



WORKING SMARTER FOR THE FUTURE

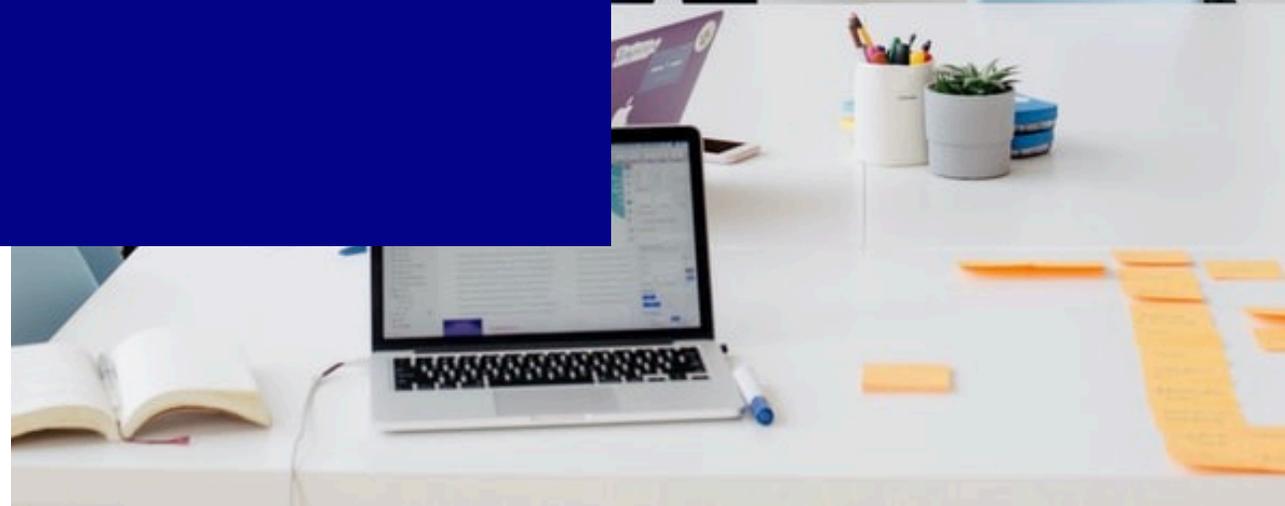
A best practices toolkit to champion wellbeing and work-life balance in PR and communications

Prepared by the PRHK Next Generation Leaders Sub-committee

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Welcome to the Working Smarter for the Future toolkit, developed by PRHK's Next Generation Leaders Sub-committee.

This toolkit has been developed to assist agency leaders and managers to facilitate a positive working environment that stimulates team members to be the best they can be, to enjoy our industry, and to feel proud of their achievements, whilst attaining a balanced approach to work and life.



Overview

Our industry reached a crossroads in 2020 when Covid-19 propelled working from home and hybrid working practices, creating new client needs, and adding a level of stress and uncertainty to our lives.

PR industry research shows that the level of overworking, burnout, and mental health issues are on the rise. With a duty to protect our industry and our people, PRHK's Next Generation of Leaders subcommittee led an agency survey to garner an understanding of what the causes of unnecessary overtime and detrimental work-life balance are, and what we could do to tackle the identified detractors. Whether large or small, international or local, the findings revealed that causes across the agencies were consistent.

Our industry is by nature a fast-paced, unpredictable landscape, and we do not profess to being able to eradicate overtime; but as a step forward, we can address the areas within our control and offer guidelines and suggestions for best practices.

We know everyone has a different style of working. That some agencies can adopt all the measures in the guidebook, and some just a few. And that's just fine. The collective steps we take together will make a difference.

The goals

Statistics from our 2021 Hong Kong PR agency employee's survey revealed that there are some troubling trends we need to tackle, and we need to tackle them fast. Our goal is to improve the areas that need the most attention based on the survey findings:

Reduce the amount of overtime

25% say they work overtime at least 3 times a week

Re-educate and set new behaviours and boundaries

75% think overtime is normal and expected for Hong Kong

Encourage open conversations

60% had never spoken to their manager about how they feel

Reduce stress associated with working overtime

70% experience physical or mental health issues

Set a positive environment

8-9 hours per day

Agree on recuperation protocols for busy times

Policies are needed

Facilitate positive flexibility

90% said flexible work helps - although assistance could be offered to avoid not taking lunch, not going outside, or working increased hours

Address the top 3 causes of working overtime:

- Tight deadline and last-minute requests
- Insufficient manpower
- Too many meetings

The commitment we need from leaders

This toolkit is aimed at leaders who can make a difference in the way teams work and facilitate recommended changes at the highest levels.

