

Moving up in retail:

An employer's guide to enabling talent progression through flexible working

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FOREWORD BY BRC

This report highlights the need for retailers to conduct a rigorous assessment of how they can unblock career progression for their frontline talent, through greater flexible working opportunities in managerial roles. Given the industry's vast workforce, its unique ability to reach across the generations, and its extensive use of flexible working arrangements for frontline staff, it is perhaps surprising that this approach has been overlooked until now.

It is a pleasure then to commend this employer's guide. It adds to our understanding by bringing together hard evidence and reliable information, as well as offering practical guidance for retailers wanting to take action. An assessment invaluable to anyone looking to improve productivity and offer their employees attractive, accessible and well remunerated jobs.

Timewise has piloted flexible working in retail management roles and demonstrates how it can prove an effective means to improving talent retention and progression. It is for other retailers to now consider and follow.

Our own Retail 2020 research this year recognised that moving up whilst maintaining flexibility is a vital part of what will make the retail industry a great, more productive place to work in the coming years. This assessment of how to match the needs of the employer and employee leaves us better placed to respond to both current trends and those that will undoubtedly emerge in the future.



Helen Dickinson
Chief Executive of the BRC

FOREWORD BY TIMEWISE

Flexibility in working hours is one of the most important reasons cited for choosing to work in retail.

However, the lack of part time opportunities in retail management means that employees often become trapped on the shop floor by their flexibility, unable to progress their careers or better utilise their skills.

It's a familiar story to Timewise. For the last twelve years we have been working with some of the UK's leading companies to help them attract and maximise the talent and skills of people who need to work either part time or flexibly. In this report, we turn our attention to the retail sector. In 2015, the UK Futures Programme supported us to pilot a new approach to flexible job design in retail, and we worked with Pets at Home to re-design store management roles to be available on a part time and flexible basis.

Our aim was to make these jobs better jobs, for those who need flexibility in their working lives. And to enable Pets at Home to make better use of its talent.

This guide summarises what we have learnt. We hope it will inspire retailers to explore flexible job design further, as part of future talent strategies. And we look forward to continuing to explore this approach with retailers, whether individually or collectively, to enhance pay, productivity and the customer offer.



Emma Stewart
Joint CEO, Timewise

BACKGROUND: THE TALENT BLOCK IN RETAIL

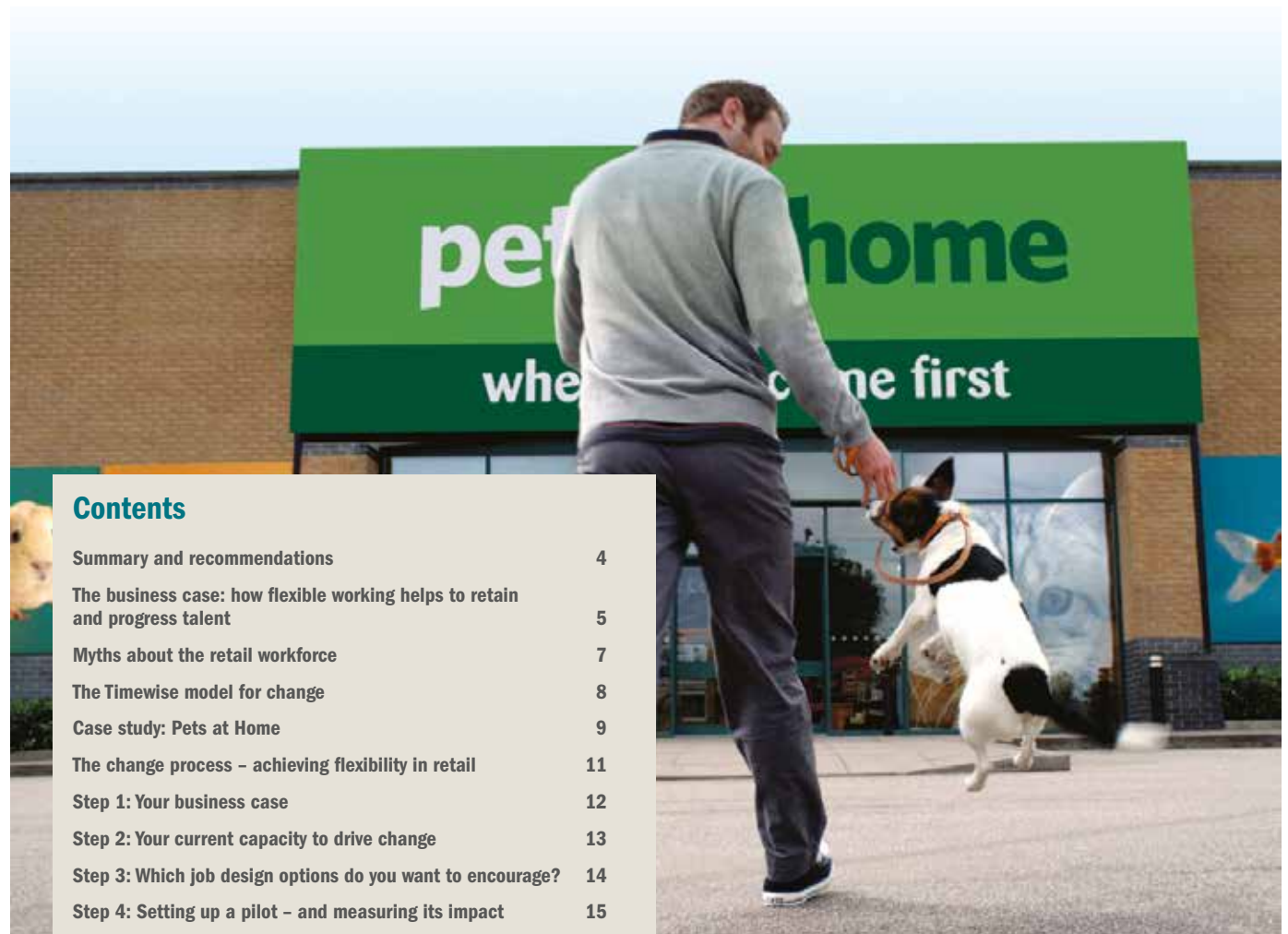
The retail industry is the largest private sector employer in the UK, employing three million people. However, the industry has low productivity, and a higher incidence of low pay than any other UK industry.¹ The financial pressures on the sector are intense: while the National Living Wage and the apprenticeship levy challenge costs, the growth of automation and online challenge the top line.

