STIVEN CATALYST

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MANAGEMENT REVIEW

Management without theatre.



ROLE

PREDICTABLE SCHEDULES: THE ROSTER AS A MANAGEMENT TOOL

An experiment in 28 stores, how little notice hourly workers get, why the hours weigh more than the pay, four sides of a stable roster, five numbers to watch, and a card for the next roster.

+7%

median sales in the Gap stores that moved to more stable schedules, in a randomised experiment in 28 stores (2015–2016).

WILLIAMS ET AL., 2018

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NO. 81 · ROLE

In this issue

For people paid by the hour, the roster decides when they earn, sleep and see their families. It is usually treated as an output of the forecast. The research of the last decade treats it as a lever: on the health of the team and on the results of the site.

In a randomised experiment in 28 Gap stores, more stable schedules went with 7% higher median sales. In a survey of 27,792 hourly workers at 80 large US firms, a third had less than a week's notice of their schedule. Ending on-call shifts went with a fall in distress more than seven times larger than a raise of $4 an hour. Four sides of a stable roster, five numbers to watch, the legal floor and a card for the next roster close the issue.

Stiven Janaqi EDITOR · STIVEN CATALYST

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HOW TO READ THIS ISSUE

Figure
Every figure has its source and year at the foot of its page.

Our reading
Where the editor interprets rather than the research, it says so.

Practice
The steps and the card are proposals to try, not research results.

COVER STORY

Two weeks' notice

On 1 October 2015 Gap required all its US stores to publish schedules two weeks ahead and stopped on-call shifts. Researchers from three universities then tested five more practices from November 2015 to August 2016: in 19 stores in San Francisco and Chicago, against 9 that kept the usual roster.

01	**Shift swapping by app**	Staff swap shifts without the manager; the manager posts extra shifts.
02	**Stable shift structure**	Standard start and end times for the store.
03	**Core scheduling**	The same days and times for each person, week after week.
04	**Part-time Plus**	A core team promised, softly, 20 hours a week or more.
05	**Targeted extra staffing**	Extra hours at fixed times in 13 stores, paid by Gap.

+7%
median sales in the stores with the practices

+5%
sales per hour of labour

OUR READING

The schedule was not a cost to cut here. Kept steady, it paid for itself.

Source: Joan C. Williams, Susan J. Lambert, Saravanan Kesavan et al., WorkLife Law, UC Hastings College of the Law, 2018

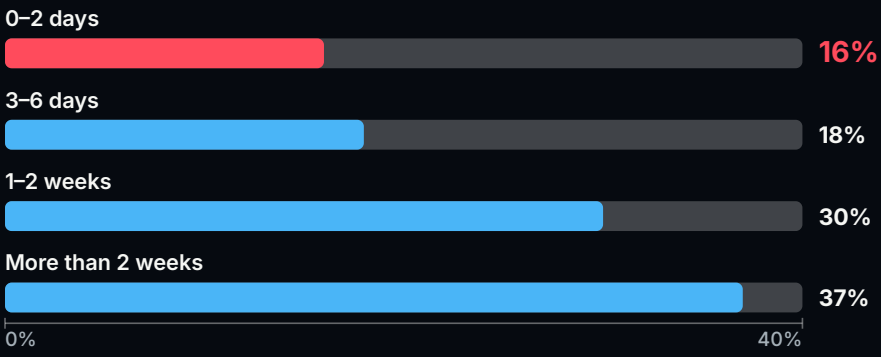
Results as the researchers estimated them (difference-in-differences, 35 weeks). Gap took part and gave a $50,000 seed grant. At the end Gap cut the notice from two weeks to ten days.

THE NUMBERS

Less than a week

The Shift Project surveyed 27,792 hourly workers at 80 large US retail and food-service firms in 2016 and 2017. They were recruited through Facebook advertisements and weighted to match the workforce.

NOTICE OF THE WEEKLY SCHEDULE, SHARE OF WORKERS (2016–2017)



50%
worked a “clopening”: a closing shift, then an opening one less than 11 hours later, in the past month

26%
worked on call in the past month

14%
had a shift cancelled with less than 24 hours' notice

Half had no say at all in their schedule. Between the best and the worst week of the month, hours swung by 32% on average.

OUR READING

Two weeks' notice was the exception, not the rule. For most, next week was still open.

Source: Daniel Schneider & Kristen Harknett, American Sociological Review 84(1), 2019

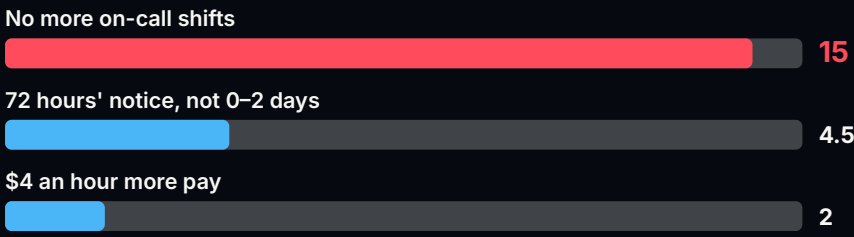
Workers' own reports; the bars count workers and add to 101% by rounding. US retail and food service, not a probability sample. Read in the full text of the article.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Time weighs more than pay

In the same data, every form of unstable scheduling went with more psychological distress, and most with worse sleep and less happiness. Schneider and Harknett then set changes to the schedule beside raises in the minimum wage.

ESTIMATED FALL IN PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS FOR THE WORKERS AFFECTED, PERCENTAGE POINTS



Of the workers who had a shift cancelled at short notice, 65% reported distress, against under 45% of the others. Work-life conflict accounted for 76% of the link between instability and distress, household economic insecurity for 42%, each measured on its own.