WE ASK THIS OF YOU:

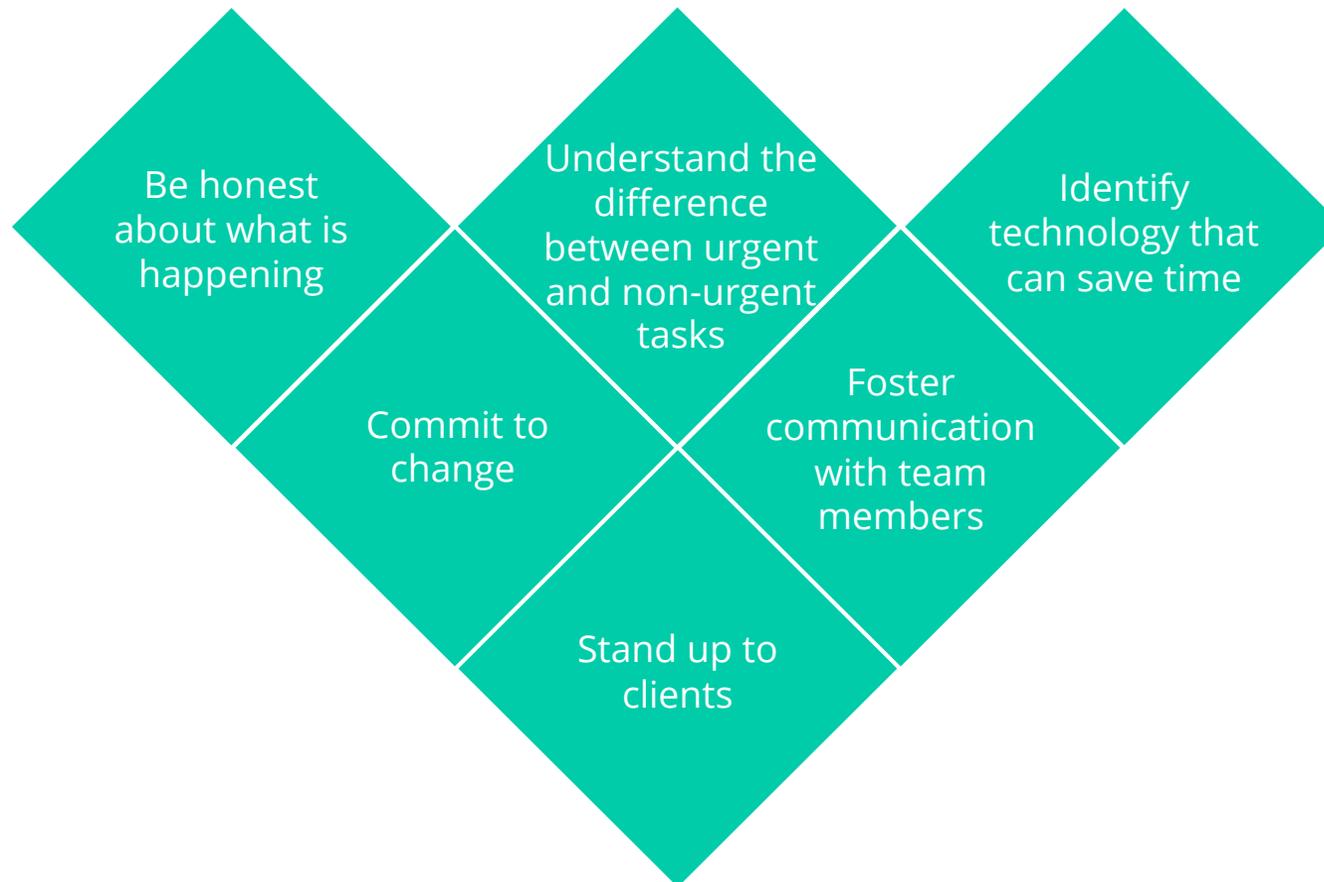


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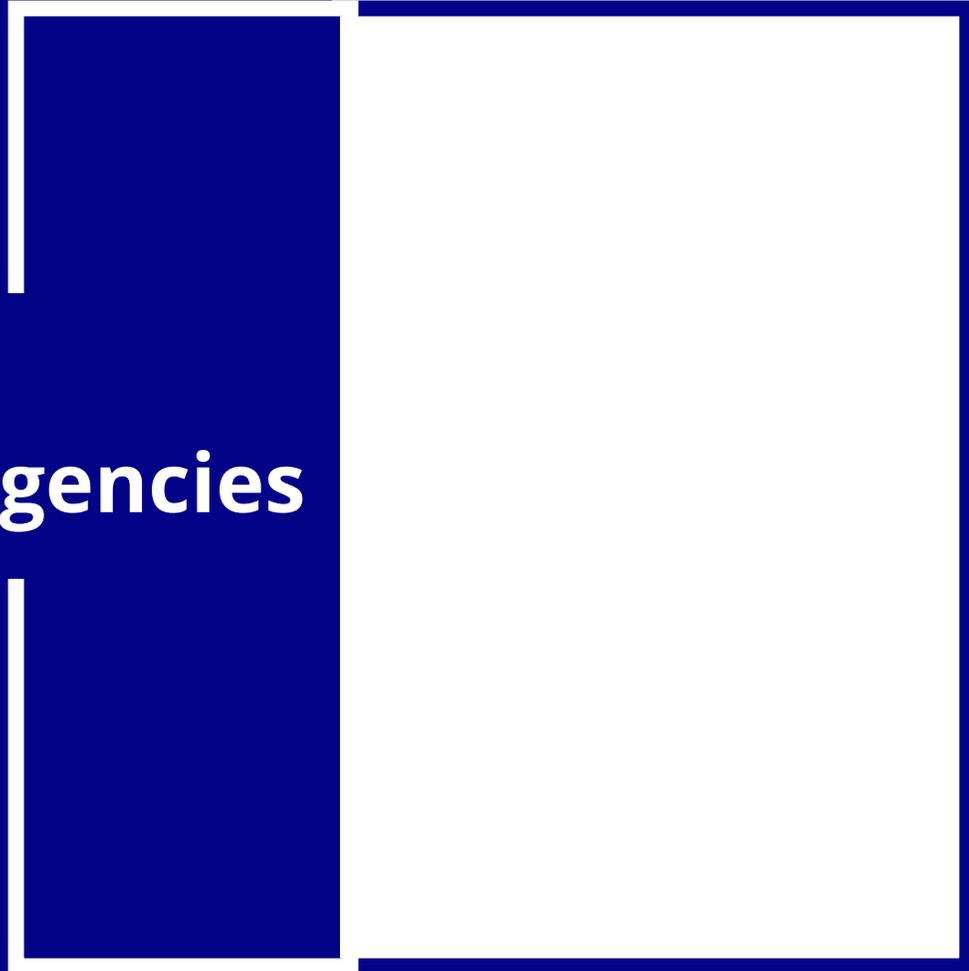
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01.

**Benefits to
Participating Agencies**



Strategic benefits to the participating agencies

RECRUITMENT

- Having a workplace that fosters a work-life balance and allows for flexibility will help secure top talent for your agency.