In these circumstances, the need to retain and progress talented people is paramount. Retailers need the productivity and customer service that come from engaged staff working at their skill level. However, much talent is wasted because retail staff who need to work flexibly or part time are trapped in junior roles: they cannot take their flexibility with them from frontline roles to store management.

THE SOLUTION PROPOSED IN THIS GUIDE

The Timewise approach to retention and career development has the potential to unlock the talent and productivity of thousands of retail workers. Supported by the UK Futures programme, we have piloted the redesign of retail management roles on a flexible and part time basis. This report is the product of an innovative project run by Timewise and Pets at Home plc, the UK's leading pets supplies retailer, with more than 430 stores and 8,000 employees.

The first part of this report examines the business case for retaining and progressing talent, particularly female talent, through introducing flexible working into retail management roles. We then detail the Pets at Home case study, and conclude by offering practical guidance on a five-stage change process for retailers who want to take action.



Contents

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Summary and recommendations | 4 |
| The business case: how flexible working helps to retain and progress talent | 5 |
| Myths about the retail workforce | 7 |
| The Timewise model for change | 8 |
| Case study: Pets at Home | 9 |
| The change process – achieving flexibility in retail | 11 |
| Step 1: Your business case | 12 |
| Step 2: Your current capacity to drive change | 13 |
| Step 3: Which job design options do you want to encourage? | 14 |
| Step 4: Setting up a pilot – and measuring its impact | 15 |
| Step 5: How to make the changes and maximise the benefits | 16 |
| Conclusion | 17 |
| References and Resources | 17 |

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Timewise, supported by the UK Futures programme and working alongside Pets at Home plc, has piloted the redesign of retail management roles on a flexible and part time basis. The aim was to find out if greater access to flexible working in managerial roles could unblock the retail talent pipeline from frontline roles, and address diversity issues. The project also aimed to identify a process for implementing wider access to flexible working, for other retailers to follow.

Background

- The retail industry is the largest private sector employer in the UK, but currently faces acute challenges including the National Living Wage, the apprenticeship levy, and the growth of online sales. In these circumstances, the need to retain and progress talented people is paramount. Diversity at managerial levels is also important, in order to mirror customer demographics.
- 1.5 million people currently work in low-paid roles in retail, and the majority work part time. Flexibility in working hours is one of the most important reasons cited for choosing to work in retail. However, much talent is wasted because retail staff who need to work flexibly or part time are trapped in junior jobs: they cannot take their flexibility with them from frontline roles to store management.

