

HR Download - Training & Development

Topic: Dealing with work overload

Source: timesascent.in

Date: 1st March 2010

Dealing with employees who complain of work overload is a challenge that most HR professionals are facing increasingly often.

Employees who are allotted more work than they can handle are likely to demonstrate diminished enthusiasm and productivity, face burnout, or quit the organisation altogether. The main point that HR needs to keep in mind is that work should be distributed according to capacity and nature of work, rather than equally. "In my opinion, HR must play a vital role to apprehend work related stress for employees proactively by reviewing the attrition pattern in the organisation and educate the team in distribution of talent fairly. Understanding the work-load balance and doing a reconciliation with the available manpower in the team to achieve the target etc. will also help organisations to come up with a proper allocation of work," says Guruvayurappan PV, AVP, HR, Omega Healthcare Management Services.

He suggests four ways to handle situations where due to the nature of business, late working or week-end working is unavoidable in spite of good work practices:

- Communicate to employees - Inform the employees about the need for extra working and also the importance of such a situation.
- Keep them in the loop - Update them periodically about the situation, particularly if they are told that the work over load is temporary in nature. If they can see light at the end of the tunnel, they will be less likely to complain and more likely to work harder to complete the job.
- Reward them for their efforts. Rewards need not always be cash rewards. Recognising their effort, intangible rewards mechanism including a few kind words can go a long way towards reassuring employees when they are on work overload.
- Be present - HR always used to take back seat when the entire organisation is on work overload situation. Demonstrate to the team that HR is also available to support the employees who are extending their hours of work, when in need.

Sanjiv Agarwal, Chairman, Tirupati Inks, offers a different approach, "On complaints of work overload the HR should revisit the assessment of work as also the appraisal of the human resource. This should also involve interaction with the complainant at length and appreciation of his views and perspective. For work profiles dominated by manual work, a time study should be conducted again not with the worker complainant but also with other workers given similar work. After the above exercise the HR should take one or more steps out of the ones listed below: 1) Reduce the work load if required and justified by the re assessment. 2) Justify the work load to complainant with proper explanation and illustrations of other workers. 3) Helping the worker with suggested improvements and reorganisation of processes being used to accomplish the work. 4) Helping the worker with

provision of additional tools and equipment to improve his work efficiency. Care however will have to be taken to justify it to other workers who have not been provided with that.”

Nikul Shah, Senior VP, Commercial and HR, Omnitech InfoSolutions Ltd. emphasises on the need to avoid pushing such complaints to the back burner. “A complaint form received from any employee is not to be neglected but validated. At Omnitech, we have a system of defining the work load that one would handle. For example, we have a rule book set for all sales and delivery teams which defines what amount of business should be handled by any individual with specific competencies and level. Yet, if an employee complains of work overload it is essential to go into the crux of the problem and resolve it in the best interest of both the employee and the organisation.”

Subhashish Dasgupta, Head HR-VLCC tells us about how VLCC practices fair distribution of work, “We have a system wherein every employee is given their KRA’s when they join and this is as per their experience/competency. The job allocation is also according to capacity and nature of work which helps the employees understand the importance of team work. So, effort should be made to encourage employees to work as a team and foster in them the feeling of team spirit.” Agarwal adds, “To ensure fair distribution of work HR first have to profile the various work functions in the organisation that need to be distributed and the team members among which it has to be distributed.” Shah illustrates with an example, “If a logistics company is to assign the same load of goods to a 25-year-old and a 45-year-old they would be making a mistake in doing so.”

Thus, a little understanding and communication is all it takes to reassure the ubiquitous overworked employee