

Creating Successful Flexible Working-Time Arrangements: Three European Case Studies



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In recent years, flexible working-time arrangements (FWTAs) have gained increased importance. FWTAs refer to the arrangements that employers and/or employees create to customize the regular working-time pattern to meet their variable needs, such as fluctuations in production demands or private-life obligations. If properly structured and facilitated, FWTAs are important for the flexibility and effectiveness of organizations as a whole. FWTAs help organizations to better adjust to the current dynamic economic and market demands, by allowing employers to better cope with workload fluctuations and reducing overtime costs.¹ On the individual level, FWTAs can help employees to better cope with their personal and social demands.² One of the goals of the European Employment Strategy³ is to combine the needs of organizations with the needs of employees through the promotion of more internal labor flexibility. FWTAs are seen as one way to combine these goals.

An important question thus is, how can organizations optimally facilitate FWTAs in order to meet both the organization demands and employee needs? In the current times of crisis, the challenge is to attain a worker-friendly and economically productive perspective for the future.⁴ We believe this is a matter of give-and-take. If FWTAs increase employee satisfaction, employees may walk

that extra flexible mile to the benefit of company performance.

One factor that plays a crucial role in optimally facilitating FWTAs is a mature dialogue between employees and the employer. This means that both parties take into account each other's interests based on trust, justice, and respect.⁵ The stimulation of social dialogue on improving the adaptability of companies through flexibility and security (flexicurity) in the employment relationship is a central purpose of the renewed European Union (EU) social agenda.⁶

In this article, we highlight the experiences of five companies in the retail and automotive industries in Hungary, Belgium, and the Netherlands that have successfully implemented FWTAs. This article is based on a case-study project initiated and carried out on behalf of Eurofound.⁷ The main aim of the project was to explore and show whether and under what conditions working-time flexible arrangements in companies are implemented and can increase productivity and at the same time preserve or improve quality of work in general and especially with regard to work-life balance.

ELEMENTS CONSIDERED IN STUDYING FWTA MODELS

Working time has been the subject of intense debate since the beginning of the Industrial

Revolution. This is reflected in a vast body of literature, not only on working hours per se, but also on related topics, including FWTAs and work-life balance.⁸ This section describes some of these views and introduces the elements of our research model.

Working-Time Flexibility Definition

In this article, *working-time flexibility* refers to the ability of employer and employee to modify the existing working-time pattern, as needed, rather than creating atypical employment contracts or isolated arrangements. The focus of our case studies was on flexible forms of working hours, such as short-term and long-term working-time accounts, variable working hours, flextime, staggered

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working hours, and irregular shifts, as well as tailor-made solutions.

Working-time flexibility may be viewed from the perspective of the employee or employer. Employee-friendly forms of working-time flexibility are “those that provide workers with the freedom to adapt their working hours and schedule to meet their own personal and family needs.”⁹ Employer-friendly forms of working-time flexibility are those that allow organizations to “bring human capital in line with the temporal requirements following from business, such as times of customer demands, machine running times, [and] optimal utilization of capital invested.”¹⁰

Working Conditions

Working conditions is a broad concept that encompasses the quality of the job, the working environment, and labor relations. It also includes health-related outcomes, work-life balance, employability, and job security. There is a large amount of literature on health outcomes of irregular working hours.¹¹ However, in the companies highlighted in this article, health-related outcomes were not primarily considered when FWTAs were negotiated. This article, therefore, focuses primarily on work-life balance, job security, and employability as employee outcomes.

Employability refers to a person's capability for gaining and maintaining employment. This depends on the supply of employee knowledge, skills, and abilities, and the demand within the labor market.¹² It is difficult to assess the overall impact that various types of FWTAs have on aspects such as work-life balance, job security, and employability.¹³ Employer-friendly working-time flexibility may be negative for workers if it leads to more intensification of work, more irregularity in work schemes, less income security, and less time sovereignty. Although intensification of work may mean that employees must work more hours and work harder, that does not necessarily imply that employees are less satisfied.¹⁴ In contrast, Liberman¹⁵ assumed that employees can trade intensification of employment flexibility for more income, job security, or other benefits they get from their employers, such as investments in training and careers. For this article, these trade-offs are of most interest, because they connect to a balanced approach to the employee and employer outcomes of FWTAs.

