

Siemens: Work From Home



Siemens is one of the largest and most diverse electrical & electronics engineering companies in the world. Their global network encompasses well over 362,000 employees in 190 countries, providing a wide array of solutions, services and products for various markets in the Malaysian economy such as oil and gas, power, process industries, ports, airports, rail, healthcare and hospitality; served in four sectors of Energy, Healthcare, Industry and Infrastructure & Cities.

“When we put our thoughts together as a team of diverse people from diverse backgrounds, all thinking outside the box, you get a team that is 100% effective. No individual can be 100% efficient, but a team can be. It is this kind of team which Siemens is building.”

- Prakash Chandran, President & CEO of Siemens Malaysia

Overview

Since its inception in 1972, Siemens Malaysia has been committed to developing and nurturing their greatest asset – their people. The company believes that valuing the differences in everyone who works within the company or whom they are in contact with helps foster a culture of creativity and innovation, which is central to their business. With strength of 900 employees, Siemens Malaysia Sdn Bhd has been supporting the growth of Malaysia, working with both public and private organizations in order to drive economic, social and sustainable growth; advancing the development of infrastructure and enhancing the lives of communities in which we operate.

In 2012, Siemens Malaysia launched a ‘Work from Home’ pilot campaign as part of their PRIDE@Siemens initiative to encourage and promote a sense of greater work-life balance amongst employees as well as to improve employee engagement and retention. Since the launch, the initiative has been well received by employees and Managers alike resulting in its company-wide implementation.

Objectives

Launched in 2011, the PRIDE@Siemens was the brainchild of Siemens Malaysia’s President & CEO. After receiving feedback and conducting two-way dialogues with

employees on how to promote employee engagement and improve retention rates; President & CEO of Siemens Malaysia, Mr Prakash Chandran, spearheaded the launch of the PRIDE@Siemens initiative in 2011 with the aim of propelling Siemens as the employer of choice in all of its four sectors – Energy, Healthcare, Industry and Infrastructure & Cities – by improving the quality of the working environment and at the same time, increase teamwork and effective interaction between employees.

Although still lower than the average industry attrition rate, Siemens Malaysia’s attrition rate of 14% back in 2011, coupled with low engagement scores (as indicated by the Global Employee Engagement Survey rolled out across all Siemens operations worldwide) became the key driving factors for the leadership team.

Initiatives

In order to realise the PRIDE@Siemens initiative, Siemens Malaysia established a Committee comprising of 11 Heads of Division to oversee the planning, design and implementation of work-life practices. One of the first priorities for the committee was to obtain feedback from employees on the types of initiatives and programmes they valued. Based on the suggestions provided by employees through various communication platforms, each initiative was ranked to identify the initiatives that would significantly contribute to an increase in employee engagement and retention. As a result, several key initiatives were identified by the committee and further sub-committees were established to drive these initiatives concurrently.

The 'Work from Home' Program was one the initiatives identified to provide employees the alternative of working in their preferred working conditions, hence giving the employee more opportunities to focus on his/her job responsibilities. The intention of the program is also to support work-life balance and thus, reinforce the Company's values. From planning and design, pilot and implementation; the project duration spanned over 9 months.



Planning & Designing a Work from Home Policy

With the support from the Management team, the 'Work from Home' Sub-Committee developed a 'Work from Home' policy which enabled employees to work from home one (1) day a week. The eligibility criteria clearly outlined that employees were able to work from home if the nature of their work permits them to work from home (e.g. customer facing employees may not be able to work from home due to the interface with customers). No restrictions were placed on any sectors or businesses, position, duration of service or work performance apart from those that were still undergoing their 3-6 months probation periods.

Additional guidelines were also developed and uploaded online to guide both Employees and Managers on the process. These guidelines included:

- 'Work from Home' online application and approval process document
- Expectations of Managers and employees working from home
- A Work health safety checklist and questionnaire adhering to the company's security and data protection guidelines to ensure a safe working environment at home.

To ensure that Managers were able to effectively manage their team and schedules, the approval for the 'Work from Home' arrangement remained at the discretion of the Managers and/or Department Heads. The guidelines also stated that the 'Work from Home' benefit could be revoked at any point in time if employees do not meet their performance objectives which are to be continuously monitored by the Manager. Although past performance is not part of the eligibility criteria, Managers are encouraged to consider past performance as part of an employee's application.

Infrastructure Support

One key element of the 'Work from Home' pilot is to ensure that employees have the technology to work remotely. This includes laptop, remote access to sharepoint or shared folders and efficient connectivity. While most employees are provided with an office laptop and access to the sharepoint or shared folders, a small number of employees are still using desktops or have restricted access to the network. An employee using a desktop may apply for a laptop and/or remote access however approval by the Manager will be based on whether there is indeed a business need.

In terms of connectivity, the company provides employees with internet access subsidies which allow them to claim 50% off their home internet connectivity packages, without exceeding a maximum of RM100 per month.

Obtaining Buy-In

Once the policy and guidelines were developed, the Sub-Committee presented their proposal to the Executive Management team which consists of the CEO and CFO for approval. With the approval from the Executive Management team, the policy and guidelines were presented to the Heads of all business sectors and further cascaded down to the Heads of Department.

Obtaining feedback and support from all Managers was critical to the success of the initiative as the approval for the 'Work from Home' initiative remained at the discretion of Managers. Involving the Managers in the process allowed them to voice their concerns, provide feedback on how to improve the initiative and most importantly prepare Managers to answer questions from employees. Briefings were conducted by the HR team to all Managers and employees.

Challenges

The key concerns highlighted by Managers were how to monitor and track performance as well as managing employee expectations on eligibility. Managers were referred to the guidelines and checklist which clearly outlined the 'Work from Home' initiative as an employee benefit and not as an entitlement. Decisions and approvals remained at the discretion of the Manager based on the needs and priorities of the business and the guidelines stipulated that it is the responsibility of both parties to ensure that opting for the 'Work from Home' program does not in any way modify or compromise the duties, obligation and responsibilities of the employee under his or her employment contract.

To ensure consistency in messaging, all communication pertaining to the initiative was conducted by HR with the support from Managers. If employees had any questions, they could liaise directly with HR or their respective Manager.

Outcome

At the end of the 4-month 'Work from Home' pilot campaign, close to 60 employees had participated across the business with both Managers and Employees reporting positive feedback. The feedback highlighted from both Managers and employees included:

- No reduction in productivity or quality of work delivered
- Employees continued to respond to urgent work tasks, resulting in no compromise to work
- Cost savings for employees due to less travel
- Increased engagement by employees as they could spend more time with family

- Managers were able to manage their team accordingly. E.g. HR department used a monthly work-from-home schedule, which was managed by the Team Secretaries. It was the responsibility of each department or division to ensure that there was a sufficient number of staff present in the office and not too many that were working from home at the same time

With the positive feedback from both Managers and employees, Siemens Malaysia fully implemented the 'Work from Home' policy company-wide in January 2013. A key change made to the policy after the completion of the pilot was the removal of the annual application as Managers and employees were given the right to suspend or terminate the utilisation as and when required by the business or employee. To date, there has been no case of the benefit being revoked by Managers or misused by an employee.

Currently 13% of the population utilises the 'Work from Home' benefit and since its implementation, Siemens Malaysia has been reaping the benefits. The attrition rate has progressively dropped from 14% in 2011 to 11% in 2012 and to 8% in 2013, far below the industry attrition rate of 16%. More importantly, Siemens Malaysia believes that they have been able to successfully retain key talent and maintain a positive employee engagement score.

Website

www.siemens.com