

MODERN RETAIL: A NATION OF PART-TIME SHOPKEEPERS?

A report on Timewise's Retail Pioneer Programme, in which we worked with five leading retailers to investigate how flexible working could improve talent progression.



INTRODUCTION



Flexibility in working hours is one of the most important reasons cited for choosing to work in retail¹. And yet employees who need flexibility all too often become trapped in shop-floor roles because of the lack of opportunities to work part-time or flexibly in store management roles. Research from the BRC found that 56% of part-time retail employees felt this way¹.

During an initial pilot with Pets at Home, Timewise identified a 'silent cohort' of would-be managers who couldn't progress. Pets at Home recognised that this meant suppressing or losing talent, and we were able to share our expertise to help them redesign management roles on a part-time and job-share basis to stop this happening.

In May 2017, we launched our Retail Pioneer Programme, developed with the BRC and five inaugural pioneer partners: B&Q, Cook, Dixons Carphone, Tesco and the John Lewis Partnership.

We set out to understand what was getting in the way of flexibility at store management level. Through our in-depth research with each of the five retailers, we interrogated and challenged the cultural and operational barriers to flexibility at present. We then used our flexibility expertise to identify key changes needed to break down the barriers, so that those employees who need flexibility can progress their careers; and their employers can make the best use of their talent. This report contains our findings.

Emma Stewart MBE - Joint CEO, Timewise

In partnership with:



"IN THIS TIME OF CHANGE AND CHALLENGE, IT'S MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER FOR RETAILERS TO ATTRACT AND KEEP TALENTED PEOPLE. THAT'S WHY WE'RE DELIGHTED TO HAVE PARTNERED WITH TIMewise TO UNLOCK MORE SENIOR ROLES TO FLEXIBILITY, AND SO CREATE PATHWAYS FOR FLEXIBLE PROGRESSION. AS WE CONTINUE TO MAKE PROGRESS ON THE JOURNEY TO BETTER JOBS, THIS INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO JOB DESIGN WILL SUPPORT THE INDUSTRY TO DELIVER MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PART-TIME AND FLEXIBLE WORKERS, RESULTING IN REAL BENEFIT FOR RETAILERS AND THEIR CUSTOMERS IN THE MONTHS AND YEARS AHEAD."

Helen Dickinson - Chief Executive, British Retail Consortium

WHY THIS WORK IS NEEDED

The UK retail industry is trying to enhance its productivity whilst facing the challenges of a record high employment rate and the potential skills shortage that a post-Brexit labour market may bring.

- The pace of change is unprecedented: 100,000 people are employed in types of roles that did not even exist five years ago and about 15 per cent of sales are online, growing at 10 to 15 per cent a year².
- Concepts of 'full' and 'part' time feel meaningless in an industry where stores are typically open 80 hours or more each week.
- Pressure on margins, due to increasing costs and subdued consumer spending, means that many retailers have moved to a flatter structure of pay and responsibility grades.
- Retailers must appeal to a diverse range of potential and existing employees.

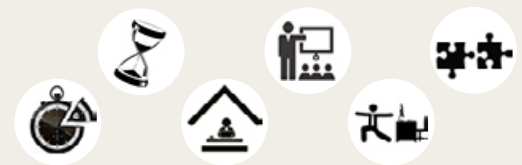
It's never been more important for retailers to attract, retain and progress the best possible talent, particularly as the increased use of technology and rise in digital services change the shape of retail work and reduce the number of jobs available.

For talented staff, being able to see a potential career pathway ahead of them is critical to retaining them within the industry; but with management jobs still predominantly full-time this doesn't feel possible for the majority of retail staff who need to work flexibly. Addressing this will also be a key step forwards in tackling the retail gender pay gap.

Increasingly, flexible working is becoming the norm across UK businesses, with recent Timewise research finding that just 27% of all UK employees work a traditional full-time pattern³. Yet it is still surprisingly unusual to work flexibly in store management roles, even though the days of a single store manager opening up their shop in the morning and pulling down the shutters in the evening are long gone for the majority of UK retailers.

WHAT IS FLEXIBLE WORKING?

At Timewise, we use the term **'flexible working'** to cover any variation in where, when and how much time people work. We believe that flexible roles should be quality, permanent roles which benefit employer and employees alike.