Company Performance

Employers that consider working-time flexibility do so primarily to increase company performance and, in turn, increase their competitiveness in the marketplace. An employer-friendly FWTA may help a company better adjust the number of hours worked to meet market demands. These goals do not necessarily work against the goals employees may seek from FWTAs. In fact, much of the literature regarding FWTAs acknowledges the relationship between employee-oriented flexibility and productivity and states that workers' ability to choose their working-time arrangements is an important factor in improving job performance and productivity.¹⁶ For instance, increasing the employees' time sovereignty may result in a more satisfied workforce that will also be more committed and productive.

Dialogue Between Employer and Employee

As we mentioned previously, the dialogue that occurs between employers and employees on working hours is an important factor in determining the success of an FWTA and ensuring that it results in improved company performance. *Dialogue* is defined as a two-way conversation in which the parties take into account each other's interests based on trust, justice, and respect.¹⁷

Some studies point to the social-exchange theory or the concept of reciprocity¹⁸ as mechanisms to satisfy parties with different, sometimes conflicting interests. Others focus on dialogue and tailor-made arrangements to align company needs with employee needs.¹⁹ Lee, McCann, and Messenger emphasize "the need for social dialogue to permit workers' needs and preferences to be heard and acted

on; to enhance firms' productivity; and to allow workers and employers to work together towards realizing high-skill/high-quality firms and economies."²⁰ In general, the dialogue between employer and employee can take place at the collective and at the individual level, as described below:

- *Collective Dialogue.* At the company or sector level, employees and the employer can have a collective dialogue on the rules with regard to working-time flexibility. Working-time arrangements are usually negotiated between management and employee representatives (unions and works councils), in the form of a collective-bargaining agreement.²¹

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- *One-on-One Dialogue.* At the individual level, an employee can have a dialogue with his or her manager on the daily working hours. This can be a result of the room for differentiation between employees that the collective agreements leave. Some companies allow tailor-made employment relations that support employees to make individual agreements about their working hours.²² At the individual level, employees can also have influence on their working hours in a more informal way. Here, in dialogue with their managers or local planners, employees try to fit in their working-time preferences.²³

CASE-STUDY APPROACH

This article is based on five qualitative case studies of retail and automotive organizations in

the Netherlands, Belgium, and Hungary, carried out on behalf of Eurofound.²⁴ The case-study research in the Netherlands and Belgium was carried out by TNO and Modern Workx. The case-study research in Hungary was carried out by the Research Group for Learning Economy and Innovation at Szent István University. A case-study approach allows us to investigate the complexity of the relationships²⁵ in everyday practice and the success factors of the FWTAs, such as the employee–employer dialogue.

The retail and the automotive sectors were selected because one may expect a strong influence of the economic crisis and competitive pressure here. Therefore, the need for an adequate flexibility strategy is important for competitive reasons, and the achievement of a balance with employees' interest is not self-evident. The focus in

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the study is on employees in production departments and in retail stores.

The five case companies and background on their working-time arrangements are introduced in the subsections that follow.

Two Retail Companies

Colruyt/lowest prices (Colruyt) is the largest retailer in the Colruyt Group, with 222 supermarkets in Belgium (as of 2011). To guarantee the lowest prices, the stores are kept as plain as possible, and the work methods are structured as efficiently as possible. In the case study, we focus on one of the Colruyt supermarkets in the region of Flanders that has 39 employees,

all with a permanent contract. The average working week is 35 hours, and the company aims at full-time, long-term employment relationships. However, employees can work part-time at their own request. The company's need for flexible working hours stems from the highly fluctuating number of customers per day, week, and over the year; as well as from the customer demand for longer opening hours. For this purpose, the company applies an annual working-time account for all workers.

Vroom & Dreesman (V&D) is the largest department store in the Netherlands, with 62 stores and over 10,000 employees. V&D sells a large range of midpriced nonfood products like fashion, multimedia, electronics, books, and home-furnishing products. In the case study, we focus on a V&D store that has approximately 70 employees, of which a bit over 50 percent have a permanent contract. The other workers have min-max contracts in a range between 3 and 38 hours per week. Of the employees with a permanent contract, more than half have a contract of 32 hours or less. The company's need for flexible working hours stems from the highly fluctuating number of customers per day, week, and over the year, as well as from customer demand to be able to shop seven days a week. For this purpose, the company uses a working-time account of annualized hours for the employees with a permanent contract and combines this with min-max contracts.

