

Viewpoint

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Modern Workforce Scheduling Requires a New Mindset

Over the last decade, various aspects of scheduling deskless or hourly workers, and managing their efforts in general, have become increasingly more sophisticated. While this has largely been a result of organizations wanting and needing more precision around deploying workers, scheduling processes are being pulled to even greater levels of sophistication for other reasons of late. The new catalysts are arguably more related to employee-centric considerations such as what employees want and need

from these processes, and how their lives at work are impacted by them.

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In industries such as manufacturing, retail, hospitality, dining, healthcare, transportation and municipalities, organizations are reaping the benefits of workforce management (WFM) platforms, and specifically, their newer scheduling automation capabilities. Just one example is the way in which third-party tools and flow-of-work collaboration and communication features have been embedded directly into workforce scheduling activities. This has resulted in workers being able to inquire what a certain shift is like or what skills are needed for it, again, with more emphasis being placed on the needs and interests of workers. Beyond the range of key HCM processes to execute well on within the WFM realm, this is really about the quality of the employee experience (EX) more broadly. Indeed, a management focus on the EX has become highly correlated with the ability to attract and retain top talent, not unlike the benefits of delivering a superior customer experience.

In our view, three pivotal WFM-related topics or operating lenses have emerged from this intense focus on the EX: Driving employee engagement, enhancing manager productivity and what we'll refer to as "scheduling for all." Let's drill into these three critical themes.

Driving Employee Engagement: For front-line deskless workers, scheduling flexibility is second only to payroll in HCM processes that drive employee sentiment. When given the freedom to arrange their own schedules according to personal needs, employees become more invested in their work and their workplace. Predictable schedules promote work/life balance as well as the perception of fairness and equity, both of which are critical elements in achieving a corporate culture that attracts and retains



talent. Certain technology considerations become front and center within this context. They include the ability of an organization to be transparent to the workforce around its scheduling drivers, and the paths the worker can pursue to maximize opportunities for job satisfaction and career growth. Examples such as the system-enabled capability to easily swap shifts with colleagues or to know what skills or certifications will provide access to more attractive shifts and pay are particularly critical as organizations strive to mitigate the risk of turnover.

Enhancing Manager Productivity: Amidst all the focus on employee experience, it is often lost that managers are employees, too. The right workforce management technology can improve their experience and efficacy by giving them what they need to run their teams with little interruption or guesswork. Where dashboards and charts have long been the standard, analytics with accompanying insights can now provide managers the ability to understand what is happening with their workforce and how to capitalize on it or mitigate risk by taking action, rather than just being aware of the information, without context. Schedules can be automatically generated based on availability, preference and skills. In fact, our research leads us to assert that by 2026, one-half of organizations will require workforce management systems to automatically compare job skill requirements and worker skills alongside availability during the schedule generation process. Further, notifications can be pushed to inform managers of missed timeclock punches or to approve shift change requests. The goal is to help managers sift through the administrative noise by providing them easy access to the information they need, when and where they need it, to make impactful decisions about their teams.

Scheduling for All: This is all part of a pervasive shift in mindset as it relates to workforce scheduling within medium and larger organizations, and it's a shift that is even extending to the scheduling of salaried, professional workers. The operational triggers and requirements in this case are less about regulatory compliance or even projecting fairness and consistency to workers. Organizations that have the ability to know at a detail level all key aspects of labor supply, demand and usage have a decisive competitive advantage when it comes to defining or modifying strategic plans and priorities. That said, another contributing factor might be recent legislative changes in different regions (such as the EU) that are now mandating scheduling requirements for the entire workforce. Fortunately, leading WFM technology now allows scheduling optimization at scale.

The points explored here all lead to our fundamental recommendation that when businesses can excel at workforce scheduling they are likely to also earn high marks in the proactive management of many of the other pressing issues facing business leaders today.

Furthermore, scheduling can legitimately be viewed as one of the few HCM workforce activities that cuts horizontally across the most important HCM themes of the day, including delivering a great EX, employee health and well-being, fairness and equity, re-skilling and up-skilling, and organizational agility. It's also an opportunity for HR, finance and operations teams to collaborate around interconnected business objectives and move the organization forward in a coordinated way.



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Matthew Brown leads the HCM software expertise at ISG Software Research and guides HR and business leaders with over two decades of experience. His research covers the full range of HCM processes and software including employee experience, learning management, payroll management, talent management, total compensation management and workforce management.