² Retail 2020, Fewer But Better Jobs, BRC, February 2016

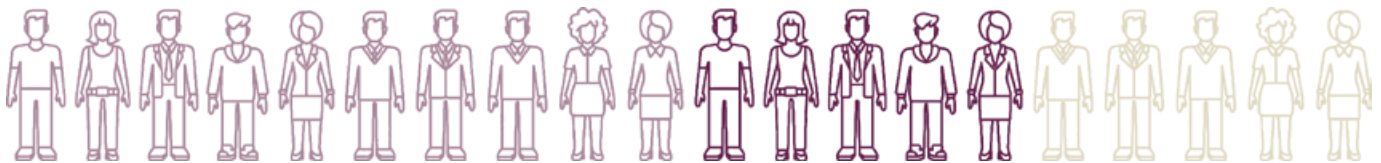
³ Flexible Working: A Talent Imperative, Timewise, September 2017

THE CURRENT PICTURE

The first two stages of the Retail Pioneers programme examined current flexible working practice, explored the business case for flexibility, and assessed each retailer's capacity for change.

We started by working closely with the retailers to understand and analyse who was currently working, doing what, and when. We then took the temperature of current flexible provision, to identify operational barriers which were specific to the retail context, and get a steer on whether career progression on a part-time or flexible basis was seen as a realistic option.

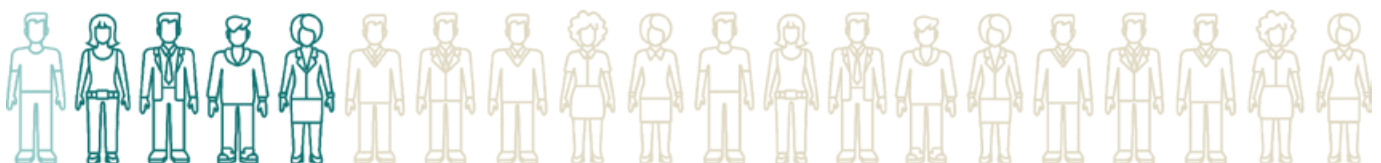
TAKE-UP OF FLEXIBLE WORKING IN THE PIONEERS' STORES:



50%-75% of all store staff work part-time

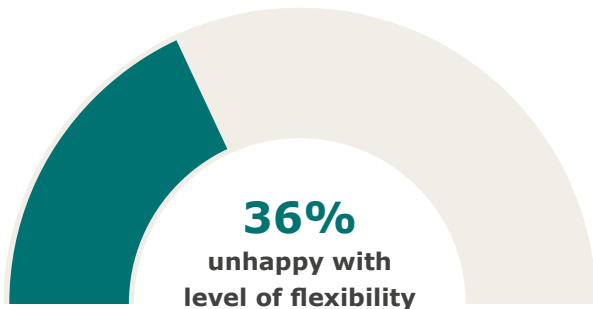


1%-23% of supervisors or managers work part-time

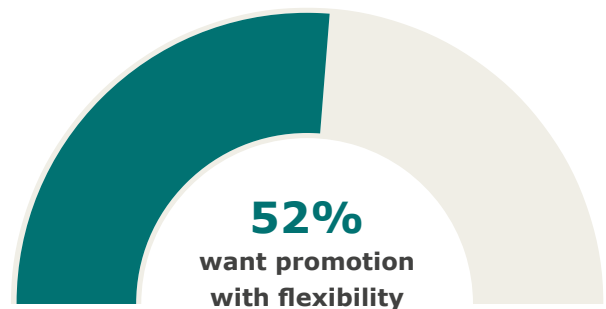


Only **6%-25%** of promotions are awarded to part-time staff.

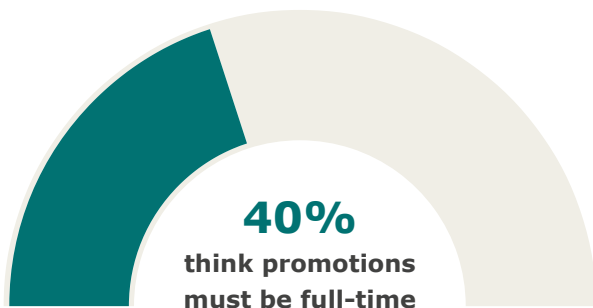
WHAT STAFF THINK ABOUT THE CURRENT SITUATION



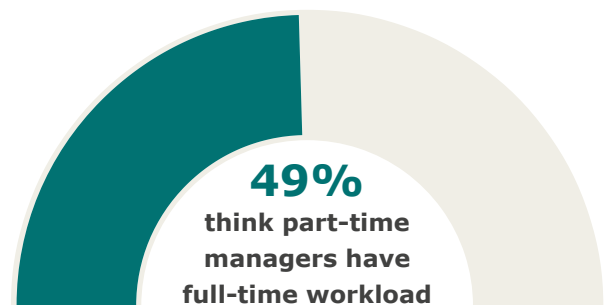
- On average, one third of staff (36%, range from 26% to 54%) at the pioneer retailers are dissatisfied with the current level of flexibility or work life balance in their roles.



