

11 March 2010

## Workplace flexibility: Fact or Fiction?

Rubicor Limited, an ASX listed recruitment company, today revealed the results of its survey on workplace flexibility, spanning all sizes of organisation, geographical locations and industry categories across Australia and New Zealand. This is the first in a series of “Rubicor Reveals” critical insights into emerging trends and issues in recruitment, human resources and talent management in Australasia.

There was a clear message that flexible work practices are now the norm in the business environment with nearly 90 percent of businesses surveyed having already established flexible work practices and a similar number believing in the beneficial impact of such practices on staff retention.

Given the disparate size of the organisations in the survey, it is likely that the flexible work practices on hand range from very limited options to a more sophisticated suite of offerings available to all employees. The top five flexible work practices were:

	% of respondents
○ <b>Flexible start and/or finish times</b>	<b>88%</b>
○ <b>Part-time work</b>	<b>84%</b>
○ <b>Unpaid leave</b>	<b>82%</b>
○ <b>Time-in-lieu</b>	<b>70%</b>
○ <b>Paid education/Study leave</b>	<b>66%</b>

Digging deeper the survey has revealed disappointing trends in terms of awareness of flexible work practices:

○ <b>Half of businesses surveyed admitted that their employees were unaware of the flexible work practice benefits</b>
○ <b>Two-thirds of the HR managers and business leaders had not received any training in how to deal with flexible work requests</b>
○ <b>Under half of respondents regularly used their flexible workplace benefits as a tool to attract new candidates.</b>

Commenting on the results, Jane Beaumont, CEO of Rubicor, stated, “In its widest context, workplace flexibility is now part of the fabric of the corporate landscape with 86 per cent of our respondents having some form of flexible work practices on offer.

“Employees, and in particular the younger generation, expect flexibility as a key ingredient in their working environments. And at the other end of the spectrum, the ageing of the population will mean that retention of older workers beyond retirement age becomes increasingly important. Flexibility will be crucial to ensure these employees remain in the workplace for longer.”

“However, there is a clear lack of communication of existing flexible practices into both recruitment and retention processes. We found that only 56 per cent of respondents were sure their employees knew what benefits were on offer and only 43 per cent commonly discussed these benefits during interviews with potential new employees. Greater focus is required on up-skilling front line managers on how to communicate and promote flexibility to existing and potential employees.”

Businesses were remarkably unaware of what their competitors were doing in this space despite the universally acknowledged positives for staff attraction, with only 17 per cent of respondents tracking competitor offerings.

“In order to remain competitive in a tightening recruitment market as economic conditions improve, employers will need to ensure flexible benefits are an integral part of their recruitment process and to match, if not exceed, their peers in this area,” commented Ms Beaumont.

Interestingly, around one-third of businesses surveyed introduced flexible work practices as a direct result of the challenges of the Global Financial Crisis. These businesses saw flexibility as a retention tool (52 per cent) or a cost cutting initiative (8 per cent) or both (40 per cent).

And it is the businesses themselves who are driving the move towards greater flexibility with the limited legislation supporting rather than forcing the move to flexible work practices in our region. There were no substantive differences in awareness, training or perceptions between Australia and New Zealand despite Australia lagging New Zealand in the introduction of flexible workplace legislation.

Ms Beaumont commented, ““We believe the flexible work practices are here to stay. Before the GFC, employers worked to attract talent in what were ‘candidate short’ markets. During the GFC they had to work to retain this talent with flexibility being an important offering. Coming out of the GFC and as the market tightens again, one of the areas of importance for employers will be around developing flexible work packages and importantly communicating these packages both internally with their employees and externally to attract talent when recruiting.”

Enquiries:

Jane Beaumont  
CEO, Rubicon  
Tel 02 8061 0000

Janet Payne  
Symbol Strategic Communications  
Tel 02 9324 4287

For more information please visit [www.rubicorgroup.com.au](http://www.rubicorgroup.com.au).

**TOP FIVE PERCEIVED POSITIVE OUTCOMES**

% of respondents

<b>Higher levels of retention</b>	<b>83%</b>
<b>Improved morale</b>	<b>74%</b>
<b>Higher employee engagement</b>	<b>71%</b>
<b>Reduced absenteeism</b>	<b>64%</b>
<b>Reduced staff burnout</b>	<b>61%</b>

**TOP FIVE PERCEIVED NEGATIVE OUTCOMES**

% of respondents

<b>More management time required</b>	<b>53%</b>
<b>Increased difficulty in managing employee output</b>	<b>52%</b>
<b>Higher costs</b>	<b>32%</b>
<b>Lower productivity</b>	<b>24%</b>
<b>Damage to company culture</b>	<b>9%</b>

Rubicon Reveals surveys have been developed and undertaken by Rubicon and Heywood Innovation. The survey spanned all sizes of organisation, geographical locations and industry categories across Australia and New Zealand. 382 responses were received.