

## Innovation in Flexible Working

B&Q

February 2009



# Case Study

### **EFA Overview**

B&Q is committed to helping its employees manage the demands of their careers while feeling fulfilled in their personal lives. In 2006 a complete review of the company's flexible working policies, first devised in 2004, was carried out to ensure that they offered solutions and opportunities that were over and above statutory requirements. As part of this review B&Q decided to remove length of service from the criteria for requesting flexibility and made the majority of policies available to everyone regardless of caring responsibilities. The revamped scheme and the accompanying communications programme encouraged a step change in the use of flexible working across the organisation and a huge increase in the numbers taking part.

### **Initiative**

B&Q used a complete overhaul of its flexible working policies to drive a change in attitudes throughout the organisation and to make it possible for all employees to work flexibly if it suits their circumstances.

### **Aims of initiative**

The company set itself a tough business case for the relaunch of its flexible working scheme. It wanted the programme to strengthen its 'employer of choice' position and branding by:

- Enabling B&Q to retain and engage existing employees.
- Helping to attract prospective employees.
- Respecting individual lifestyles, personal circumstances, caring responsibilities and beliefs.
- Being relevant for all places of work.
- Recognising grandparents who are becoming more actively involved in providing childcare for their grandchildren.
- Being relevant to all staff irrespective of age, gender, disability, ethnic origin, religion, belief or sexual orientation.

Using these objectives, B&Q set out to offer a menu of flexible working options and wherever possible, provisions for employees to work on a flexible basis – whether on a temporary, short-term or permanent basis.

It set clear goals for the scheme that it should:

- Cost effectively meet both business and customer needs.
- Attract and retain employees.
- Help employees realise their aspirations outside work without having a detrimental impact on the business, customers and colleagues.
- Ensure fair and consistent treatment of employees who wish to work more flexibly.

### **Approach taken**

B&Q engaged its employees in developing the new programme, through a series of focus groups, enabling it to understand the needs and desires of the workforce. It wanted to go further than the statutory requirements on flexible working and to devise a programme that would capture the imagination of its employees.

It developed a new menu of flexible working options and now offers:

- Term time contracts that are available not only to parents, but also to grandparents in recognition of the supportive caring role that many of them have. The contracts are available for those with children up to the age of 16 years, or 18 years if the child is disabled.
- Job share for employees, male or female, who do not want or are unable to work full-time. An online job share register has been launched to help individuals find a partner to job share with.
- Staggered start/finish times.
- Dual store contracts allowing employees to work at more than one store, as long as their hours do not exceed full-time. This is particularly beneficial for students or those who want full-time work when only part-time roles are available.
- One employee/two roles, allowing employees to develop new and different skills and really benefit from multi-skilling. It also allows people to work in more than one area of the business.
- Home/remote working allowing employees to work from home or away from their normal workplace on an occasional basis.
- Career breaks enabling an employee to take a break from work for a minimum of three months up to a maximum of one year.

The company's flexible working policy was rebranded and an information pack was issued to all employees to explain the options on offer. All locations were briefed during the launch to make sure the messages were understood. Posters were used to promote both the general scheme and the job share register, regular articles appeared in internal publications, including case studies of positive role models and a dedicated site for flexible working was developed on the company's intranet.

At the same time revised pensions options were introduced to encourage older workers to stay with the company. Eligible employees could draw their pension through the final salary scheme and continue working, paying into a money purchase scheme that allows contributions up to the age of 75. This new pension arrangement is particularly helpful where a manager wants to step down (for lifestyle reasons) or workers want to reduce their hours without reducing their pension.

### **Challenges**

The main challenges for B&Q were communicating the new policy and winning acceptance of the innovative options included. The policy needed to be managed by local teams without central control and therefore it had to be transparent, easily understood and able to stand the test of time.

### **Outcomes and benefits of the initiative**

B&Q says that the new menu of options and the communication programme now mean that flexible working is 'how we do things around here'. Managers have taken ownership of the programme and are actively making flexible working a reality across the organisation. The high levels of communication about the benefits of the programme have been properly understood and embraced.

### **Impact on the organisation**

The new menu of options has increased the numbers of flexible workers across the business.

- Over 65% of B&Q people work part-time.
- 68% of people in retail operations work part-time – 25,156 people in total.
- 10% in Head Office work part-time – 278 people in total.

- The use of term-time contracts has increased by 50% since the launch.
- There are 36 employees on a career break.
- B&Q has its first part-time director who is female.

### **Lessons learned**

The review of B&Q's original flexible working policy illustrated that the programme needed to be communicated more thoroughly and that there was a need for more 'how to' information. Managers saw flexible working as a threat, not an opportunity and B&Q's use of headcount to describe the number of people needed for roles was a barrier to flexible working as it encouraged managers to recruit full-time workers.

All of these issues were addressed with the launch of the new programme:

- B&Q communicated and briefed every store and provided full information packs.
- The dedicated intranet site means up-to-date information is accessible to all staff.
- Managers are now able to make the flexible options work in practice.
- Success stories and role models are regularly communicated to staff.
- Hours worked are used to describe specific roles, making it simpler for managers to use part-time and other flexible workers.

The company recognises that in the future, it needs to continue to have a senior (board level) member of the business actively supporting the programme to ensure sponsorship and visibility. It also needs to continue to link case studies into business success.