

Flexi sop, safety net for staff, gig workers: HUL

In A First, Co Offers Employees Flexi Option With Benefits, Expands Welfare Measures For Gig Work

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Mumbai: In what could set a trend among large corporates in India, Hindustan Unilever (HUL) has introduced employment models that challenge traditional employer-employee dynamics.

In a first, the FMCG major has launched two models that offer flexible work arrangements with benefits to both existing employees and gig workers who are associated with it but are not on its payroll.

Under 'U-Work', HUL employees can choose to be engaged with the company in a flexible way while getting financial security, retirement, and medical benefits. The 'Open2U' model, introduced specifically for India, allows gig workers, who are not employed with the company, to work on assignments and get a financial safety net and medical benefits.

U-Work covers about 8,000 office-based HUL employees. While employees can apply to be a part of U-Work, the final decision is based on a mutual agreement between the company and the staffer.

The two models would operate under an overarching thought process of offering flexible ways of working, which the company terms as 'Flexi-curity'. HUL's executive director (HR) Anuradha Razdan told TOI, "During the pandemic, a number of people have been introspective on what they want from life and are keen on getting new and more personalised work experiences. Through 'Flexi-

curity', we would like to provide opportunities to this rich talent pool that doesn't force a trade-off between flexibility and security. People want flexibility about when they want to work and how they want to work. At the same time, they want the security of structured pay and benefits. Flexi-curity serves that objective."

a prototype of the hybrid workplace for the future."

As 2021 has seen the 'Great Resignation', Bhaduri said, "Millennials want to travel, study and work on a wide variety of projects. Some experienced people want to slow down without losing access to financial security. Young parents and caregivers have had to take career bre-

WHAT'S 'FLEXI-CURITY'

- > HUL's new 'Flexi-curity' work model allows employees/gig workers to get both flexible work options as well as job security
- > HUL's 8k office-based staff can opt for 'U-Work' — a flexible job option with a structured pay & retirement/medical benefits

- > They will have to put in 6 weeks of work in a year, choosing their own assignments
- > Another model, titled 'Open2U', is

India-specific and aimed at independent gig workers

- > Open2U offers different projects along with a financial safety net & medical benefits

- > HUL hopes flexi work options will help tap and retain highly skilled talent across age groups

- > Axis Bank offered last year gig opportunities to work from anywhere, and UAE recently announced a 4.5-day work week



India is among the key markets where Unilever has rolled out U-Work. Under this, an employee is required to put in six weeks of work in a year. Initially, the percentage of employees opting for working on a flexible-basis is expected to be low. But in the long term, the ratio could be 80:20, where 80% would be in the fixed or full-time employee bracket, while the balance could be in the flexible bracket.

Commenting on HUL's move, Abhijit Bhaduri, an executive coach, said, "The traditional 40-40-40 model of employment has been challenged. People worked for 40 hours per week for 40 weeks a year (approximately) and for 40 years of their lives. This is

asks to look after their loved ones. Instead of losing this talent pool, Unilever retains access to them through the flex arrangements. Permanent employees can come into the office for a few days and work from any other location on the rest."

There could be more organisations that could challenge traditional status quos as they also benefit from such arrangements. "As an organisation, we stand to gain by getting access to highly skilled talent across diverse groups, who can work with us on priority areas of the future. In order to retain and engage talent in future, flexibility will be key," said Razdan.