

Q & A

Salika Sukswan

Executive director, human capital
PwC Malaysia

Creating a culture for the future workforce

By WANI AZAHAR

Q You've been with PwC since 2004. What has made you stay for more than a decade?

PwC is my fourth organisation and my longest tenure so far. I joined the firm as a recruitment lead because I was excited about working with young talent, and staying energised after being surrounded by middle-aged colleagues in my previous organisation.

In my initial years, I centralised the recruitment function and grew a team of top recruiters to win our war for talent. Over the years, I've gained a breadth of experience, including a secondment to a government agency.

It's been a fulfilling journey so far; and time flies when you're working hard and having fun at the same time.

Q In those years, I'm sure you've noticed the digital transformation happening right under your wing. What are the top three trends you've noticed on the expectations of Gen Z when it comes to recruitment and career development?

As the conventional career options and employment models may no longer appeal to the future workforce, these are the main trends I've observed:

Big isn't necessarily beautiful: Joining the Big 4 used to be the top choice for top talent. But now, there's a growing interest to be part of the online marketplaces, sharing economy, start-ups and social

enterprises. Part of the appeal is driven by the perceived greater sense of purpose, autonomy and recognition associated with these fast growing companies.

A job may no longer be just a job: With the gig-economy on the rise, freelancers work in their own time and they pick the work they like. PwC's study on Work-Life 3.0 explains this trend as the age of "independent talent", with freelancers preferring greater flexibility and control over their work environment.

Career progression is not about moving up the career ladder: The future career paths are determined by the talent themselves, rather than their employers. I anticipate that a larger portion of the future workforce would opt to be their own boss and own their own business.

Q How would you summarise PwC's HR agenda when it comes to the Millennial workforce?

Young talent join PwC to learn and grow, often with the intention of getting a head start in their career with the experience they gain here.

We will continue to make PwC an attractive workplace which offers opportunities for them to grow as PwC professionals. With this in mind, our priorities in human capital include encouraging real-time development (or giving feedback in real-time), growing and developing our people, continuing to enhance workforce flexibility, growing

diverse talent segments and employment models and continuing with our digital roadmap – where we are ahead of our competition with our learning management system, "Xceler8"; and our mobile app "Mobile IQ".

Q Talking about your digitisation efforts, it all started in 2009 when the team was challenged to tap into social media to source for suitable interns. How has the progress been in the past eight years?

We were the pioneers in using Facebook to engage with talent back in 2009. While I wasn't sure whether it would work at the time, we still went ahead as it was a cost-effective way to have direct engagement with talent who are studying and working all over the world.

I set a target to my graduate recruiters to have 1,000 likes on the PwC Malaysia Facebook within our first year, and it seemed like a stretch target at that time! But now, we have expanded our social media presence to Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube and have grown from strength to strength in expanding our online followers.

As many leading employers are now on social media, it's no longer a novelty and we must continue to think of ways to differentiate ourselves. This led us to our campaign called #YourBestShot.

Showing amazing results, our social media platforms have seen an increase

“

As many leading employers are now on social media, it's no longer a novelty and we must continue to think of ways to differentiate ourselves. This led us to our campaign called #YourBestShot.

”



VITAL STATS

As the human capital leader at PwC Malaysia, Salika Sukswan is motivated to make a difference to her workplace. With staff of 2,400 country-wide, she is using digitisation through a number of initiatives to turn PwC into a company for the future workforce.

of 11.3% in followers, and an increase in engagement and conversation of 174.5% and 89.3% on our Instagram and Facebook platforms respectively since #YourBestShot was launched in May 2016.

Q On the topic of #YourBestShot, what was the business need behind it?

We wanted a campaign which would appeal to a diverse group of talent, anywhere in the world. We brainstormed various campaign themes before deciding on #YourBestShot.

We felt it had a universal appeal and resonated with us at PwC. Our social media followers were shown real examples of opportunities at PwC Malaysia which allow them to give their “best shot” at realising their career aspirations and dreams. We shared stories of real PwC staff via posts on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube and our graduate e-newsletter.

I’m proud to say this is all done in-house – from ideation to execution, and at a minimal cost.

Q What were some of the specific metrics used to measure the success of this campaign?

The campaign strategy was based on feedback from graduate surveys and social media user insights. We wanted to improve on our employer ranking, which is an important measure of our campaign success.

The results have been good so far. We went up five notches in the rankings to be the first runner-up in the GTI Malaysia’s 100 Leading Graduate Employers (M100) in 2016, and took the lead position among our Big 4 competitors.