The Timewise model for change

- Working with some of the UK's foremost employers to improve talent attraction, retention, and progression, Timewise has learned that successful flexible working results from three key tenets:
 - Culture change needs to be driven by the leadership team
 - Job design must routinely consider flexible working possibilities
 - Organisations need to communicate successes in flexible working.

The Pets at Home pilot

- Pets at Home is the UK's largest pets retailer, employing 8,000 store-based colleagues of whom 65% are women. The business suffers from high attrition rates for women.
- Research amongst employees found that the ratio of men moving off the shop floor into assistant manager roles was double that of women, and that the lack of flexibility in management roles was a major contributing factor.
- Through data mapping, surveys and listening groups, and analysis of operational practices, Timewise helped Pets at Home to identify the challenges and opportunities within the business. The board made a commitment to job redesign for managerial roles, and set up a steering group to run the change process.
- The job redesign process identified job-share partnerships and a four-day-week as viable options, and these were made available for store management roles.
- Training for managers helped to facilitate the new approach, and role models have been championed through internal communications channels.

Five-stage process for implementing flexible job redesign in retail management roles

- Through the pilot, Timewise developed a guide for retailers interested in using flexible working as a means to improving talent retention and progression:
 1. Establish a business case
 2. Explore your current capacity to drive change
 3. Identify which job design options will support your business
 4. Set up a pilot and measure its impact
 5. Roll out the changes and continue to measure the benefits

THE BUSINESS CASE: HOW FLEXIBLE WORKING HELPS TO RETAIN AND PROGRESS TALENT

Flexibility in working hours is one of the most important reasons cited for choosing to work in retail. In fact, apart from 'working near where I live', it's the most important. And flexibility is not only valued by working mums and carers: students working in retail put flexibility as the number one attraction.²

Staff turnover is harmful to organisations when the wrong people are leaving. Estimates of the cost of replacing an employee vary, but for retail staff who earn more than £25,000 (just over half the retail workforce), the cost of replacement is £20,000. This includes not just the direct recruitment costs but also the (often forgotten) cost of getting the new employee up to optimal productivity.³

1.5 million people currently work in low-paid roles in retail, and the majority work part time. However, moving up to store and general management is harder for those who need flexibility: 56% of retail employees believe they are less likely to get promoted if they work part time.⁴ This 'flexibility trap' means that talent is locked into lower grades.

65% of frontline retail employees would take a job for which they were overqualified, if it offered flexibility in hours. Yet over half of part time workers in retail are interested in career progression and would accept promotion if they could take their part time and flexible arrangements with them.⁵ Redesigning senior jobs to enable flexibility is therefore vital if the sector is to retain and progress the best talent, and maximise productivity.⁶



INNOVATIVE PRACTICE IN AMERICA

In the USA, work redesign initiatives in retail⁷ have shown a positive link between working time flexibility and reduced voluntary turnover. The US technology products retailer Best Buy (1400 stores and 125,000 employees) trialled giving employees flexibility over working time and measured productivity in the trial teams. Voluntary turnover rates reduced by 90% and productivity increased by 41%. People were happier and healthier too and more motivated to stay.



RETAINING AND PROGRESSING WOMEN

Gender diversity is not just about corporate responsibility or employer brand. Gender-diverse companies are 15% more likely to achieve financial returns above their industry average. In the UK, for every 10% increase in gender diversity on the senior executive team, financial performance has been shown to rise by 3.5%.⁸

Employing women in senior, decision-making roles is particularly important in retail because 85% of all retail purchases are made or influenced by women. Yet only 20% of executive teams are women, and only 10% of executive boards – despite the fact that women dominate frontline and junior management roles in retail. The lack of part time and flexible working locks women out of senior jobs: women are more likely to be overqualified and underemployed in their jobs.⁹

“Diversity in the team leads to a better discussion with greater understanding before reaching a conclusion. I definitely see a correlation between business performance and diversity.”

Sir Charlie Mayfield, Chairman, John Lewis Partnership¹⁰

“The retail industry needs people who visit stores and understand customers and that’s why I think the gender mix on executive boards should be at least equal.”

George Davies, Founder, Next¹¹



INNOVATIVE PRACTICE IN AUSTRALIA

Telecoms giant Telstra Australia piloted “All Roles Flex” in its retail environments before rolling out company wide. A three-month pilot offered employees and external candidates working time flexibility from day one at frontline and manager level. 30% of candidates said they applied for the role because of openness about flexibility and applications from women increased. Nearly a third were hired or promoted on a flexible basis.¹²

MYTHS ABOUT THE RETAIL WORKFORCE

Myth: Part time workers don't want promotion.

