

# Media Coverage

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## It's not about the free food: Google

Google is famous for its employees perks but they're not what keeps its attrition rate around two per cent, says Sue Polo, director of HR - engineering and operations.

What most people think of when Google's corporate culture is mentioned is the food - the company provides free meals to all its employees and has a rule that "no engineer can be more than 100 feet from food", Polo told last week's Australasian Talent Conference.

But people don't stay because of perks, she says. "It comes down to the work."

After five years of massive growth - from fewer than 3000 employees in 2004 to about 20,000 now - Polo says it's time to "take a breath" and focus on the development of its talent.

She outlined some of the key elements of Google culture, which include:

- **"20% time"** - engineers can spend the equivalent of a day per week on their own projects and interests. There is complete transparency about these - "everyone knows everything" so the initiative is self-policing. Polo says some of Google's biggest products began life as these projects;
- **lots of data** - Google conducts annual employee surveys and Polo says the response rate is always above 85 per cent. About 70 per cent of the survey stays the same each year and the rest changes to deal with fresh issues. Results are shared in multiple vehicles - "every way, shape or form imaginable" and given to managers in the form of "[tag clouds](#)" so the biggest issues are immediately apparent and they can click on the words for more information;
- **rigorous recruitment processes** - "it's hard to get hired, but people are very glad to be there". Candidates undergo multiple interviews (usually about five, but sometimes more) with committees of employees who assess their experience, qualifications and personality. A downside of this is that engineers don't make many referrals (because they're reluctant to "put their friends through the ringer") Polo says, but Google's attrition rate is generally around two per cent and hasn't been above five.
- **recognition** - employees can self-nominate for promotion and decisions are peer-driven. There are no titles at Google but recent promotees get to wear a special shirt. Employees can also send "kudos" to colleagues; and
- **rewards** - "Google is a true pay-for-performance company," Polo says. Employees get base pay but "not a cost of living increase". Bonuses are based on individual and company performance. Everybody has a target bonus and none is below 15 per cent.