- Just over half of the staff across the five retailers said that they would be interested in progression if they could take their current working arrangements with them (52% average, range from 33% to 73%).



- However, more than 40% (range from 17% to 65%) of all respondents believe that they would need to work full-time or change their working pattern to achieve this promotion.



- Half (average 49%, range from 20% to 71%) of all respondents believe that a part-time manager in their store would be expected to deliver the same workload or outputs as a full-time manager.

These staff concerns about the practicalities of flexible working in managerial roles stem from current practice. Our research found that where part-time manager roles do exist, their jobs are often poorly designed, with it being left to the individual job holder to 'make it work' as best they are able to.

This means that the workload for many part-time managers is unachievable and their performance is being measured against unrealistic expectations. And for more junior staff, the few part-time managers who do exist currently are poor role models, as they work in overstretched roles in which it is difficult to succeed.

FLEXIBILITY: A TALENT SOLUTION

A good flexible working strategy can build stronger retail teams. It creates a workplace where promotion is awarded to the most talented employees, and where jobs are designed to be challenging, but also fair and achievable.

"IF WE CAN DEMONSTRATE THAT THIS LEVEL OF FLEXIBILITY ISN'T JUST POSSIBLE, BUT PREFERABLE, THEN WHEN WE HAVE A VACANCY, WE'LL BE ABLE TO INVITE CANDIDATES TO BRING THEIR OWN FLEXIBLE PREFERENCES INTO WORK. THAT'S A POWERFUL INCENTIVE TO COME AND WORK WITH US."

Lesley Ballantyne

Director, Partner Proposition & Experience, John Lewis Partnership

Optimising skills utilisation

Building flexible career paths isn't only about employee satisfaction, it's about maximising the skills of the whole talent pool to benefit the business. The lack of flexible career progression means that talented people are being underutilised and their skills underdeveloped. This might encourage them to leave the industry, and deter others from joining it.

Addressing diversity and the gender pay gap

For some of the 5 retailers, attracting female talent to their stores was a particular challenge, which was likely being compounded by a lack of flexibility. Other retailers had a diverse gender mix at shop floor level, but this reduced dramatically as soon as you looked at supervisor or manager roles. There's a real opportunity for flexible career pathways to have a positive impact on the gender pay gap for retailers.

OUR RESEARCH POINTS TO THE NEED FOR A 2 STEP CHANGE PROCESS:

- 1.** Redesign existing part-time managerial jobs to make them achievable and attractive, supporting management teams to explore how they can redesign workloads and schedules collaboratively. This will start to change perceptions and beliefs throughout the store as employees at all levels see in practice the job design elements that make a flexible managerial role a success.
- 2.** Demonstrate flexible career paths in action by opening up all roles to flex, and promoting and hiring flexibly for managerial roles. Stores will then be able to access the previously untapped flexible workforce both internally and externally, and attract the best talent.

KEY FINDINGS FROM OUR FOCUS GROUPS WITH RETAIL STAFF

Through focus groups with staff at our pioneer retailers, we identified five recurring themes in attitudes to flexible working. Some of these represent barriers that need to be tackled, while others reveal opportunities. The five themes can all be used to inform the change process needed to build flexible career pathways for store managers.

PERCEPTION THAT “STORE MANAGEMENT ROLES HAVE TO BE FULL-TIME”

This perception is typical of both managers and retail team members, due to the volume of work and number of visible hours spent by managers in store.

"I'd do part-time, but there is no way they'd let me work part-time as a manager. It just isn't something we even think about."

Manager

"There's definitely an expectation that you'll go full-time if you want to get promoted."

Retail team member

"We all kill ourselves on the hours. It's a massive role profile. I was told, 'You need to do stuff out of hours or you won't survive as a retail manager.'"

Manager

PART-TIME JOB DESIGN ISN'T HAPPENING

In the majority of cases, when a manager moves to part-time hours this intensifies their work even further, as they are expected to deliver the same outputs in less time.

"You can't fulfil the role profile if you're part-time. It's a massive role profile, and it's not fair that part-timers are judged against the same criteria."

Part-time manager

"My boss said: You can either do jobshare – but you won't find a jobshare partner – or do the whole job part-time."

Newly promoted manager

"Our expectations stay exactly the same for a part-time manager: they just do discretionary work to make up to the same outputs and responsibilities as a full-time colleague."

Manager

EMPOWERING AND TRAINING MANAGERS TO REDESIGN JOBS IS CRITICAL

Store managers and regional managers don't feel capable or empowered to design management and supervisory jobs in a different way to enable more flexibility.