Fact: Over half of part time workers in retail would accept promotion if they could take their part time arrangements with them.¹³

Myth: Senior jobs can't be done on a part time basis.

Fact: One in ten UK managers works part time.¹⁴ Reduced working hours do not necessarily signal reduced commitment to career progression.



Myth: Women don't want senior jobs in retail.

Fact: Six of 45 new retail CEO appointments were women in 2015.¹⁵

Myth: Millennials want to work long hours to build their careers.

Fact: Millennial workers place very high value on work-life balance: 75% of them want the ability to work flexibly and progress their careers.¹⁶ And half of millennial dads (under 35) would take a pay cut to spend more time with their family.¹⁷

THE TIMEWISE MODEL FOR CHANGE

Timewise is the leading change agent for flexible resourcing in the UK. We have worked with some of the UK's foremost employers to implement flexible working as an aid to talent attraction, retention, and progression. Three key things we have learnt:

1. Leadership drives culture change

Some cultures are more receptive, informed and open-minded about employee flexibility than others – and the tone is set from the top. Flexible working needs to be owned not just by HR but by directors and senior managers, who should develop the business case, cascade the organisational change, and role model the change they want to see.

Misconceptions about flexibility

- Flexible working is reserved for valued employees
- Always means part time hours
- Is only for mums
- Puts a burden on the full time team
- Is unfair to those who don't have it
- Complicates rota planning
- Is a permanent change we can't review
- Removes flexibility from the business

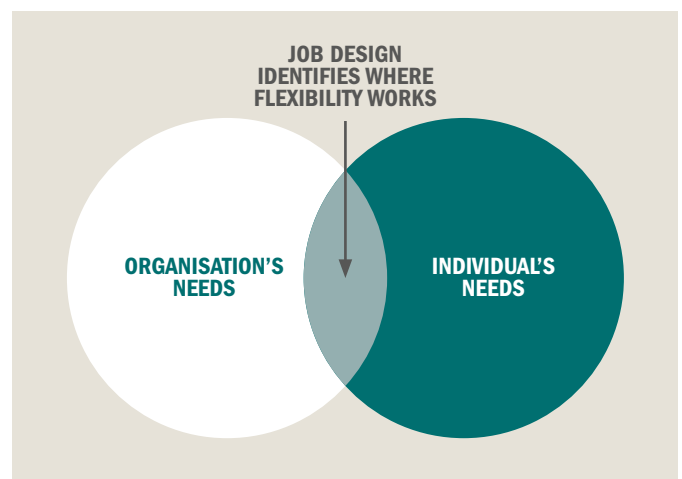


Opening up to flexibility

- Boosts productivity
- Lifts engagement
- Is open to all
- Means different things to different people
- Looks different in different jobs
- Means designing jobs that suit the needs of the employer and the individual
- Can help us think in outcomes not just hours
- Is an opportunity

2. Build capabilities in flexible job design – at every opportunity

Traditionally, a lack of skills or ambition has been seen as the reason for poor progression among part time workers. Timewise research and experience suggests instead that job design is the key. We ask employers to rethink the default design of frontline and managerial jobs and to create jobs which meet both organisational and individual needs. This means managers need to think about when, where and how much the job-holder works – and to focus on outputs, not hours. Nine out of ten hiring managers in the UK are open to employing flexible workers, but three quarters have not had any training in how to manage flexible working.¹⁸



3. Communicate positively about flexibility

Organisations need a clear and compelling story about why flexible working matters to their business – and then they need to use multiple communication tools and channels to raise awareness and normalise flexible working, both internally and at the point of hire.

Case studies of senior leaders working flexibly are one of the most powerful signifiers of intention to change. Timewise runs the Power Part Time list every year, providing an opportunity for employers to showcase people doing senior jobs on a part time basis. It's important to highlight both men and women who work flexibly for a variety of different reasons.

CASE STUDY: PETS AT HOME



Pets at Home, the UK's largest pets retailer, employs over 8,000 store-based colleagues of whom 65% are women. The company is growing fast and is a highly regarded brand, having won many awards as an employer of choice.

Pets at Home wanted to understand why their attrition rates for women were high. Timewise invited the views of groups of female frontline colleagues, store and general managers, and promotion candidates at different job levels. We found that, while many women do stay and move within the company, the ratio of men moving off the shop floor into assistant manager roles was double that of women. The lack of flexibility in management roles was a major contributing factor. Two thirds of colleagues consulted agreed that more would be interested in promotion if they knew they could work part time or flexible shifts.

