



Flexibility as a Key Talent Strategy

Industry Best Practices:
Raffles Hotel Singapore

Produced by:



Tripartite Alliance for
Fair & Progressive Employment Practices

tafep.sg

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FLEXIBILITY AS A KEY TALENT STRATEGY

How an effective work-life strategy can support talent acquisition and retention in the competitive hospitality industry.

Established in 1887, Raffles Hotel Singapore is a local landmark and icon. In addition to its rich history and colonial architecture, the award-winning hotel is known for its impeccable service standards in the hospitality industry.

In order to support the consistent delivery of the excellent guest experience that is synonymous with the Raffles brand, the leadership focuses on

cultivating a stable and highly committed workforce with a strong Singaporean Core. Here, the fundamental belief is that when the organisation takes care of its employees, they in turn, will take care of the business. Thus, the hotel has gradually built a comprehensive work-life strategy with flexible work arrangements (FWAs) at their centre, that provides employees with sufficient time for family responsibilities and personal interests.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND BUY-IN

In an industry where high attrition is a common workforce challenge, the hotel sought to minimise employee turnover by understanding the needs of employees and providing a workplace that would be conducive to work-life harmony. In 2010, when the sector was still characterised by 24/7 operations and 5.5 or 6-day work week was the norm, Raffles Hotel Singapore was among the first hotels to implement a 5-Day Work Week. The management shares that this was done to enable the organisation to be an attractive workplace for new hires, as they recognised employees desired work arrangements that allowed them to have enriching lives even outside of work, and this included time for family and personal relationships.

From endorsing FWA requests on an ad-hoc basis, the hotel's work-life strategy evolved to formal FWAs in 2015, when the Staggered Work Hours policy was implemented. The Management found several advantages to this approach. First, eligibility criteria and terms of responsible use of the FWA were clearly explained through communications with staff and via a written policy, making misuse less likely. The FWA also became more accessible to staff who confidently utilised it as they clearly understood how to apply for the work arrangement and how to use it effectively. Heads of Departments also became more invested in the roll-out of FWAs, as they were empowered to evaluate and approve FWA requests based on their on-going operational needs.

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Flexible Work Arrangements are one of Raffles Hotel Singapore's Talent and Culture best practices. Well before adopting the Tripartite Standard on Flexible Work Arrangements, to attract and retain talents and support colleagues' work-life and domestic needs, the hotel has been extending flexible work arrangements at the request of colleagues and candidates for positions and work that are operationally feasible, leading to higher colleague engagement and productivity.

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JENNIFER TAN
DIRECTOR OF TALENT AND CULTURE

Through the years, Raffles Hotel Singapore has gradually introduced different FWAs to meet the growing needs of their workforce.



FLEXI-PLACE

Work from Home (Telecommuting) (2020)

- Employees can work from home on specific predetermined days, during an agreed-upon period.
- Available to all administrative employees during the Covid-19 pandemic and continues to be mainly utilized by this group.



FLEXI-LOAD

Part-time Work (Prior to 2000)

- Employees can opt for a permanent part-time schedule, where they work fewer days or hours per calendar week i.e., less than 35 working hours per calendar week, mutually agreed upon by the employees and the hotel.
- Available for all staff roles and groups.



FLEXI-TIME

Staggered Work Hours (2015)

- Employees who work with the standard office hours can opt for staggered start and end times.
- Mainly utilised by employees in administrative roles.

Family-Friendly Shifts (2019)

- Employees with primary care-giving responsibilities (e.g., parents, etc.), may request fewer overnight/weekend shifts, subject to operational needs.
- Section Heads are empowered to consider and approve these requests where possible.
- Available to all operational staff (85% of the workforce) on shift work patterns.

A POSITIVE WORK CULTURE UNDERPINS THE WORK-LIFE STRATEGY

The Hotel's well-established positive work culture is a key factor in its successful work-life strategy. The organisation adopts the philosophy that all employees are part of a "Big Working Family", working together as a team to achieve shared goals and show care for one another. This core idea is deeply ingrained in the way employees work and

has been pivotal in defining organisational culture, even through the evolution of the hospitality landscape and change in leadership over the years. As employees subscribe to the idea of being part of a 'work family', 3 key behaviours have emerged as a result, and these contribute to the overall work-life success of the Hotel.



