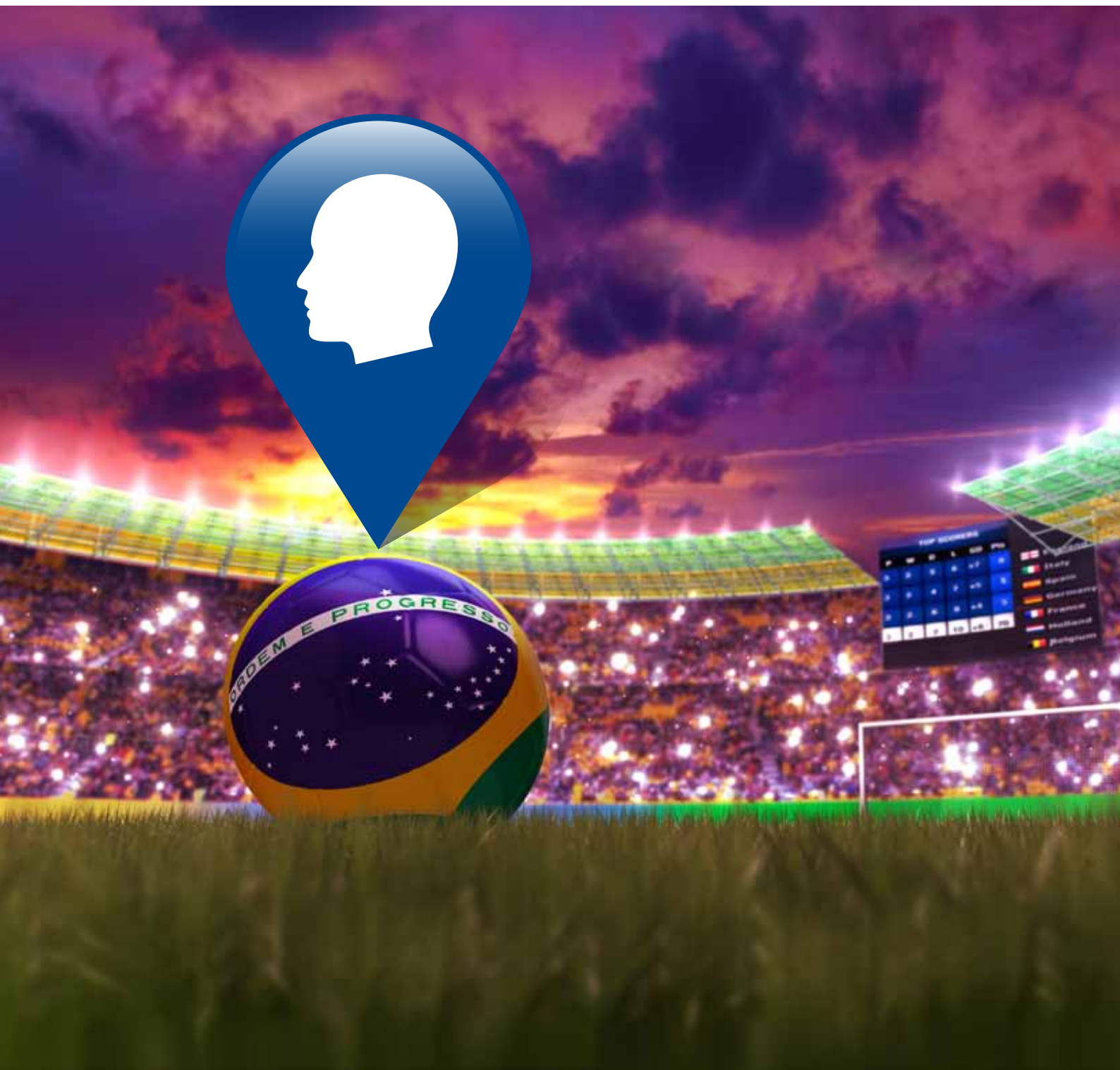


# Employee Management During The World Cup 2014 **SCORE TO WIN!**



# It's a Goal!



Set to kick off on 13th of June and last an entire month before culminating in the final match on 13th July, the 2014 FIFA World Cup is without a doubt one of the most watched sporting events in the world. In 2006, the final match of the World Cup was seen by an estimated 715.1 million viewers, while the 2010 event was broadcasted to 204 countries on 245 different channels. It is only natural to expect that a large proportion of the working population will be looking forward to a month of football, with people across the globe clamouring to support their favourite teams.

What happens, however, when your business is in Asia, where the majority of matches, once time difference has been accounted for, occur in the wee hours of the morning? The result is a large proportion of bleary-eyed, fuzzy brained workers who, between their third and fourth cups of coffee,

wonder why they didn't just call in sick this morning. Without proper management, it is highly likely that many of your employees will be afflicted with 'Football Fever'.

During the 2006 World Cup, two football fans in the UK faced disciplinary action when their employer discovered them in a pub watching an England match when both were supposed to be on sick leave from their jobs as supervisors at a manufacturing company. More recently in England, Labour Party leader, Ed Milliband, was spotted at a football match last year, two hours after he had cancelled an important speech due to 'illness'.

The first instinct of most companies is to think about how they can stop this from happening but this kind of thinking misses a very crucial, and obvious, point. The 2014 FIFA World Cup will happen, regardless of whatever company policies are put in place, so the sooner HR departments and managers realise that, the quicker they can come to a second revelation.

The World Cup season actually provides a golden opportunity for companies to ramp up their employee engagement and build a strong rapport with their employees, racking up loyalty points in the meantime.



## EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT – WHY DOES IT MATTER?

In recent years, there has been a strong recognition among organisations that in order to stay competitive, it is not enough to focus on employee satisfaction at work, but it is vitally necessary to engage employees. This is quite different from job satisfaction as the former refers to how employees feel about their compensation, benefits, work environment, career development and relationship with the management.

Engagement, however, is about employees' commitment and connection to their work - who and what conditions are motivating them to work harder. Many studies have linked employee engagement to factors such as employee performance, customer satisfaction, productivity, absenteeism, turnover and support of the organisation.

A recent publication from global management consultancy, Hay Group, unveiled six megatrends that are set to

transform the business environment and corporate organisations<sup>1</sup>. One of these trends is "individualisation" which refers to the growing freedom of choice expected by and being granted to individuals within companies. This trend is having an enormous impact on employees' loyalty and motivation to perform, with factors such as recognition and work-life balance taking precedence over traditional factors like pay and promotion.

This coincides with findings from a 2012 study by the Society for Human Resource Management that showed that 87% of employees felt that having flexibility was either extremely, or very important, in choosing a new job.

According to Ken Matos, Senior Director of Employment Research and Practice, Families and Work Institutes, "When a job is inflexible, employees are confronted with some tough choices that affect their evaluations of their



job security and compensation. Lacking the flexibility to pick up a child from school can reduce net wages if the only alternative is expensive child care. Similarly, an ill or injured employee who cannot take time away from work to recover without fear of losing his or her job is likely to have low job security. For employees in these or similar situations, there's no real difference between flexibility, job security and compensation, because their inflexible work arrangements are creating unnecessary costs and threats to their continued employment."<sup>2</sup>

The fact is that flexibility has become a key factor to employee happiness and engagement, but it is not just about picking up a child from school or taking time off to recover from an injury. It is also about being able to enjoy life outside work and how flexible an organisation can be in that regard. If the work gets done, but not within the usual 9-6 timeframe, does it matter?

For some companies, there is a wholehearted embracement of the opportunity to engage their employees by showing that work/life balance is not an abstract concept. For renowned sports equipment brand and sponsor for the FIFA World Cup 2014 – Adidas Group – giving their employees the freedom to choose is the best way forward.

"As a sports company, we are definitely affected by the upcoming World Cup. All our employees around the world are already pretty excited about the event and have all or most of the games in their Outlook calendars," stated a spokesperson from Adidas. "No matter where our employees are on the globe, due to our flexible working system, they can all watch the games."

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# KEEPING THE WHEELS TURNING

It is important to keep in mind that during any disruptive time, the basics of employee engagement still apply. Firstly, there needs to be solid communication around the policies of the company and what can and cannot be done. If a company is enacting a flexi-time policy during the World Cup period, then the policies and procedures should be very clearly outlined.

This leads to the issue of accountability. An engaged individual who understands the boundaries and expectations of the company is much more likely to prepare themselves for time off i.e. briefing clients/customers on when they will or will not be around, discussing the covering of responsibilities while that person is away and so forth.

It is also important to remember that employees will operate based on the examples that their leaders set. If the management can achieve their work goals while still taking time to watch matches, there is no reason why employees cannot do the same. Similarly, if you want your staff to be accountable to their clients/customers on when they will be available, you have to be accountable to them in the same way.

There are a variety of approaches to be considered to help employees enjoy the World Cup season without compromising your day-to-day operations. If an organisation has plans and policies in place then the likelihood of organisational chaos is lessened significantly.

“One of the simplest methods would be to allow employees to clear their annual leave during this period,” advises Casey Ho, an employee engagement trainer at the Institute for Adult Learning at MDIS. “By using a ‘first-come, first-served’ policy for authorising leave applications, you can maintain your minimum staff requirement while still allowing people to take the time to watch a match or celebrate the outcome.”

Ho also recommends adopting a flexi-time policy in the office. “Companies can allow their employees the ability to work staggered hours. If there is a match at 2am, then perhaps an employee can start at 1pm and work through till 9pm.”



As a global sponsor of the world cup, Adidas Group is already way ahead of the curve on this. “We offer flexi-time to ensure our employees can comfortably balance work and life needs. In reality this means that our employees have 100% control of their time,” stated their spokesperson. “At the German headquarters in Herzogenaurach, the World of Sports, we plan a big World Cup event with all German employees. Similar events are planned in various locations to celebrate the World Cup.”

The formality of this arrangement can vary among different companies. Smaller firms tend to get by with a verbal agreement while large multinationals are prone to make company-wide email announcements. It is important to remember though, that any such arrangements should be clearly communicated so that the staff are fully aware of the procedures and what is expected of them.

Aside from simply managing employees' time off and productivity, the World Cup offers companies a chance to enhance their company morale. If there are matches that occur in the earlier part of the night, there is a prime opportunity to arrange for a viewing party for the staff. Management can organise a 'Football Night Out' that includes food and drinks, offering staff a chance to mingle and bond on a level outside of work.

Another way that employers can leverage on the World Cup is to hold a contest among the staff, centred around which team will win the finals. Management can get the staff to submit a vote for their favourite team. The prize for winning the contest can vary as well, from gift vouchers to company perks such as additional days off.

Whether it is a screening party or an internal contest, the main aim of these activities is to engage employees by making them feel that the company cares for their work/life balance. If they feel that not everything is about profit and loss, they will feel a more emotional connection with the company, engendering loyalty, more passion for their work and greater drive to succeed.

With some careful forethought and planning, the coming month of football can be effectively managed so that your business continues to operate efficiently while at the same time, your staff will be able to enjoy the highs and lows of one of the most watched sporting events in the world.



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