Three Automotive Companies

Nido (Aebi Schmidt Nederland) produces and sells salt-spreading machines for winter road maintenance, primarily for the Dutch market. Nido's key customers are local municipalities, provinces, and the central government. The company consists of a production and

development department and a sales and services department, totaling to over 200 employees. Our case study focuses on the assembly section in the production department. The average working time is 40 hours per week. Although Nido will grant all workers' requests to work part-time, only a few workers have a part-time contract. The company's need for flexible working hours stems from the seasonal pattern in production, with a peak in the months before the winter. For this purpose, the company applies an annual working-time account that allows the company to differ between high and low seasons.

CabTec is a company of Swiss origin that has two plants in Hungary. CabTec produces more than 10,000 products, including conductors, cables, and interlocking devices, for automotive-industry companies. The plant of the study, in Kecskemét, was hit by the negative effects of the economic and financial downturn in 2008 and 2009. In 2011, the number of workers at the Hungarian plants was 338, an increase from 2009, when the company employed 310 workers. The company's need for flexible working hours stems from seasonal fluctuations and strong economic fluctuations in the automotive industry. To cope with seasonal fluctuations, the company uses a working-time account over a two-month period. As a response to the crisis, the company applied a compressed working week for several months.

Audi Hungaria Motor Kft. (Audi) was established in 1993 in Győr. At the time of the establishment of Audi, the company's main task was the assembly of the engines of the Audi TT coupé. All the parts of the engines and cars were imported from the mother company from Germany and other suppliers. The Győr plant is growing, despite the effects of the 2008 crisis, and doubled the

surface space of the production halls in 2012 and 2013. The company's need for flexible working hours stems from seasonal fluctuations and strong economic fluctuations in the automotive industry. Audi chose a strategy to protect all its well-trained workers with implementing a special three-year-long flexible working-time arrangement and guaranteed job protection until the end of 2011 for 1,100 full-time core workers.

Interviews and Research

In each of the companies selected for our case studies, we have conducted face-to-face and group interviews with company management, local management, employee representatives (unions or works councils), and employees. We have studied relevant documents when available, such as actual work schedules, financial figures, annual reports, and results of employee surveys conducted by the company, when available. We conducted the research at the end of 2011 and the beginning of 2012.

VARIABILITY OF WORKING HOURS AND TIME ACCOUNTS

In this section we elaborate on the two main aspects of working-time flexibility that were found in the case companies: the variability of the working hours and the working-time accounts in place.

Both retail companies face great variability in the amount of customers during the day, but also over the week. Apart from this variability, there are seasonal fluctuations related to specific holidays or simply related to the weather conditions. Because the amount of work is closely related to the number of customers in the stores,

both companies tried to adjust the number of workers as closely as possible to the expected number of customers. This results in individualized work rosters with many different shifts, starting and ending at different hours per day.

In the automotive sector, the level of variability in the daily working hours is much lower, and the work schedules are more collectively organized. The tasks of the employees are closely connected to each other on the production lines; an individual simply does not easily step in or out of the production line. Due to the character of the work processes, work schedules have a more collective and more regular character than in retail. Variability of working hours per day or week is linked to seasonal or long-term fluctuations in the demand for products.

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By using a compressed working week (four ten-hour days per week) for a short period of time, CabTec was able to save on energy and production costs, without decreasing the number of working hours. It prevented dismissal of permanent workers by the company. The same is the case with the long-term working-time account at Audi, on which we elaborate later.

All case companies have negotiated working-time accounts. Both retail companies have implemented a time-banking system that is based on an average working week on a yearly basis and allows high variability in the planning over the weeks. This allows the companies to have the flexibility to cope with

fluctuations in the demand for labor, which can differ from day to day. The employees have highly individualized rosters but are being paid a fixed salary on the basis of their average working week. Both retail companies use something called a "wish book" in order to meet the demands of the employees. Employees can express their wishes with regard to their working hours and thus achieve a good work-life balance, despite the flexible work rosters.

Colruyt

Colruyt has developed a time-banking system with a working-time account over a one-year period. The maximum positive balance (overtime hours worked) in the time account may reach 130 hours on a yearly basis (or 100 hours at the request of the employee), and the maximum negative balance (reduction in hours) may reach 40 hours (only on a voluntary basis). Management and unions used the new agreement to combine new rules on the broadening of the store's opening hours with new rules about the working-time account. The accounts are tailored to the needs and desires of employees, who fill in personal templates once every six months (in dialogue with their managers) and choose whether or not to work overtime, the number of overtime hours on a weekly or monthly basis one wants to work, and whether the overtime hours will be compensated with leave, paid out, or put into an account. Employees can also choose whether to work early-morning shifts. Employees can decide at any moment to change their individual agreement.