Through data mapping, surveys and listening groups, and analysis of operational practices, Timewise helped Pets at Home to identify the challenges and opportunities within the business. The board made a commitment in the business plan to tackle gender diversity (and help meet their gender pay gap reporting obligations) through job redesign, and set up a steering group with senior representatives from operations and HR to run the change process.

A series of workshops with HR and operational teams identified operational constraints and management capability. Jobshare and part time were identified as the options which met business needs while also appealing to frontline candidates for promotion.

"We are proud of the great engagement our colleagues give our business and we know how important it is to our success. But we know from our survey that work-life balance for our managers was becoming an issue, and for us ultimately, that is what this is all about, making a difference to our colleagues' work-life balance... There are total synergies with our actions on flexible working and our work in promoting women in the workplace."

**Kate Williams, People and Engagement Manager,
Pets at Home**

A strategic decision was made to make two flexible job designs available in store management jobs from day one:

- Jobshare partnerships, with each partner working a minimum of three days a week
- Part time, with the job holder working a minimum of four days a week

To facilitate the organisation-wide culture change needed to underpin this change, Pets at Home has provided training to managers to identify and recruit colleagues into the new roles, and to facilitate this new approach to work within teams in stores. The company also adjusted its flexible working policy and created guidance to managers and staff to make explicit that conversations about individual flexibility needs were welcome at any point.

Management roles are now advertised with flexible options and role models are highlighted through internal communications channels. For example, in a large and busy store, Pets at Home has supported a jobshare between two store managers who say, "We work alternate days and share responsibility for managing the store... We're different personalities and have different ways of doing things but the combination works brilliantly... Our store results have been excellent and our team are a happy bunch."

"Our job share partnership works really well. We complement and trust each other, and it means we can bring a great mix of skills to Pets at Home, whilst also balancing our career with family life. We would definitely recommend this way of working, both for women who want to progress their careers in retail and companies who want to keep great talent."

Juliet Botur and Emma Harris, Job-share Store Managers, Rawtenstall

"By offering more flexibility in our approach to management recruitment and development we aim to create further opportunities for talented female colleagues to achieve their full potential while balancing their working life and home commitments."

Vicky Hill, Head of People, Pets at Home

Guidance for jobsharers

- Work out how the responsibilities will be shared and the tasks divided. For example, rota planning might happen on a Monday and team meetings on a Friday, and unless these routines can be changed, the tasks will fall to the manager in work on those days.
- Decide how working days and shifts are split between the jobsharers, and whether these patterns are fixed or variable, for example monthly or quarterly.
- Jobshare partners don't necessarily need to know each other before they start working together if the arrangement is designed well, and it is clear that they are jointly responsible for hitting performance targets and managing their teams.
- Handovers are critical and jobsharers must have good communication skills – both between each other, and with their teams.
- The manager of the jobshare partnership needs to be clear about how to manage performance.



THE CHANGE PROCESS: ACHIEVING FLEXIBILITY IN RETAIL

Following our pilot with Pets at Home, Timewise has developed a five-stage process for the implementation of flexible job redesign in retail management roles.