OUR READING

The hours hurt less through the money than through the life around them.

Source: Daniel Schneider & Kristen Harknett, American Sociological Review 84(1), 2019

A cross-sectional survey: associations, not proof of cause. The “effects” are differences in predicted shares, as the authors say; the wage base is $7.25. Read in the full text.

THE MODEL

Four sides of a stable roster

The Gap study measured stability on four sides, each with its own data: the published schedules, the time clock and two surveys of staff.

01

Consistency

Same days, times and hours each week. Same start or end hour: under 3 in 10 shifts without the practices, over 3 in 9 with them.

02

Predictability

The shift worked is the shift published. Changed by 15 minutes or more: 46% of shifts without the practices, 41% with them.

03

Adequacy

Enough hours for those who want them. Part-time Plus: 21 hours a week before, 26 after; the average did not rise.

04

Input

A say in when one works. Input into the days worked: 75% with the practices, 66% without.

Demand was not the main cause of instability: week-to-week traffic explained only 30% of the swings in weekly payroll hours. Managers named three causes at headquarters: shipments, promotions changed at the last minute, and visits by leaders.

OUR READING

Much of a store's instability is made upstream. The roster is where it lands.

Source: Joan C. Williams, Susan J. Lambert, Saravanan Kesavan et al., WorkLife Law, UC Hastings College of the Law, 2018

Definitions and results condensed from Williams et al. (2018): weeks with the practices against weeks without; survey answers for input. Demand and capacity in one plan are in No. 59.

More in the essay High-volume days: the standard under pressure

HOW IT IS MEASURED

Five numbers for a roster

The two studies measured stability with simple counts. A manager can take them from the published roster and the time clock, period after period.

01	**Notice**	Days from publishing the roster to its first shift.
02	**Changed shifts**	Share of shifts worked 15 minutes or more off the published start or end.
03	**Hours swing**	Most minus fewest weekly hours in four weeks, divided by the most.
04	**Late cancellations**	Shifts cancelled with less than 24 hours' notice.
05	**Clopenings**	A closing shift followed by an opening one less than 11 hours later.

The legal floor: under Directive (EU) 2019/1152, a worker whose pattern is mostly unpredictable may refuse work outside agreed reference hours and days, or without reasonable notice. In Germany, for work on call, the notice is at least four days.

Sources: Joan C. Williams, Susan J. Lambert, Saravanan Kesavan et al., WorkLife Law, UC Hastings College of the Law, 2018; Daniel Schneider & Kristen Harknett, American Sociological Review 84(1), 2019; European Parliament and Council of the European Union, Official Journal L 186, 2019; Bundesministerium der Justiz, gesetze-im-internet.de, 2000

Definitions from Williams et al. (2018) and Schneider & Harknett (2019); the selection is the editors'. Article 10 of the directive and § 12 TzBfG, summarised, not legal advice. Rest and the body clock are in No. 45.

TOOL OF THE ISSUE

The roster card

One card per roster: filled in when it is published, checked when the period ends. Shift Capacity turns the volume forecast into heads per shift before the roster is written.

01	**Published, first shift**	the two dates, and the notice in days
02	**Reference hours and days**	the time frame in which work can be asked
03	**Core shifts**	who keeps the same days and times as last period
04	**Changes after publishing**	shifts moved 15 minutes or more; asked by the site or by the worker
05	**Late cancellations, clopenings**	how many, and for whom
06	**What drove the changes**	demand, a delivery, a promotion, a visit, an absence; what to plan next time

Sources: Joan C. Williams, Susan J. Lambert, Saravanan Kesavan et al., WorkLife Law, UC Hastings College of the Law, 2018; Daniel Schneider & Kristen Harknett, American Sociological Review 84(1), 2019; European Parliament and Council of the European Union, Official Journal L 186, 2019

A card the editors propose, after Williams et al. (2018), Schneider & Harknett (2019) and Article 10 of Directive (EU) 2019/1152.

Open the tool: Shift Capacity stivencatalyst.com/tools/shift-capacity/

SOURCES AND METHOD

Every figure has a source.

The figures in this issue come from the sources below. The year shows how recent each one is.

Stable Scheduling Increases Productivity and Sales: The Stable Scheduling Study
Joan C. Williams, Susan J. Lambert, Saravanan Kesavan et al., WorkLife Law, UC Hastings College of the Law, 2018
https://worklifelaw.org/publications/Stable-Scheduling-Study-Report.pdf

Consequences of Routine Work-Schedule Instability for Worker Health and Well-Being
Daniel Schneider & Kristen Harknett, American Sociological Review 84(1), 2019
https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122418823184

Directive (EU) 2019/1152 on transparent and predictable working conditions in the European Union, Articles 1, 4, 10 and 21
European Parliament and Council of the European Union, Official Journal L 186, 2019
https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2019/1152/oj/eng

Teilzeit- und Befristungsgesetz (TzBfG), § 12 Arbeit auf Abruf
Bundesministerium der Justiz, gesetze-im-internet.de, 2000
https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/tzbfg/__12.html

EDITORIAL METHOD

Each figure was checked for its year, its publisher and what it measures, in the full text where it could be opened. A source read only in a summary, an abstract or excerpts is marked “via”. A figure not confirmed in what was read is marked so on its page, or left out. The editor's interpretation is marked “Our reading”.



MANAGEMENT REVIEW

Management without theatre.

Every issue, one management question, checked against the best research.

ALL ISSUES

stivencatalyst.com/magazine/management-review.html

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Edited by Stiven Janaqi, who answers for it; “the editors” in this publication means him. Its texts, translations, layout and the checking of figures against their sources are done in working sessions with Claude, an AI model by Anthropic.
stivencatalyst.com/how-this-is-made.html