

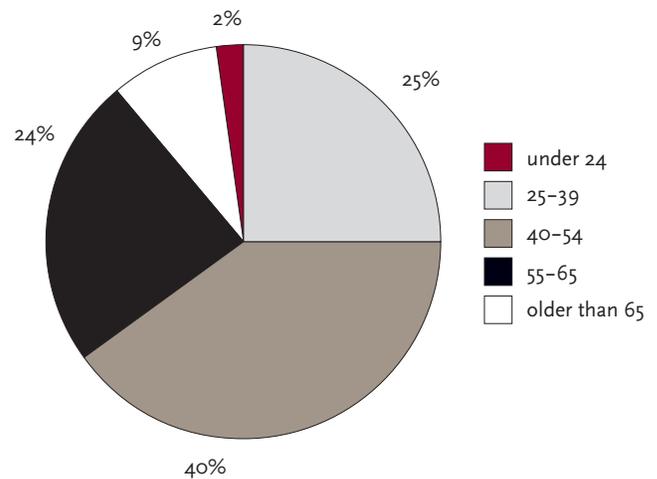
BOSTON COLLEGE

EMERGING STRATEGY

SELECTED BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Primary Industry Sector:	Educational Services
Type of Organization:	Not-for-profit
Worksite Locations (countries):	United States, Ireland
Size of Workforce:	3,500 employees. The number of employees has increased from 2007-2008
Average Age of Employees:	46 years
Average Age of Retirement:	66 years

Figure 1. Age Distribution of the Workforce



INTRODUCTION

Boston College is a not-for-profit organization specializing in educational services. With worksites in both the United States and Ireland, Boston College is one of the oldest Jesuit, Catholic universities in the United States, offering degrees in more than 50 fields of study through 7 different schools and colleges. The median age of Boston College employees is 46 and the average age at retirement is 66. In response to the changing demographics of its workforce, Boston College is looking at ways to maintain work/life balance and increase opportunities for flexibility. Younger employees are approaching their careers at Boston College from day one with a “what’s in it for me” attitude, often asking questions about career development and workplace flexibility during the interview process. An increasingly older workforce presents additional challenges to Boston College as they strive to retain key talent while simultaneously facilitating smooth transitions into retirement for those who are ready to do so.

THE BUSINESS CASE

Employer-of-Choice is more than just a popular buzz word. Twenty-First Century Employers-of-Choice understand what motivates employees, and are committed to developing 21st century solutions to recruit, retain, and engage a diverse,

multigenerational workforce. While there is more than one set of indicators for an employer-of-choice strategy, Figures 2A-B focus on eight important dimensions. These essential components comprise the Center’s Quality of Employment Framework (Pitt-Catsouphes et. al, 2007). Of course, different employers are likely to focus on different aspects of the employer-of-choice strategy depending on the organization, the needs of its workforce, and the country context. Some actions – such as the expansion of workplace flexibility – can help organizations simultaneously reach goals and objectives related to multiple components of the employer-of-choice strategy. Employers may tailor their employer-of-choice policies and practices depending on the stage of employment (recruitment, engagement, and/or retention) they seek to affect.

Boston College’s strategies and practices, with respect to changing age demographics in the workplace, exemplify several aspects of this Framework.

Boston College has made efforts to create opportunities for meaningful work, employee development, and attractive

benefits for its employees. It accomplishes this through a number of programs, including retiree health, tuition remission and a generous overall benefits package and paid time off policy. New employees receive, on average, almost two months of paid time off in their first year; this includes personal days, vacation time, and paid holidays. Flexible work arrangements are available on a case-by-case basis across the University. Although Boston College has not defined a formal strategy, there are a number of initiatives in place which address issues related to their multigenerational workforce.

Boston College hopes to maintain its position as an employer-of-choice by assessing how to strengthen its approach to retention, flexibility, and retirement planning including options for phased retirement.

Retention

The University's tuition remission program has proven to be an effective retention tool across generations. Younger employees are attracted to the opportunity to complete their own degree, and mid-life employees will stay in order to take advantage of the tuition remission for their children. However, the University is aware that while desirable, tuition remission alone may not be enough. It is important that they also provide continued opportunities for career development. Many younger employees will stay long enough to finish any degree programs they may be enrolled in and decide whether or not to stay at BC based on what, if any, opportunities there appear to be. Retention is an interesting challenge at Boston College because of its low turnover rate. Because so many employees stay for a long time there is often little room for others to "fly through the ranks." The University is working hard to maintain a delicate balance between long service and fresh ideas from newer employees.

Flexibility

Establishing workplace flexibility has been somewhat of a challenge at Boston College. The campus' 24 x 7 face-to-face service delivery demands that many employees – from facilities, to residential living to dining services and more be available and on campus 365 days a year. HR has encountered difficulty selling the idea of flexible work schedules to managers who are not convinced that the necessary work can be completed at a different pace. However, this is changing and recently the University is seeing more and more examples of successful flexible arrangements thriving across campus.

Retirement Planning

Boston College values long service, and for those employees who have been at BC for decades, it is difficult for them to picture life without the University. The University recognizes

Figure 2A. Quality of Employment: Strategy



that they are having trouble relaying to employees what to expect after retirement—with respect to both financial security and life in general. Boston College would like to help its population nearing retirement plan and prepare more effectively. The University has just begun to explore options for Phased Retirement as a mechanism to help older employees transition into this new phase of their life, thereby opening opportunities for more junior staff who are ready to advance in their careers.

THE RESPONSE

Although the institution is aware of the issues tied to its changing age demographics, there is not a burning platform for change at this time.