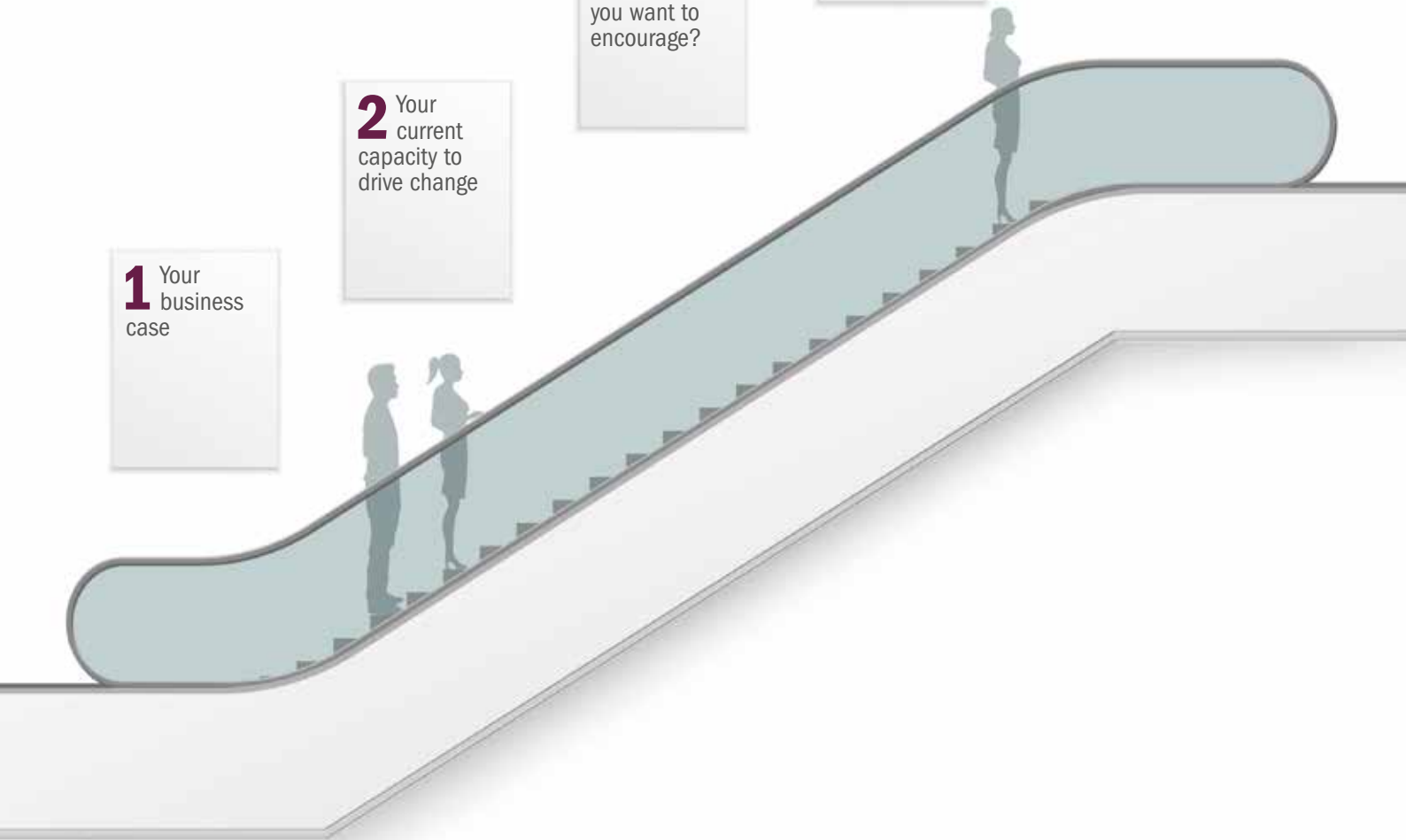
1 Your business case

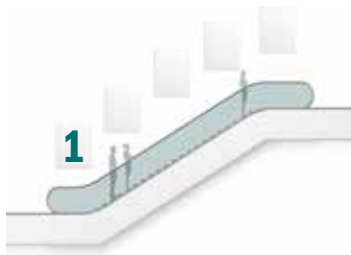
2 Your current capacity to drive change

3 Which job design options do you want to encourage?

4 Setting up a pilot – and measuring its impact

5 How to make the changes and measure the benefits





STEP 1: YOUR BUSINESS CASE

The first step is to understand why enabling talent progression through flexible working is good for your business, and the difference you expect to see by taking action.

Retailers set the gold standard in understanding customer segmentation and listening to customers. Applying the same tools and techniques to understanding your employee segments will help you detect patterns in their needs and attitudes towards moving up and towards different types of flexibility. You may have some relevant information from exit interviews or staff surveys, or you may need to collect new information through specific surveys or focus groups. You should do enough data analysis and research to get a handle on:

- Which demographic groups tend to get promoted, stay longest in role, and leave? Is there a difference between men and women? Younger and older employees? Parents and carers? Part timers and full timers? Flexible or non-flexible workers?
- What is the distribution of part time and flexible working at each job level and type? Does it vary by age, gender or caring profile?
- Which demographic groups express most and least satisfaction with their jobs, their opportunities and their working arrangements?
- Who asks for flexible working? Which requests get approved and rejected? Does the reason for the request matter? And what are your rates of return from maternity leave, and

retention rates in the years after return from maternity leave?

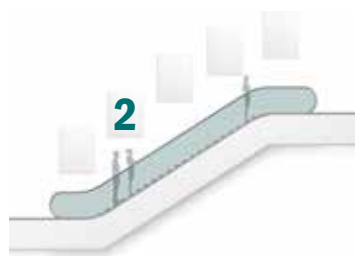
- What kinds of flexibility do employees want? Understanding latent, unexpressed demand for flexible working is difficult to do in surveys, especially in cultures where flexibility is regarded as unsuitable for senior roles: confidential focus groups and interviews can give a more accurate picture.