RETENTION & HAPPINESS

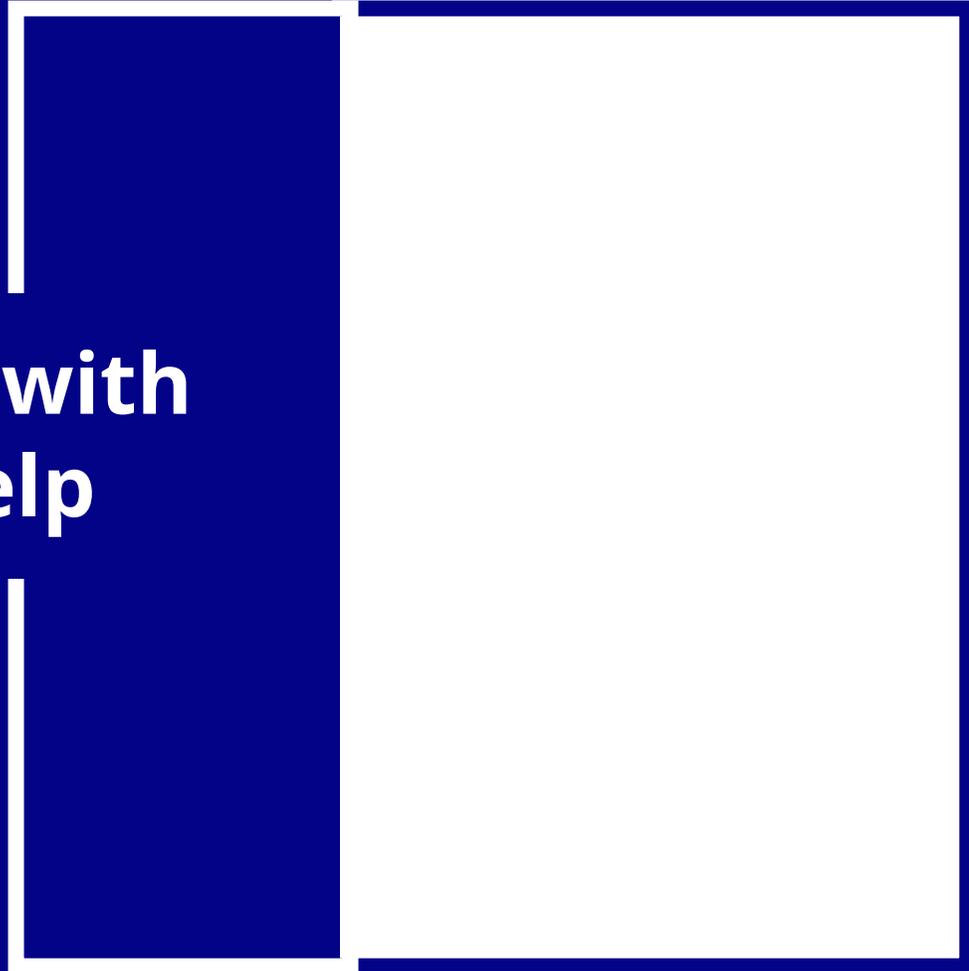
- Flexibility and better work-life balance will result in more loyal and motivated employees, who will go above and beyond and be a lot happier with the agency environment.
- This will also save money on additional recruitment.

REPUTATION & RESOURCES

- Participating agencies will be pioneers amongst industry peers in promoting work-life balance and driving positive change in our industry.
- As we grow the initiative together, we will evolve as we learn and share.

02.

**Providing you with
the tools to help**



Suggested tools and processes for prevention of unnecessary overtime

A

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A. 'Ways of working' agreement that govern relationships

It is important to get it right from the start by align expectations of both internal teams and clients.

INTERNAL AGENDA

- Walk through the scope of work and budget
- Client leads to update the team on expected hours to spend on the account on a monthly basis
- Client leads share any knowledge on the client
- Set up clear roles and responsibilities with team members and make sure they know their role on the account
- Clarify any questions on the scope and map out KPIs
- Set up regular check-in meetings.

EXTERNAL AGENDA

- Go through the scope of work and set priorities
- Set frequency of WIP meetings
- Discuss and agree:
 1. Preferred communication channels
 2. Approval process and lead time
 3. Reporting templates
 4. Ways of working
- Timeline and action items.

A. 'Ways of working' agreement to govern relationships

Here is an example of an email that could be sent out to the client at the start of the relationship. Agreeing on the 'ways of working' can set up a fruitful relationship from the start and manage clients' expectations on how the servicing team would work.

We are honoured to be your partner and we want to be as efficient as possible and deliver on your needs. Below is a list of guiding points:

- Utilise email for specific actions and asks so we can track conversations clearly*
- Use WhatsApp to reach out to the team only if an urgent response is needed*
- Respect each other and use a tone that indicate as much; we are partners*
- We will respond to you within four hours during the working day, at the very latest*
- Requests sent after 7 pm will be addressed the following business day unless it is a crisis or an urgent situation*
- We do not work after 7 pm unless it's an urgent situation*
- We appreciate clear client direction and respect of personal time, and we will, of course, give you the same*
- Rounds of changes to content should be kept to 2, or a maximum of 3*
- Deadlines should be adhered to*
- Approval processes should be followed*
- Catch-up meetings should be kept to one hour and have a clear agenda*
- Any out-of-scope work is to be discussed*
- KPIs are to be tracked and met*

B. Unified flexible working arrangement

WHY IS FLEXIBILITY IMPORTANT?

According to the Deloitte Global 2021 Millennial and Gen Z survey, millennials and Gen Zs see flexibility as the most critical employee characteristic for successful businesses.

Gen Zs also demand better flexibility and autonomy at work around work-life balance.