V&D

V&D has negotiated a time-banking system at the corporate level. Employees with a

permanent contract at V&D have a contract for a specific number of hours per year (the so-called current account) and work an average number of hours per week. They have a fixed salary per month. The weekly deviation to the average working week can be 40 percent for employees who work fewer than 30 hours per week and 30 percent for employees who work more than 30 hours per week. They also have a right to fixed days off.

Nido

Working-time flexibility at Nido is limited, due to the nature of the production processes in the assembly line. The working-time account allows the company to change from an eight-hour working day to a nine-hour working day in high season and allows both management and the employees to be compensated for these additional hours at other times of the year by means of a closure of the production line and/or individual leave. The working-time account has a maximum positive balance of 200 hours and a maximum negative balance of 50 hours.

CabTec

CabTec uses a working-time account over a two-month period; this means that all workers have to work 40 hours per week in a two-month average. This two-month-average working-time calculation improves predictability both for the employer and employee and gives the opportunity for individual employees to take time off: the worker can take one or more day(s) off if he or she has overtime from the previous month. As a response to the crisis, CabTec modified the working hours at every department, and from March to May 2009, personnel worked four

ten-hour days per week instead of five eight-hour days in order to save energy and production costs. The crimping and cutting units' two-shift system was modified to a one-shift system. Employees with young children worked four eight-hour days per week. There was a reduction in their salary. In practice, many of them chose to have a second job or worked in their family greenhouses to earn extra money on the fifth day.

Audi

As a response to the economic crisis, Audi introduced a working-time account over a three-year period. The six-day workweek was reduced to five days. The other change in fiscal compensation was that the annual premium (bonus) was not paid in full amount to the employees. As compensation, all the workers received 12 extra days. Altogether, all employees received 22 extra days to spend. These were calculated in a three-year average. So, if an employee worked less than the average in 2009, he or she had to work more days and have fewer holidays in 2010 and 2011.

FINDING THE BALANCE

Each of the five case companies designed an FWTA that balanced the specific company's goals and the employees' needs. This section describes how the companies found their way toward a balanced approach.

None of the FTWAs implemented by the five companies targeted improved working conditions as the primary goal of the arrangement. The FWTAs were essentially employer-driven, implemented to cope with external challenges and competitive pressure. With the introduction of flexible

working hours, the companies were able to improve productivity by creating a better match between the demand for labor and the number of hours worked. Both the working-time accounts and the possibility of variable working days and weeks help to reduce overtime on the one hand and underutilization of personnel on the other. However, both employee representatives and employers from the various companies acknowledge that there has also been a positive impact on work-life balance, job security, and employability. The FWTAs have been implemented in an employee-friendly manner.

Work-Life Balance

Due to the high variability of the working hours in retail, it is hard to combine work and family life. However, the employees at both Colruyt and V&D indicate that they

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don't have a problem with the variability of the working hours. Interviews with employees indicated that the following aspects are important: the voluntary character of the arrangement and the negotiability of the working hours, the ability to change shifts with colleagues, the fixed days off, and the informal influence of employees on their working hours.

Colruyt used to deploy mostly older male workers, but with its growth, more women and younger workers entered the company. Both management and unions wanted to guarantee that all employees

were able to have a good work-life balance. The management found it necessary to create more transparency with regard to the working-time preferences of employees and to guarantee the voluntariness in the flexibility that was requested from them. Balance was achieved as a result of the way in which new working hours were implemented rather than the working hours alone. The most important aspects of this are the negotiability of the working hours, the influence the employees have on them, the notification period of three weeks for the weekly work schedules, the sufficient means for compensation, and the considerable possibilities to get time off when needed. However, the fact that overtime is now monitored quite closely and controlled by the manager was also important. The monthly salary sheet provides all the necessary information needed to see the number of overtime hours worked, accrued time off, and benefits received.