A differentiated picture of demand is what you need in order to design a differentiated and inclusive range of opportunities. For example BRC's research segmented frontline retail workers by age, gender and income tax credits. Timewise surveyed frontline colleagues at Pets at Home and segmented people by age, gender, and caring responsibilities.

Once you have this differentiated picture of demand, you need to consider two more issues:

1. What's the cost of doing nothing on flexible working? Can you quantify the cost of attrition and lost engagement or productivity due to lack of flexible working? Do you have the information you need to fulfil statutory obligations on gender pay gap reporting?
2. How does taking action on flexible working and progression fit with your strategic priorities? Which other organisational initiatives might provide synergies? Are there any which might conflict?





STEP 2: YOUR CURRENT CAPACITY TO DRIVE CHANGE

Step 2 turns to your operating culture and capability to design flexible working at different job levels and open up progression pathways between them. It's about understanding your own structure, processes and culture.

The strategic question is: how good are you at making flexibility work in management roles – and how good do you want to be? Answering it involves taking a critical look at how your business structures, processes and culture facilitate or constrain opportunities for people to progress on part time and flexible hours. And how ready your managers are to make the change.

Flexible working in management roles: where are you on the Timewise Flexibility Maturity Curve?



Which systems and processes might need to change?

Some operating models are more conducive to flexible working than others. For example, if you use headcount to measure a store's efficiency or productivity, managers will be reluctant to employ people on a part time or jobshare basis. If you have rigid rules about which grades of staff are allowed to perform particular tasks, such as cashing up or being a key holder, you reduce the options for flexible hours. If your store managers don't have the skills or scheduling tools to manage variants to the standard rota, they are unlikely to welcome requests for part time or flexible hours. If you have an hours-based or time-served approach to performance management and promotion, managers will find it hard to treat part time or flexible workers fairly. And if your talent development programmes require off-site overnight stays, how can you facilitate the participation of part time workers with family or other commitments?

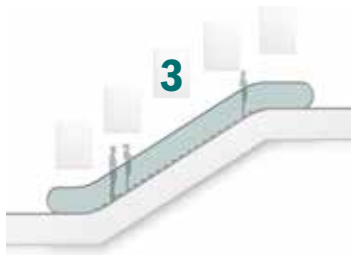
How ready are your operational managers?

What are operational managers' attitudes towards flexibility and progression on part time and flexible hours? What can they tell you about what's feasible – and how much do they need to be challenged to think differently?

Store managers know which times of the day/week are slow and which are busy, and which tasks and times they find hard to resource. Opening and closing times, lean staffing and contracted hours targets, long-range succession planning, and localised rota planning, are likely to be raised as operational constraints. Managers may also raise concerns about their own confidence or capability in designing flexible jobs, dealing with legal rights, maintaining fairness, or placing additional burdens on colleagues.

These concerns and constraints can be an opportunity: involving managers in solving operational, capability and cultural issues leads to well-designed solutions that are more readily owned, championed and accepted.





STEP 3: WHICH JOB DESIGN OPTIONS DO YOU WANT TO ENCOURAGE?

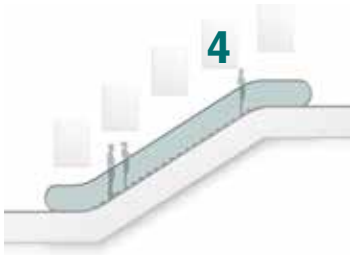


Once you have understood your staff needs and operational constraints, and decided where you want to get to, you are ready to identify which job design options are most appropriate. There are plenty of job design options to consider in retail management.

You need to ask:

- **WHERE** does the job-holder need to work? Opportunities for remote or mobile working may be limited in store management roles, but dual-store contracts may mean that a store manager isn't always based in the same place as their team. How often does a store manager need to be physically present? Can they do some of their job remotely as long as they're contactable by phone?
- **WHEN** does the job-holder need to work? Extended opening hours mean that even full time managers are not available to their team all the time: a full time store manager may have a 40-hour contract, but stores will open for many more than 40 hours each week. What does the team do when the store manager isn't at work? Can decisions or advice be delegated to assistant managers, or to managers in adjacent stores, or to 'on-call' managers elsewhere? How much flexibility is there in when the store manager needs to be at work?
- **HOW MUCH** does the job-holder need to work? How is the workload for a full time manager calculated? Which tasks could be delegated upwards, downwards or sideways to enable a talented person to take on a managerial role with a reduced workload? As managers progress up the hierarchy, the amount of workload is less related to the number of hours worked: an experienced manager can make decisions and answer questions in less time than an inexperienced one. If there is nobody else to delegate part of the workload to, consider asking two managers to jobshare a single role: this doesn't have to be 2 x 20-hour contracts, but could be, for example, one three-day contract and one four-day contract in a store that opens seven days a week.