"As store manager you know your shop, your patch, your team. Sometimes it'd be great to be able to say 'I want to organise this (workforce) differently.'"

Store manager

"As store manager you want time with your deputy for planning but because of the rules to have a senior manager in store we are rota'd on opposite shifts and so you end up working on a day off to make it happen."

Store manager

"The centre don't support you with making flex work structurally. What do you do about bank holidays for a part-timer? I rang them and they said they didn't know. So I said, 'Let's look at the policy guidance', so we did that together, and agreed we didn't know what to do."

Manager

FLEXIBILITY DOESN'T JUST MEAN PART-TIME!

Retailers tend to focus on part-time hours, but managers value other forms of flexibility too - including when and where they work.

"I'd like to do a compressed week. I still want a full-time salary but I would like to organise my workload to do it in four days."

Manager

"I'd like to do four days in the shop, and one day out of the shop doing other stuff - development work, some of our community projects which is a big focus for us."

Manager

"For me the key thing is having proper time off. At the moment as a manager, I'm expected to be fully contactable 24-7 when I'm not in store. It means I have zero work life balance."

Manager

MANAGERS RECOGNISE THE VALUE OF FLEXIBILITY

The managers we spoke to could see the significance of flexibility as an attraction and retention tool for themselves and their colleagues.

"In our store we buddy up managers, have clusters within the store, this helps for weekends. We could use a similar approach to give our managers more flexibility - it'd make a big difference for the team."

Manager

"Managers could share out tasks between them, or do weekly tasks like timecards in rotation, or maybe some merchandising or buyer relationships. There's definitely options there."

Store manager

"Lots of maternity returners have to step down. We don't make it easy. But they also don't believe they can do the job part-time. We need to get staff to believe it. I would support it, we're losing experience and talent where it's really needed."

Manager

TAKING ACTION TO DESIGN JOBS DIFFERENTLY

Timewise is working with our pioneer retailers on a range of actions tailored to their specific business needs. The changes they are making will break down barriers to progression for their teams, and bring about new ways of working that are fit for the future.

B&Q is exploring a team-based approach to workforce planning in stores, and reviewing recruitment processes and branding to ensure flexibility is clear.



"At B&Q we are committed to using the insight provided by the pioneer programme to explore how flexible working can be introduced through a team-based approach to workforce planning in stores. We will review recruitment processes and branding to ensure flexibility is clear and made available to potential candidates and existing colleagues. Success stories will be shared across the colleague population to maximise learning and best practice."

Helena Feltham
HR Director, B&Q

Cook is building a set of flexible and part-time job descriptions for store managers, to be rolled out across the network of stores. They will then train their managers in flexible job design.



"Working with Timewise on the retail pioneers programme has given us a rich understanding of the business case for flexibility in our stores, and the potential benefits for our people and our organisation."

Alison Payne
Head of People Operations, Cook

Dixons Carphone is incorporating flexible working into their diversity strategy. They are particularly interested in how they can recruit and hire flexibly.



"The detailed steps of the Timewise process gave us insight into the most pressing issues for our different store formats. Using the data gathered through the pioneer programme we can now target our actions to have most impact."

Caroline Angell

Director of Talent & Development, Dixons Carphone

John Lewis is piloting a team-based approach to management roles in its Peterborough branch, to enable partners to successfully work flexibly in these key positions.

John Lewis

"I'd advise other organisations to be open-minded about the barriers to and effects of flexible working, and to be prepared to have their assumptions challenged; the programme has brought issues to the surface that we previously only had an inkling of."

Lesley Ballantyne

Director, Partner Proposition & Experience,
John Lewis Partnership

Tesco is piloting a team-based approach to flexible job design and hiring, training an internal team to lead working sessions with managers in three pilot stores.



"Participating in this programme has broadened our perspective on flexibility and encouraged us to think differently about how we work. We hope this pilot can be used to help us to offer managers more flexible working options, so they can achieve the right balance between their work-life and home-life."

Sharon Kyte

People Operations Manager for large stores, Tesco

LET'S TALK!

Timewise can help you deep dive into the impact that flexible working has, or could have, on your business. We share market insights on flexible working and flexible hiring, deliver training and consultancy to help businesses attract and develop the best talent, and conduct research such as our annual Flexible Jobs Index. We also run Timewise Jobs, a jobs board for roles that are part-time or open to flexibility.

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Data Source

Unless otherwise referenced, all data in this report is taken from employee surveys conducted by our retail partners in 2017. All employee demographic data was provided by the retail pioneers in 2017.