SUGGESTED POLICIES

- **Set up a minimum number of Work-from-home (WFH) days per week/month:** As part of the employee remuneration package and ways of working, set up a minimum number of WFH days each week/month.
- **Support employees to set up their home office:** Provide a one-off allowance for employees to set up their WFH stations and equipment.
- **Set up ground rules for WFH:** The culture of WFH has been accelerated by the pandemic, but there remain organisations that are new to WFH. Education and ground rules for companies and employees would be essential to facilitate the process.

B. Unified flexible working arrangement

BUILDING TRUST UNDER WFH ARRANGEMENTS

- **Overall tracker for the team to update their office schedule:** On a week-by-week basis, each team member to update the centralised office registry on a shared point to indicate when they intend to be in the office and when they will WFH in the upcoming week.
- **Transparency in calendar sharing:** Allow the rest of the team to access individual's calendars to facilitate virtual meetings set-up.
- **Notify team to changes in working time:** With a variety of responsibilities at home, there may be changes to an individual's usual working hours. It is important to keep the team informed in advance about a potential change in working hours.
- **Set up regular check-in and guidelines on WFH:** For a prolonged period of WFH, regular check-in and guidelines are recommended to ensure the wellbeing of employees
 - ✓ Separate work and life, and set a time for logging off
 - ✓ Schedule regular check-ins and facetimes to answer any concerns that employees have
 - ✓ Set up virtual engagement activities to allow team bonding and cater to the mental health of team members

B. Unified flexible working arrangement

POTENTIAL WFH ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES FOR EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS

- **Welcome/care packages for employees:** Depending on each individual case, welcome or care packages could be sent to employees; e.g. welcoming new joiners who joined during an extended WFH period, or members of the team who might be at home for extended periods of time for personal or family reasons.
- **Themed weekly catch-up to encourage more interaction:** Something as simple as changing the virtual background to a travel theme or one's favourite bar/restaurant would already encourage more interaction and inject fun elements into virtual meetings.
- **Virtual workshops to enhance health and wellness:** Engage yoga instructors or fitness coaches for a session with team members who sign up.
- **Podcasts or invite external speakers for a virtual sharing:** Ranging from mental health tips to business-related training, podcasts or external speakers could help bring in excitement and novel experiences for the team.

C. Resources planning and additional support

MANAGE AND COMMUNICATE TIME RESOURCES REGULARLY AND TRANSPARENTLY AT DIFFERENT LEVELS:

Team level

Capacity plan to be reviewed and aligned among all team leads and managers, ideally on a monthly basis, focusing on red flags/crunches observed or anticipated, as well as sourcing for additional support or sharing spare resources, if any; if possible, actual hour utilisation can also be reviewed.

Individual level

Hours and priority projects planned for the upcoming month to be cascaded with individuals following the review meeting – individuals should be encouraged to share feedback and if the plan is not feasible according to the actual work involved, adjustments can be made.

All in all, the process of resource planning should be a collaboration between the team leads and members – team leads are responsible for a more thoughtful planning and priority setting, as well as considering additional support whenever needed, while team members are responsible for providing feedback and sharing timely communication about the actual situation and any difficulties in sparing the time required.

C. Resources planning and additional support

When planning around the team's resources and time, several key elements should be taken into consideration.

1. The standard number of hours that are required for admin and other non-client-related, but essential items:

- Internal admin
- Training
- Team building and other internal activities
- People and team management
- Annual leave

2. Additional hours (~10-15%) to be added as a buffer for:

- New team members
- New accounts
- Key accounts/projects that require special attention and extra investment
- Business development – especially during the peak seasons, typically the beginning, interim, and end of each calendar year or fiscal year

C. Resources planning and additional support

3. Number of accounts/projects assigned to each individual

- More accounts/projects may mean more meetings and admin hours, and sometimes spreading the mindspace too thinly may compromise efficiency - a balance needs to be managed carefully
- That said, understanding the passion and preference of each individual is equally important – some may be more motivated by working on different things with less time on each, while some the opposite

4. Other ways to keep the team motivated and manage time resources beyond numbers on the paper

- Advancement or rotation of the roles and responsibilities among members of the team should be made from time to time, especially for heavy-lifting tasks; try to rotate the responsibility to avoid burnout of a particular member
- The number of hours assigned on different tasks/accounts should be aligned with the individual's growth needs

**The use of external support such as freelancers and tools should be considered especially during the peak seasons, to add flexibility in resourcing and allow the team members to focus on more critical and ad hoc tasks.*

D. How to reduce admin time

Admin time can rack up hours that are not billable to the client and cause team members to work on unnecessary overtime. Some admin tasks are essential, but some are not. The first step to understanding how to reduce admin time lies with the management teams.