#1. INVESTING TIME AND EFFORT IN UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYEES' CHALLENGES

Over the longer term, Management invests effort to understand employees' unique personal circumstances and work-life challenges and provides FWA solutions for those who need it.

During the exceptional circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Management also prioritised employee safety and well-being. For front service operational roles that required employees to be on-site, a decision was made to temporarily excuse those in vulnerable groups from work duties (e.g., employees over 60 years of age). For those in administrative roles who had to work on-site on split shifts, they were given the option to temporarily work from home.

These practical actions by Management, help to build a culture of care, and show employees that they are genuinely valued and cared for by their employer.



#2. EMPOWERING SUPERVISORS TO ENABLE FLEX FOR THEIR TEAMS

Section Heads are empowered to evaluate and approve FWA requests taking into consideration the operational and team needs and where possible to minimise overnight and/or weekend shifts for those with caregiving responsibilities. As this segment of managers is well-positioned to implement FWAs, they are effective in ensuring that FWAs are accessible to employees for positions and work wherever it is operationally feasible.



#3. SHOWING EMPATHY AND PRIORITISING TEAM WELFARE

Employees value being part of the 'work family' at the Hotel and establish strong interpersonal relationships with colleagues and prioritise team welfare. As such, employees are also open and amenable to the idea of colleagues utilising flex options to meet personal responsibilities such as caregiving, even if they may not use these themselves.

The culture of care that is seeded at the top of the organisational hierarchy thus has a trickle-down effect through the different levels of the organisation.

THE ROLE OF SENIOR LEADERSHIP IN ACCELERATING FWA ADOPTION

While COVID-19 brought unprecedented challenges for the hospitality industry, the senior leadership at Raffles Hotel also viewed this as an opportunity to accelerate FWA adoption and manage manpower more effectively.

Learning from their past SARS experience, a Safe Management Committee was instituted, comprising leaders from the senior management including the Head of Security and the Director of Talent and Culture. This team provided direction across the Hotel, including the quick implementation of FWAs to enable the various business functions to continue without major disruptions; staff were directed to work from home where possible, and were managed remotely through conference calls and virtual meetings.

The senior leadership also invested in technology and digitalisation to ensure the systems, processes and infrastructure are available to support FWA implementation. One example is the introduction of digital signing for signatory authorisations, to ensure the process would not be disrupted due to staff working remotely. While the Hotel had already established a basic level of technology capabilities (e.g. remote access to business systems via VPN), additional technologies were adopted to facilitate virtual communication such as online meetings and chats.

The Hotel's senior management believes that providing a comprehensive work-life strategy with FWAs as one of the core offerings helps to retain experienced employees in a competitive hiring environment, which contributes favourably to the overall guest and customer experience that Raffles Hotel Singapore is known for. Indeed, a good proportion of the Hotel's employees (17%) have served with the organisation for several decades. The Management also believes that as they continue to implement FWAs sustainably, maintaining employee engagement levels and having regular in-person communication with their staff will be key.

Raffles Hotel's strong culture of care and being part of a 'Work Family' has stood the test of time and is well-ingrained in the workforce. Having seen and experienced the positive results, the Hotel's leaders from the senior management to supervisors see themselves as custodians of this work culture and are committed to supporting the implementation of FWAs for the organisation in the long term.

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I've had the pleasure in my career and the excitement to work in a couple of hotel companies, cruise lines, around the world, but I have not felt that bond, that special belonging that I see at Raffles.

With our people, we not only look after them at work, but we do take the responsibility to support their overall well-being and mindset as well. It's a similar approach with our guests.

Our guests see that as well when they engage with our colleagues and a lot of times, they come to us and say "Your team is different. There is something that I cannot, tangibly describe". I think this is what culture is all about.

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CHRISTIAN WESTBELD
MANAGING DIRECTOR



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About Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices

The Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) was set up in 2006 by the tripartite partners (Ministry of Manpower, National Trades Union Congress, and Singapore National Employers Federation), to promote the adoption of fair, responsible and progressive employment practices.

TAFEP is one of three agencies under TAL, along with the Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management (TADM) and the Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) Council.

TAFEP helps employers build workplaces where employees are respected, valued and able to achieve their fullest potential, for the success of the organisation. Employers can approach TAFEP for tools, resource materials and assistance to implement fair and progressive practices at their workplaces. Employees or individuals who encounter workplace discrimination or harassment can seek assistance and advice from TAFEP.