significant productivity improvements and job satisfaction.

In addition to maternity, paternity leave programs, leave programs need to offer flexibility to have service desk professionals take time off for the care of elderly, adult dependents etc. IT service desk professionals can also be provided with the option of purchasing leave (self-funded) to help them spend more time with children during school holiday times or pursuing a hobby or further study etc.

Telecommuting refers to situation in which IT service desk professionals at remote locations (often at home) are able to electronically connect to their workplace. Service desk professionals gain control over where the work gets done and this helps in easing the work and family conflict. Often, employees are allowed to telecommute certain days of the week, while coming to work for specified days and times. Other times, employees make temporary use of telecommuting in order to, for example, take care of sick children.

Telecommuting is linked to organizational benefits as higher job satisfaction, higher productivity and decreased expenditures for office space.

On-site child care programs are very important as working IT service desk professionals face lot of stress regarding adequacy, quality and cost of child care. Organizations can explore the option of providing child-care programs in order to avoid the problems associated with inadequate, high-cost and low-quality child care. If on-site child care is not possible, subsidized child care and child care for sick-children can be provided.

Knowledge sharing among employees makes IT service desk professionals efficient and saves time. Less time will be spent dealing with certain service requests that means there will be more time to spend outside work. Knowledge sharing also helps when 24/7 on-call is needed so that issues can be resolved in a timely fashion by on-call IT service desk professional without taking the time away from expert resources.

Promoting work-life balance programs and benefits and communicating these to IT service desk professionals as one package will help professionals to have all the information needed.

Annual or quarterly “bring your family to work” day through workshops provides the opportunity for IT service desk professionals to invite family members to the work place so that they can deepen their understanding of the work done by IT service desk professionals.

When IT service desk professionals take vacation or leave, encourage them to turn-off “blackberry”, “laptops” etc. and promote the culture of “disconnect from office” during vacation.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Application of flexibility based HFE practices to resolve work-life balance issues of IT service desk professionals will have positive impact on employees, customers, organizations and communities. These practices help retaining IT service desk professionals, attracting new skilled IT service desk professionals, building diversity in skills and experience, improving morale, reducing sickness and absenteeism, enhancing working relationship between service desk professionals, encouraging service desk professionals to show more initiative and teamwork, increasing levels of productivity and satisfaction and decreases stress and burnout. Happy IT service desk professionals who are frontline of the organization lead to happy customers (Heskett et al.,1997).

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