The unions at V&D wanted to improve the work-life balance of employees by providing less flexibility in the working hours. The unions view the limitation of the bandwidth of the working-time account and the provision of fixed days off as important measures to create a better work-life balance. For example, employees with a contract of 20 hours per week or more have the right to ask for one fixed day off in the week. Employees with a contract of fewer than 20 hours have the right to ask for two fixed days off in the week. Every half-year, these fixed days can be changed by the employee, in a dialogue with the manager. Apart from this, employees appreciate what they call "informal flexibility," which means that they can change their working hours and exchange hours with colleagues, in consultation with

their floor managers, whenever needed. They also appreciate the fixed day off that is agreed to in the new CLA. They confirm that this provides them with more security and better work-life balance.

For the employees in the automotive sector with collectively agreed-upon working hours, work-life balance improves due to the predictability of the working hours and the notification period for collective closures, but also due to the ability to take days off or vacation when needed and to know this in due time.

The working-time account at Nido is introduced in order to respond to the highly seasonal demands for products and is not intended to improve health or work-life balance. However, management and the works council did aim for a win-win situation in their negotiations on the new time-banking system and have reached a compromise, in particular with regard to the limits of the min/max hours, the obliged vacations, the notification time for eight- or nine-hour working days, and additional compensation. Also, short-term requests from employees for taking days off when necessary are granted, even in peak season.

At CabTec, the possibility to take some time off in the two-month time-banking system helps to provide more individualized working hours. If the worker has overtime and knows when he or she wants to take it out, it is communicated to the head of the department and, depending on the next month's orders, he or she accepts the request for having the day off. So, the company has time to rearrange the work schedule of the worker. Another measure to achieve work-life balance is the special shift for female workers with young children on one part of the production line; they have the chance to take their children to kindergarten or the primary school.

Job Security and Employability

Management and employee representation at CabTec and Audi were prepared to compromise in order to combine more flexibility with job security.

In a low-wage country such as Hungary with high unemployment, job protection is a key factor both for the employee and the employer. The Audi management chose the option to change the work schedules and introduce long-term working-time accounts and to keep the level of salaries and guaranteed job protection for three years. This was supported by the employee representation.

The employability of the employees in all case companies increased, due to the fact that the companies focused on

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internal flexibility and aimed for long-term employment relationships. As part of their employee-friendly personnel strategy, they also offer training and career opportunities. Some of the companies deliberately combine working-time flexibility with functional flexibility, which provides more challenging jobs and learning opportunities on the job for the employee and higher flexibility for the company.

NEGOTIATED FLEXIBILITY

In all companies, the FWTAs were negotiated between management and employee representatives. In these negotiations, unions and works councils have pursued protective

measures against too much company-oriented flexibility and set rules that have made the measures more employee-friendly.

The working-time account at V&D was introduced more than 12 years ago. The intention was to create a better alignment between the need for labor and the availability of employees. In the beginning, the system was open-ended, and the result was that some employees had a negative and others a positive balance at the end of the year. This was an undesired situation for both management and the unions. The outcome of the new dialogue was an agreement to decrease the annual bandwidth of the time-banking system (the number of hours annually allowed above or below the average contractual working hours) from 7 percent in 2010 to 4 percent in 2011 and to 2 percent in 2012.

Management and unions at Colruyt negotiated a new collective agreement on the working hours and the working-time account. Part of the debate was about the extended opening hours of the Colruyt stores. Unions wanted to protect the employees from working too much in the early morning, in the evening, or on Sunday. Colruyt reassured the unions that there was no intention to expand the general opening hours to Sunday, and a compromise was reached with regard to the opening hours and financial benefits.

At Nido, the works council opened a discussion with the local management about the maximum amount of hours that workers could be indebted to the time bank. Employees feared that the maximum deficit of 200 hours could lead to a reduction of working hours over the years. They also feared that the rules around the high-peak periods and obligatory leave in

low-peak periods would be enforced strictly. A process of negotiations was started. The final outcome is that the maximum deficit was decreased to 50 hours. And although management does obtain the ability to declare collective closing days, the workers do get compensated in additional time off.

At CabTec employees and the works council understood the necessity of the measures in order to protect jobs: the introduction of a compressed working week, the change from two shifts to one, and the reduction of working time for women with young children. Furthermore, the new break system and its compensation met the demands of employees: 20 minutes out of the 30-minute daily breaks are paid, so there is an increase in the salary for the blue-collar workers.

The management of Audi and the employee representatives worked on their common aim to protect jobs, and the FWTAs have been implemented with the support of all the parties. The extra 22 days off were a compensation for the stagnation of salary and the decreased financial premium. The employer announced the compulsory days off, which were mostly concentrated around holidays. The employees were informed in advance about the days off so they could plan for these extra days with their families.

