

Flexible work practices.

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It is becoming increasingly evident that the capacity of employees to advance in an organisation is often tied to their ability to balance their work and family responsibilities. Based on our study, employers have responded to the need for more flexibility in their workplace. However, flexibility is much more likely to be available to shop staff than to shop management.

While it may be more difficult to provide flexibility to management staff, it may be of critical importance to keeping and growing female talent within your organisation and is well worth doing.

Control over working hours

Some control over working hours is important to all employees, but particularly to women who may need to organise their other responsibilities around work. This aspect of staffing presents particular challenges to retailers – naturally, shops open and close at fixed times, and must be staffed during these times.

However, retail relies on rosters. Coping with fluctuations in business, means that part-time, casual and full-time workers are being rostered in such a way to ensure maximum staff coverage at critical times of the day and week. This usually results in a range of shifts being available over the week – at different times of the day, and different times of the week.

Many retailers give employees some choice in what shifts they work. Employees may have made known their preferences from the start, which are often accommodated. Or employees may have a say in the weekly, fortnightly or monthly design of rosters.

Building a better business: how agreement making can help

This publication contains information for small to medium retail outlets and service providers. It contains a range of examples and ideas that you may want to consider when developing an enterprise agreement for your business.

For a copy contact the Industries Branch of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations: Ph 6121 7081. It is also available on the publications sections of DEWR's website at www.dewr.gov.au

Benchmarking data

Our survey found:

- only 52 per cent of shop managers have access to part-time work, compared to 93 per cent of shop staff
- only 38 per cent of shop managers have flexible start/finish times compared to 57 per cent of shop staff, and
- only 4 per cent of shop managers can have school term employment, compared to 37 per cent of shop staff.

Suzanne Grae, a clothing retailer with stores Australia-wide, has a vision and values program that aims to set it apart from its competition. Its vision "exceptional people providing exceptional product for exceptional people" identifies the link between staff, product and customers. The company values of "trust, responsibility, pride, recognition, development, integrity and equality" provide clear directions for their actions.

Suzanne Grae has a strong commitment to work and life balance. The company's recruitment emphasises work and life balance, and their recent certified agreement specifies that store managers work a 38 hour week plus overtime if necessary. The agreement also makes it easier to employ permanent part-time employees. The Business Development Managers, who operate as area managers and training and development consultants, work a five-day week.

International comparisons

In German stores there is a time-bank system which enables employees to accumulate a number of plus- or minus-hours over the year. The extent of the margin varies between stores, but employees can work fewer hours in one period, and more in another, and even build up a 30-hour deficit with no financial penalties. The time-bank system is available to full-timers, part-timers, shop workers and managers.

“The first thing I do is check staff availability. Some of my staff can only work weekends, some only want the lunchtime shift. It's always done in consultation with staff.”

Store Manager, Baristas Coffee Shop

“Shop floor rostering is a negotiation process – it requires give and take flexibility on both sides.”

Regional Manager, Safeway Supermarkets

“Being a female dominated industry with the majority of staff in their late 20s we envisage that there will be a large number of people going on maternity leave. Our challenge will be accommodating these people, keeping positions for them and addressing the issue that most of these employees could prefer returning to work on a part-time basis, in all areas of the company including management positions.”

Executive, National Pharmacies

International comparisons

A **German sports store** achieved a remarkable reduction in personnel costs by upgrading qualifications and enhancing time flexibility. Employees were trained so that they could competently serve customers in various

departments, and new working time arrangements were introduced which were fully oriented towards the daily, weekly and monthly variations in turnover and demand. The working time model introduced was based on a high level of autonomy, allowing employee teams to work out their own rostering arrangements.

The **Bristol City Council** recently introduced Sunday opening for many of its services, including its libraries. To make working on Sundays more acceptable to its staff, it introduced self-rostering. This involved staff and management working together to produce a framework detailing all the tasks that needed to be fulfilled. It was then left to staff to determine how the tasks would be achieved.

Benchmarking data

Our survey found:

- 44 per cent of retailers said staff left their business because they wanted more control over their working hours,
- 14 per cent of retailers offer self-managed rosters, and
- 56 per cent of retailers say that their rosters are negotiable to cater for work/life needs.

Flexible hours are a popular and effective family-friendly provision. A good way to implement these is through a workplace agreement.

Office of the Employment Advocate

For information and instructions on the implementation of Australian workplace agreements (AWAs), as well as guides, examples and contact information, phone 1300 366 632 for the price of a local call between 8.30am – 7.00pm Monday to Friday or visit www.oea.gov.au

The Office of the Employment Advocate can send you a free copy of *How to profit from family-friendly workplaces*.