First, consult the timesheet data either for individual accounts or individual people, so you understand where the level of admin is coming from.

Ensure everyone knows what their utilisation target is, so people feel empowered to control their own level of admin, push back to the company as needed, or offer solutions.

Polling agencies from PRHK have put the following practical steps in place:

1. Hire a dedicated admin employee for the practice/company to handle any necessary form filling, expenses, etc.
2. Assess processes and programmes such as timesheets, review programmes, etc. that could be addressed with tech upgrades or alternatives.
3. Ensure teams are aware of what is necessary admin and what can be postponed; e.g. any internal committee work.

E. How to reduce meeting time

EACH MEETING LEADER SHOULD ASK THEMSELVES:

- Why am I having this meeting and what is the purpose?
- Does it need to be for an hour or can we do it in 30 minutes?
- Am I sure that everyone I invited is needed, and will they contribute?

EACH MEETING ATTENDEE SHOULD ASK THEMSELVES:

- Have I been briefed properly for this meeting, and is there a clear agenda?

MEETING RULES:

- Start and end on time
- Have an agenda
- Have clear actions at the end

F. Overtime compensation

It is suggested that capacity planning be done on a monthly basis to ensure we identify peak periods and arrange freelance support, as needed. However, if resources are not available and the team has to work significantly overtime, the following arrangement must be in place:

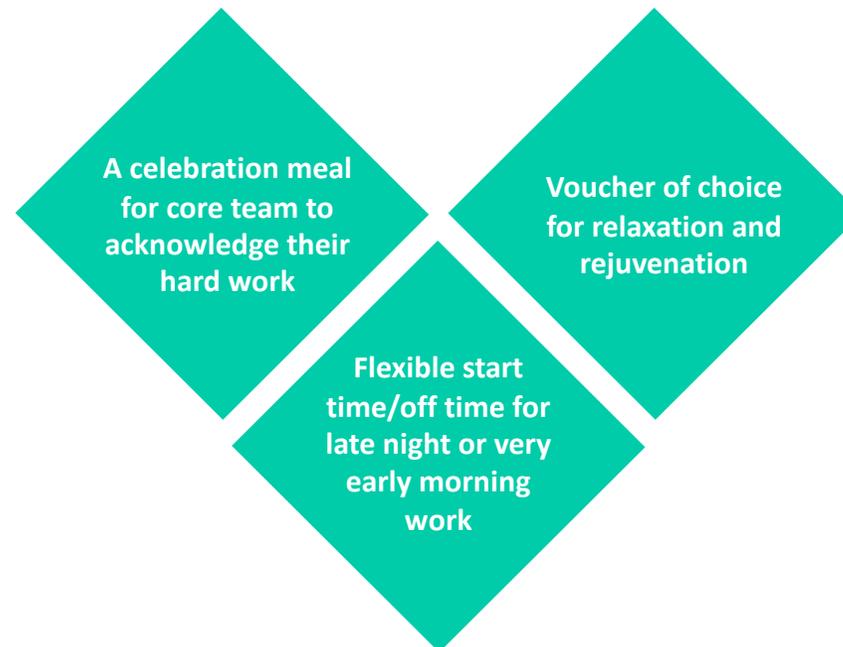
TIME-IN-LIEU SUGGESTIONS

- If a peak period is foreseeable, estimate the total additional hours and level of expertise required
- Keep a log of who would be expected to work on the tasks and the estimated hours
- Suggest period of when the time-in-lieu should be taken by the employees, e.g. time-in-lieu should be claimed within 1 month of the overtime