DIALOGUE, TRUST, AND RECIPROCITY

One of the findings of the study was the importance of mature employment relations in order to reach a balance between employer- and employee-friendly flexible working hours. In order to reach this, three conditions are important: dialogue, trust, and reciprocity. All three are important at both the collective and the individual levels.

- *Dialogue*: A mature dialogue requires mature employee representation and HR management and a setting in which a balance of interests can be achieved. A top-down approach will not work in a way that enhances support from workers for change and renewal. At all five companies, the employee representatives could negotiate with management and were taken seriously in their role. But also at the level of the work floor, a dialogue between the individual employee and the manager is important, in order to reach the necessary informal flexibility, which is highly appreciated by the employees.
- *Trust*: The parties to the agreements are aware that each side has its own agenda. This is not a problem as long as parties respect each other's points of view and interests. Trust must be earned. Defining the scope and boundaries of the debate is also important for creating trust.

Trust is important not only at the executive level, but also at the level of the work floor, between manager and employee. Clarity on the company strategy is important in this respect. Employees need to understand the reasons behind the company-oriented working-time flexibility and at the same time trust their managers in respecting the employee demands. The quality of the floor manager is also very important in building trust, in terms of negotiability and predictability. It is important for the employees that they can negotiate individually about their specific needs with regard to working hours. Most important is the fact that the manager respects the individual needs and allows employees to formulate these needs. The day-to-day possibility to change shifts with

colleagues or to take time off when needed is a prerequisite for being able to combine work with private life.

- *Reciprocity*: Reciprocity cannot be seen apart from the social-exchange character of employment relations. An individual who receives something that is in line with or beyond expectations will feel motivated to reciprocate in a similar way, sometimes displaying extra effort. Reciprocity implies the preparedness to negotiate, to check, and to correct at any time when necessary. Only in such a setting will partners be prepared to start dealing in a way that they can respect opposite interests.

LESSONS LEARNED

The bottom line is the presence of mature employment relations between employer and employee. The preparedness to negotiate con-

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structively is essential. Such a dialogue takes place both at the level of the collective agreements and at the individual level. At the collective level, the framework is set in which there is room for tailor-made arrangements on the individual level. Employee demands are respected—as much as possible. The local manager should have the skills to have a mature dialogue with the employees as well as the skills to plan the working hours as efficiently as possible. Moreover, the manager should provide predictability and should clearly communicate the need for flexibility.

In many organizations, workers must adapt to whatever work setting the employer establishes. The case studies show different ways in which companies can find a more balanced approach. Receiving higher flexibility from employees can be earned by an adapted personnel policy, by creating stable and secure jobs. Overall, the success of working-time flexibility is highly dependent on the mixture of flexibility measures and will not have the same impact by itself. The broader setting is of importance to understand how balance is reached. Companies need to know how to react to their environment with different kinds of measures.

Internal Flexibility

All five case companies made the choice to intensify the internal flexibility in combination with FWTAs. The number of workers

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at the departments can be rearranged at any time in order to provide the needed service. Colruyt, for instance, applies an employment model that is very unusual for supermarkets; the company does not hire temporary employees but rather looks for flexibility within its own staff. Colruyt offers employees training on the job to develop their qualifications in a broad way so they can work in different processes when needed. The focus on internal flexibility and long-term employment relationships in the case companies led to higher job security and satisfaction for the employees.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HR MANAGERS

The most important implication for HR managers is that the cases provide evidence that it is possible to achieve both good working conditions and company performance with FWTAs, even in economically difficult times. We have seen that a mature dialogue between employee representatives and management is essential and should feature trust, preparedness for negotiation, and reciprocity. This is necessary not only on the collective level, but on the individual level as well. Furthermore, collective arrangements should leave room for tailor-made solutions between individual employees and managers. HR managers played a crucial role in each of the cases highlighted here. HR managers acted as the pivot between employee needs and employer needs, by providing management with advice in the negotiation process, by developing the systems that support and monitor the FWTAs, by training floor managers to have a mature dialogue with the employees, and by providing training on the job for employees to increase their internal flexibility.

Certainly, successful implementation trajectories are always unique in several ways, making it hard for them to be copied by others. Without regarding the five presented cases as best practices, one can nonetheless learn much from the mechanisms behind their success. How one balances between employer and employee interests is a unique journey for each company and the employees, but it seems to be best guided by a mature employee–employer dialogue.

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