The specific job designs that you choose will be linked to the scale of your ambition and the scale of structural, process and cultural change that you can support either in one go, as a trial, or phased over time. Flexible job redesign often means thinking at a team level and considering collaborative working practices.



STEP 4: SETTING UP A PILOT AND MEASURING ITS IMPACT

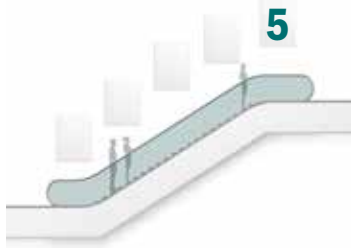
It can be challenging to justify wholesale structural change while maintaining business as usual. You will be aware of how receptive your management is to change, but you also need to distinguish between real operational challenges and outdated attitudes. If you have identified the potential for real business benefits, you may need to challenge managers' perceptions of what's possible.

Designing a pilot project is a good place to start

You could trial your ideas in one store, area, division or job family, and measure what happens to productivity, engagement, progression, and applications. Within a trial it should be possible to relax any constraining features of the operating model, and rethink how work is organised at a team level. It's often a good idea to build on a region or business area where you have existing good practice or role models. Depending on your ambition and the content of your initiative, a trial could run for three months to a year.

Whatever you trial, make sure you track the costs and outcomes of what you change.





STEP 5: HOW TO MAKE THE CHANGES AND MAXIMISE THE BENEFITS

This step is about implementing your changes. Good change management skills are essential and communication is key. We advocate moving forward step by step, rather than adopting an all or nothing approach.

Build on existing success

It's likely that some of your teams have already bought into the business case and are putting flexible working into action. It helps to identify and celebrate these successes internally, and then see how you can replicate them in other departments or regions.

Be proactive

Leading flexible employers don't just wait for an employee to ask. They actively create opportunities for rethinking job design - for example at the point of hire or promotion, during organisational restructures or annual budget planning, or on return from parental or sick leave. Add a line to all advertised vacancies that you will consider flexible working options, and mean it! For example, Pets at Home job adverts for store managers now state "We are happy to discuss the opportunity to work flexibly".

Create change agents

Consider training up ambassadors - either staff who already work flexibly or operational leads in different divisions. Or you could set up a dedicated change team to own and drive the initiative, drawing on a range of expertise, e.g. operations, HR, communications, employee forums and representatives.

Communicate!

Use multiple communication channels to raise awareness, itemise the benefits and reiterate the organisation's commitment to change. Tell stories, publicise internal case studies and provide FAQs.

Upskill your managers

This could be done informally through champions, mentors or buddies - or formally through existing or new training programmes. Provide guidance to store and line managers (who are usually the first recipients of employee flexibility requests) about flexible job design and which options work best for the business. Improving awareness, confidence and skills in managing flexibility normalises different ways of working.

Measure and review

How will you know it's working? Be clear about your outcome measures, which might include:

- Individual and team productivity measures
- Profile of promotion candidates by gender, different flexibilities
- Job application and conversion rates by gender, different flexibilities
- Promotion rates
- Staff engagement scores
- Staff attrition/turnover



CONCLUSION

The British Retail Consortium has recognised that moving up whilst maintaining flexibility is a vital part of what will make the sector a great place to work in 2020.¹⁹ Flexible working can help retail employers to improve diversity at all seniority levels, so that management teams better reflect their customers.

This report has explained how retailers can create part time and flexible jobs in store and general management – and maximise the productivity of employees who would otherwise be locked into junior roles.

Flexible working is a significant part of what will make retail jobs better jobs. A job design approach matches the needs of the employer and employee. It invites employers to adjust structures, processes, and mindsets in order to benefit from access to the widest possible pool of talent.

A genuinely differentiated approach to enabling progression across different employee groups in different jobs demands an informed and agile response from retail employers. These practical hints and suggestions from retailers will help you on your journey. Good luck!

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ABOUT TIMEWISE

Timewise is a multi-award winning social business and leading change agent for the flexible recruitment market in the UK. Led by founders Karen Mattison MBE and Emma Stewart MBE, Timewise undertakes a range of activities to articulate the business benefits of quality part time and flexible work and provides a range of advisory and recruitment services for employers.

Employers who have partnered with us include:



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