MONETARY COMPENSATION

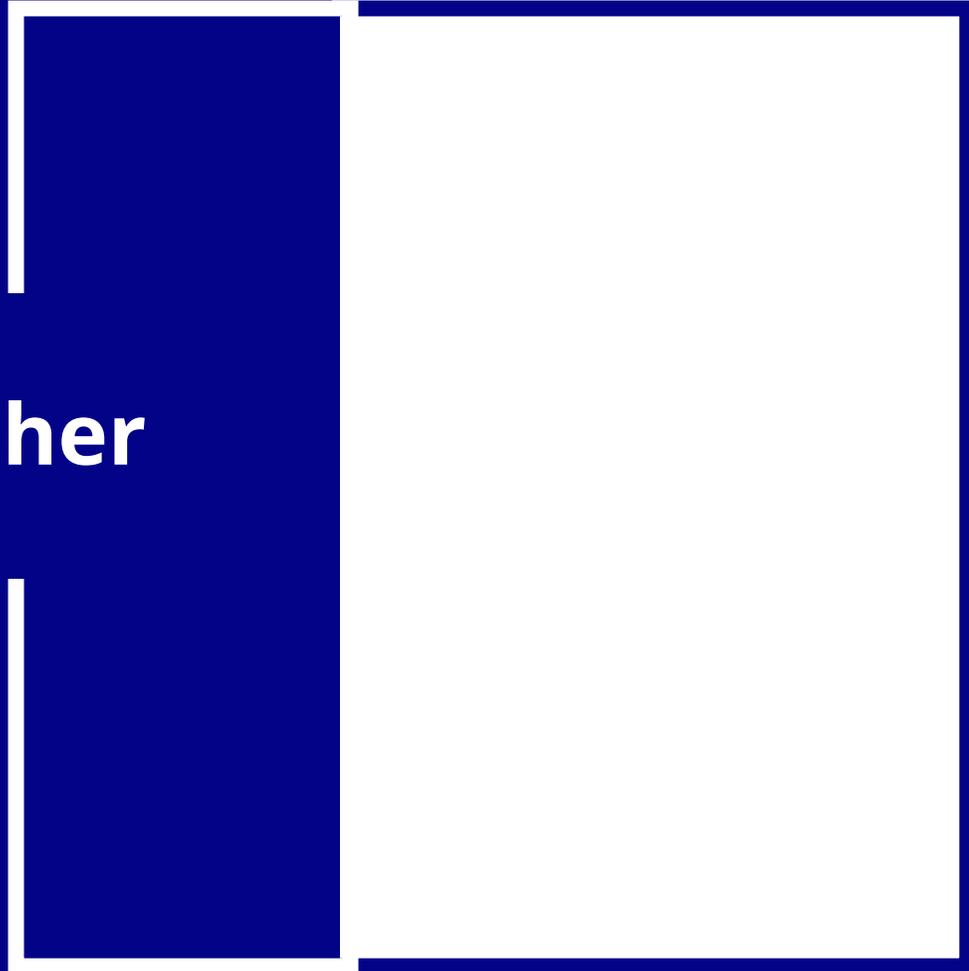
As we don't want to encourage overtime, if there are monetary incentives it might become a culture for people to work overtime. Depending on the company policy, suggest most of the overtime situation be addressed via time-in-lieu or other incentives

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR THE RECOVERY PERIOD AFTER A MAJOR LAUNCH OR BUSINESS PITCH :



03.

Working together



LEADERS

- Build a bank of freelancers to help with unforeseen moments
- Be brave enough to turn down new business if resources don't allow
- Weave in WFH flexibility into company policy
- Create an open feedback system such as a bi-monthly anonymous survey, that acts as a pulse check
- Manage clients with kick-off meetings, align expectations, and intervene when needed
- Leaders to manage internal teams, KPIs, and expectations
- Managers to report overservice each month with reasons and solutions

TEAMS

- Use a capacity tool to map hours for the month ahead and the individual tool to map each day/week, ready for the start of each week; 8 hours per day
- Keep communicating - last minute requests will crop up; help teams prioritise as and when this happens
- Respect your team members and their personal time
- Stick to deadlines
- Be organised – for pitches or work you need to get feedback on, give that person the time by which you expect the feedback and ask them to acknowledge it; don't assume and make sure you give them enough time to do a good job
- Set your own boundaries
- When you are in the office it's 'heads up' - meet with people and interact. When WFH, schedule 'heads down' time - to concentrate on doing really great work, free of distractions and disruptions
- Clock off after business hours

5 quick wins to achieve work-life balance

1. Right from the start

Setting scope and hours right and align expectations between clients and teams

2. Clear roles & responsibilities

Fair allocation of workload and regular capacity planning

3. Set boundaries

Both leaders and teams need to set their own boundaries and respect others' boundaries

4. Keep communicating

To minimise potential scope creep and over-servicing

5. Work smarter, not harder

Focus on efficiency, prioritise the essentials



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