Besides the employer ranking, our graduate applications increased by 8% in 2016 during our campaign period, when we compared the same period in the previous year.

Q Learning from #YourBestShot, what do you think makes for a successful social media recruitment campaign?

I’m not a social media expert. In fact, I frequently tap on the expertise of my young colleagues who are social media gurus. With that said, my team would list the following as some of our success factors. First, be creative. Young colleagues work together with our marketing and communications team to come up with creative on-line campaigns and content.



The team takes ownership and pride in bringing their creative ideas and campaigns to life.

You also need to be real. We’ve used real stories featuring PwC people to appeal to our talent pool – for example, a colleague who cycled alone to China in 67 days. We also encourage our leaders to share their life outside work. Besides our chairman who takes cool “wefies”, we have a “rock star” senior partner, a people partner whose triplets win triathlons, and a consulting leader who benefited from our flex+ programme.

Next, you need to be in touch. We integrate our online presence with our campus activities.

One simple example is our campus visits where we give postcards with #YourBestShot themed tag lines to undergraduates before the final exams.

We also stay in touch through *Fresh Off The Grad*, our graduate e-newsletter which is curated and written by our team.

Besides recruitment campaigns, we’ve also used social media to promote our inaugural PwC “Trust Builders Challenge” for university students this year.

We were encouraged to receive close to 140 entries from universities across the nation within a short time frame, including campuses where we don’t have a presence in.

“I would like to see less emphasis on scores and ratings, and a greater focus on having more regular and meaningful conversations.”

people initiatives which aims to provide an attractive workplace for our agile workforce.

Various studies have shown that Millennials prefer a flexible work schedule, which increases their engagement and motivation levels.

This is also reflected in the feedback we have from our annual employee survey which reinforces the view that workplace flexibility does make a difference.

Q How do you think having staff leave earlier for flex Fridays (at 12.30pm every second Friday of the month) has positively impacted the firm?

We have been progressively enhancing our flexible work arrangements (FWA) over the last 5 years. We believe that our people initiatives, including the various flex+ options, have contributed to an improvement in our employee engagement index - which has increased by 6% in the last five years.

Q What are some of the common challenges that companies need to look out for when it comes to flexi arrangements?

The key challenge for FWA is the change of mindset. It’s a big shift to encourage managers to focus on deliverables rather than face-time at work.

A common perception among people managers is that staff who are on FWA lack commitment and have lower productivity, compared to those who work long hours in the office. Another challenge is the trust (or lack of) that the employees will be putting in productive hours of work if they opt for FWA.

Q As a leader yourself, what do you think helps to contribute to a successful FWA?

Trust is a key factor. The frequently asked question on FWA is: “How do you know they’re working if they’re not at work?” At PwC, we have guiding principles which clearly define the principles each employee should commit to if they opt for flexibility at work.

There may be some who will misuse the flexibility given to them, and we should address these individuals.

We can choose to revoke the flexibility given to those who compromise on their commitment and deliverables, rather than decide not to adopt FWA for the organisation.

Q As part of the effort to encourage real-time development, PwC is revamping its performance management framework. What does this mean for staff?

Our focus is on the behavioural change to adopt what we describe as “real-time development”. The design of this framework is intended to encourage individual and team development by embedding a mindset of learning every day with giving and receiving “in the moment” feedback. For example, asking for feedback from your team immediately after a presentation.

Q What drove this change? And what impact has this made on engagement rates?

This change is driven by the need to develop PwC professionals who have the right skills and capabilities to be in line with changing client demands in an evolving business landscape.

This involves a change in the talent life cycle – talent sourcing, learning and development, managing performance and managing talent.

Fundamentally, this is a behaviour and mindset change, which will take some time to embed. If done well, PwC colleagues will be clearly differentiated and we will see an improvement in our engagement scores.

Our people will feel they are being recognised and valued for their contribution to the business.

Q What do you personally believe is the one thing that HR can do without when it comes to performance management?

I would like to see less emphasis on scores and ratings, and a greater focus on having more regular and meaningful conversations. We are starting this journey in PwC Malaysia by introducing “Take 5” conversations which encourage colleagues to take five minutes to give and receive feedback on the five PwC attributes (whole leadership, trust-based relationships, business acumen, technical capabilities, and global acumen) in real-time, and not one year later. We realise this will take time to embed. However, we’ve taken the first step to introduce this initiative firm-wide.

In fact, we’ve encouraged our senior business leaders to be the role models in driving this change. 