Boston College recognizes that there are not always promotional opportunities and therefore tries to create what it calls "developmental jobs," in which employees can advance in job "grade." The hope is that employees will feel as though they are advancing and continue to be satisfied and motivated by their career with the institution. Another way in which BC hopes to keep employees satisfied and engaged is by allowing them to take classes at the University. Employees can work on degree programs or take individual classes, hopefully enriching their job performance and contentment.

Boston College is also working on making flexibility a part of the culture of its workplace. It is expanding arrangements for part time work, job sharing, and staggered shifts. Another way in which BC hopes to improve flexibility is through the Information Technology Services Structured Approach to Working from Home, which will be highlighted in the following section.

PROMISING PRACTICE

FEATURED PROMISING PRACTICE AT-A-GLANCE

Information Technology Services Structured Approach to Working from Home

Description:	A work at home policy allowing one telecommuting day per five-day work week.
Purpose:	Allowing IT employees a creative way to integrate flexibility into their work schedules while meeting the needs of the department.
Target Population:	Based on good performance, ITS employees in non-direct customer roles.
Launch Date:	September 2005

Figure 2B. Quality of Employment: Practice



IMPLEMENTATION

Boston College would like to further the culture of flexibility and is beginning doing so with the Information Technology Services Structured Approach to Working from Home.

Employees had expressed an interest in such programs, citing that telecommuting is sometimes more convenient because it cuts down on travel time, preparation time etc. There was also a surfacing need to allow parents the flexibility to work from home while caring for children— assuming they are able to work at the same level of productivity that they would adhere to in the office. In addition to developing a work-family approach, Boston College ITS needed the ability to compete with competitors who could pay higher salaries in addition to offering flexible work options. It was therefore essential that Boston College ITS incorporate some type of telecommuting policy as a perk to attract the best and brightest talent in the IT world. This led the department to look into best practices regarding telecommuting policies in order to determine what elements Boston College ITS should include in its own work-from-home arrangement. The result was an ITS Structured Approach to Working from Home program which allows employees a greater level of flexibility while fulfilling their work responsibilities.

The ITS Structured Approach to Working from Home allows eligible employees to telecommute one day per five day work week. The program, which was launched in the Fall of 2005, is open to ITS employees who do not directly deal with customers and have a “history of high performance.” A cornerstone to the program is the idea that the arrangements must meet the needs of the business first— if telecommuting affects an individual’s ability to provide quality service to their customers then it will not work. It is imperative that employees who participate have demonstrated the ability to work independently and are reliable. Approved telecommuting arrangements are subject to review by the employees’ immediate manager and can be revoked if the employee is no longer performing up to par. Boston College ITS stresses that the responsibilities of an individual are not different if they telecommute, and they must be available and in contact with their manager during normal work hours.

“One reason this can work is that the kind of work we do can be done in this way. Using computers and logging onto servers requires less and less of a physical presence.”
 –ITS Department

LESSONS LEARNED

Boston College researched the telecommuting and work-from-home policies of other organizations, as well as recommendations for best practices, before developing its own program. Below are some of the characteristics of other programs BC decided was important to incorporate into the ITS Structured Approach to Working from Home.

- It is not possible for all employees to telecommute, some jobs require the individual to be on site;
- Telecommuting arrangements must meet the needs of the organization;
- Telecommuting does not change the individual's level of responsibility;
- Telecommuting is a privilege, and can therefore be revoked;
- Those who telecommute should be high-performance employees who are able to work independently;
- Those who telecommute should take the precautions necessary to secure sensitive data.

EVIDENCE OF PROGRESS

Boston College has found that employees are very appreciative of the opportunity to work from home. In fact, to date they do not report a single case where an employee abused the arrangements. The ITS Department measures success of the

work-from-home program in the same manner it conducts other performance reviews— are the expectations for work being met by the employee and are customers satisfied with the results?

Because work from home arrangements are an attractive feature of work at Boston College's ITS department, leadership believes it serves as a tool for retention as well as recruitment.

MOVING FORWARD

Continuous monitoring of data security is critical and will remain a priority. The University has taken precautions around sensitive data, making sure people who work from home do so in a secure manner and are “extremely aware of security when they're offsite.” This is difficult to enforce in a University setting because they cannot limit the programs that employees utilize- Faculty want to be able to use a wide array of programs and tools to meet the needs of their particular research and curriculum areas.

The University is considering developing a tool kit for Human Resources to use when approached about establishing flexible work arrangements for other employees on a case-by-case basis. Furthermore, they are looking at developing ways to implement flexible work arrangements for those employees whose job descriptions make it a challenge, such as help desk employees.

In the future, Boston College expects it will further embrace developing additional flexible work arrangements to cement its position as an employer-of-choice.

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The Center on Aging & Work has developed the Executive Case Summary Series to provide Center Partners and members of Learning Circles with current information about workplace strategies, policies and practices established for today's multi generational workforce.

These cases have been prepared to foster the sharing of information among talent management experts and to accelerate “just-in-time” insights about employer-response to the 21st century workforce even as strategies, policies and practices are just emerging.

The Case Summaries contain confidential (and in some cases, proprietary) information about organizations. Therefore, the Center provides these cases only to organizations that are Center Partners and members of Learning Circles.

Interested in additional information about this Case Summary? Please contact Samantha Greenfield at 617-552-9117.

Pitt-Catsoupes, M., et. al (2007). *Employers-of-Choice in Countries-of-Choice* (Global Executive Insight No. 01). Chestnut Hill, MA: The Center on Aging & Work/Workplace Flexibility. Retrieved from http://agingandwork.bc.edu/documents/Global01_Employer-of-Choice.pdf