

2019 Elizabeth Broderick Workforce Flexibility Award

WINNER: Frasers Property Australia

All roles flex @FPA

Origins and principles

Frasers Property Australia (FPA) is a leading diversified property group with a rich history dating from 1924. The organisation is committed to creating a great workplace culture and the motivation behind this initiative was to normalise flexible work practices for all employees, while improving trust and employee satisfaction in the workplace.

Flexible work had been perceived as strictly for parents and more specifically for women. It was also seen to be career limiting; there were perceptions that flexible workers were less committed or interested in career progression. With no formal policy in place, flexible work practices were applied inconsistently with ~650 staff across four states in Australia. It was no surprise that there was little understanding or leader capability in managing workplace flexibility. The experience of employees was variable but mostly well below where FPA wanted it to be. In a flexibility staff survey conducted in November 2015 as part of membership of the Property Male Champions of Change 54% of employees believed that FPA offered flexible work, 63% thought the technology was in place to support flexible work and 56% believed their manager supported flexible work.

The challenge was also linked to a broader challenge facing the organisation to increase the number of women in roles of leadership and impact to better reflect community and customers. FPA believed that normalising flexible work for both men and women would be a key enabler to achieve this overarching strategy.

FPA's workforce was largely male dominated and many female employees took career breaks to have children. Both these factors had influenced the number of women in roles of impact and leadership and there were signs of bias with perceptions that only men could do or would want to do certain roles. This unconscious bias was an underlying issue that also needed to be addressed as part of the success of implementing All Roles Flex @ FPA.

Overall, FPA believed that flexible work would be an enabler for recruiting and retaining the best people and creating a great workplace culture that delivered high performance outcomes as a business.

Implementation

In June 2016 the All Roles Flex @ FPA approach was launched. The spirit and intent of is described in policy excerpt below:

"Frasers Property Australia (FPA) is committed to developing a workplace culture that flexibly integrates work commitments into a healthy balance with all the commitments our employees encounter in their lives. We believe most roles can be flexible and encourage an "all roles flex" approach at FPA. This means we are open to discussing flexible work arrangements that combine individual needs and circumstances with the performance needs of the Company. FPA managers will review applications for flexible working arrangements from this perspective.

FPA recognised that at different stages of life and career, employees have different responsibilities and demands on their time. Their aim in providing flexible work in an open and transparent way was to allow all employees to thrive at work, regardless of which stage of their life they are in. A key part of achieving this was their commitment to a culture that supports “work” as something we do and contribute to the company, not just a place to go for a fixed number of hours and in uniform time slots.

FPA is working towards a culture that recognises and measures the value of the outputs of employees, not the quantum of time they are at a desk or on a site. As the nature of work is changing, so too will the way careers evolve. FPA want a culture that ensures that all employees should be treated equally throughout the various stages of their lives. A series of enabler tactics were developed and implemented.

Research and Consultation

FPA researched what the best organisations were doing in this space to set an aspiration of what could be. This included working with the Property Male Champions of Change (PMCC). FPA consulted with managers to better understand some of the Flexibility Survey insights and what would help them get on board this initiative. FPA also consulted with employees who at the time were engaged in a form of flexible work practices in order to understand where the gaps were given the lack of a formal policy. The FPA Gender Equity Council (GEC) reviewed and improved the draft policy to ensure that all the key considerations were addressed.

Leader Education

The GM – People & Culture and the Human Resources Manager conducted face-to-face and interactive education sessions for all managers and people leaders. This was critical in improving manager understanding, knowledge and capability. Unconscious Bias Training was rolled out to all managers and people leaders which helped increase leaders’ understanding and acceptance of the importance of diverse teams.

CEO Support and Visibility

The FPA CEO officially launched the policy in June 2016. This was pivotal in ensuring a top down approach to communication and reiterated that this was a policy supported by the most senior leader and therefore acceptable and encouraged. This message has continued with the CEO regularly speaking about the importance of flexible work in his staff briefings and through his continued work as a Male Champion of Change

Technology

There was a rollout of laptops to all staff and technology improvements were made on IT collaboration platforms that could be used remotely by employees. FPA continued to invest in technology with the launch of Workplace by Facebook in October 2018. This communication platform reflects and promotes flexible work practices. Employees can choose to be connected from anywhere and most importantly at a time convenient for them.

Workplace Design

A significant investment was made in refurbishments of workspaces in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. The spaces both encourage and support a flexible approach to work mindset. It removes the focus away from line of sight management to focus on employee outcomes. It encourages and facilitates a high level of trust.

Culture Plans

Business teams work on their culture plans on an ongoing basis with the specific intent to build a culture of high trust and support. As an enabler of a constructive culture, the business units were

asked to incorporate ideas on flexible work practices to support this initiative and the spirit of flexible work. Integrating the impact of flexible work on culture was critical for success.

HR Business Partnering

The HR team were champions of change for this initiative. Their role was to navigate the way forward and more importantly to be a trusted adviser for employees and leaders. This sometimes meant helping clarify expectations, providing moral support and encouragement. HR business partners continue to work with the business to assist in navigating conversations around flexibility, however with an increase in utilisation and acceptance, there has been less heavy lifting for HR. Leaders and employees now engage in these conversations with increased confidence and with an outcome focus of 'how do we make flexibility work?' and are open to giving flexibility a go.

Ongoing Support and Education

To assist managers in being greater enablers interactive and practical training sessions form part of ongoing learning and development and are compulsory for all newly appointed people leaders within the organisation.

Benefits and Outcomes

FPA employees and their managers have continued to embrace flexible work, and this has resulted in improved trust and satisfaction as measured in staff surveys. The conversation is no longer about "if and why should I facilitate flexible work". Leaders are now asking, "how can I best manage flexible work arrangements?"

FPA have come a long way on this journey and while there is still more to do, are pleased with the outcomes employees and managers have achieved with applying All Roles Flex @FPA. FPA set out to normalise flexible work practices for both men and women and have experienced a noticeable improvement in both attitudes and perceptions of employees that work flexibly and of the people leaders in the business. Most pleasing is that both men and women have embraced flexible work practices - both formal and informal arrangements.

In a Flexibility staff survey conducted for a second time in May 2017 FPA saw improvement from their 2015 benchmark:

- 90% of our employees in 2017 believed that FPA offered flexible work compared to 54% in 2015.
- 89% in 2017 thought the technology was in place to support flexible work compared to 63% in 2015.
- 80% in 2017 believed their manager supported flexible work compared to 56% in 2015.

As part of their successful WGEA Employer of Choice Citation FPA incorporated flexibility questions in their 2017 and 2019 Culture Surveys and have seen excellent results.

FPA are pleased to see that flexible work is used by both men and women and at varying career levels in the organisation and for varying reasons including family, study, reducing travel time, religion, sport and geographic relocations. This is key in their attraction and retention of employees and reflects how they value their people and their "whole life needs" as part of the workplace culture.

For example, construction site-based teams traditionally commence at 6.30am and continue until last tools are down late afternoon. The traditional environment is not one that was deemed adaptable to flexibility, until it challenged itself. The FPA policy states "we believe most roles can be flexible and

encourage an 'all roles flex' approach. Focusing on "flexible start and finish times" a roster was developed that allowed construction workers to start at 10am and leave site at 2pm once a fortnight allowing parents to attend to school, personal or sporting commitments.

Flexible work has enabled an increase in the number of men utilising primary parental leave, with zero participation in 2014/2015 up to 4 in 2017/2018 and with continued growth to 9 for 2018/2019. Flexible work options form part of a proactive approach in all conversations around returning to work from parental leave, with many employees transitioning back in either part time capacities or with formal flexible arrangements in place whilst working full time. Overall, workplace flexibility has been largely normalised and improved trust and employee satisfaction has been observed in the workplace.

Summary

FPA sought to foster a workplace culture that encourages employees to holistically consider their work, family and social commitments. The transparent and supportive approach of All roles flex @ FPA has promoted greater trust and satisfaction, allowing employees to thrive at work, regardless of which stage of th