

Working Time in Mauritius

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Ministry of Labour, Industrial
Relations & Employment
International Labour Organization
Mauritius Research Council

Centre for Applied Social Research

- Work and Family Study 2002 found that many employees find it difficult to reconcile work and family obligations.
- Time Stress requiring greater flexibility of control over time use and its effect on the quality of life
- Changes in working time arrangements balancing improvements for employees and the needs of the employer.
- Concept of Decent Work (ILO)

Study Methodology

- Desk Study
- FGDs with organizations representing the interests of employees, employers and legislative bodies
- Case Studies conducted on Private firms employing 10 or more persons identified by the CSO as “large” establishments.
- Selected using a stratified random sampling process
- Public Sector not included
- Informal Sector not included

- Sampling frame was provided by the Survey of Employment and Earnings of the Central Statistics Office with each classified according to its activity based on the National Standard Industrial Classification of Economic Activities
- Sample was representative of the target population taking into consideration:
 - (i) Sectors
 - (ii) Activity of the establishment
 - (iii) Number of employees
 - (iv) Geographical distribution

Employment Sectors

- Agriculture
- Manufacturing
- Construction
- Wholesale, Retail and the Distributive Trades
- Tourism
- Transport and Communication
- Financial Services
- Business Activities
- Other Services
- Response rate of 70%. Interviews took place June and July 2005.

What are flexible working arrangements?

- *Different forms of flexible working time arrangements*
- Flexi-time programmes
- Compressed working weeks
- Work and Job sharing
- Annualized hours
- Shift work
- Time-banking schemes
- Telecommuting
- Part-time work

Main Findings

Focus Group Discussions

- In Mauritius *Working Time* is a peripheral issue to safeguarding or limiting job losses and improving the financial conditions of employment
- Existing working time arrangements tend to be inflexible
- It is important to improve existing working time arrangements to improve efficiency and productivity
- The coinciding of the starting times of school and employment
- The deficiencies of local public transport and worsening traffic congestion problem

- Heavier burden on working women who have the additional responsibility of childcare and a catalogue of other family commitments
- Lateness is a very common problem at work in Mauritius
- Employers are very strict and uncompromising
- Belief that foreign workers in Mauritius thrive on overtime and longer hours but local counterparts have home and family obligations
- Attempts to reduce working hours at the workplace might encourage some employees to take up extra part-time jobs
- Working time issue is entangled with a wide number of other issues which need to be addressed simultaneously

Case Study Findings

By Sector

Manufacturing (EPZ)

- Foreign workers seen as “ultimately flexible”
- About 70% of the work force Female
- Provision of transport and some disciplinary measures assist in keeping a check on absenteeism and lateness
- Employers argued that they were not rigid when it came to working time arrangements

- General lack of understanding of what flexible working-time arrangements actually referred to
- Skepticism, mistrust and rejection of any concepts regarded as being 'flexi-time'
- For management, more flexible working time arrangements would be chaotic bringing more disadvantages than advantages

- Discretionary exchange of shifts among colleagues considered by managers as a sufficiently humane approach to meet the working time needs of workers
- General belief that any introduction of flexibility in working time would lead to immediate decrease in productivity
- Flexible working arrangements would impact on transport arrangements

Tourism

- The facilities offset such negative aspects as the necessity to work odd and unsocial hours
- Majority of employees worked a shift / roster system
- Appreciation of the demanding nature of some of the shifts worked by hotel staff, especially when it involved female employees

- The contract clearly stipulates that they will be asked to work odd hours
- The recruitment of staff locally and the provision of transport facilities felt to be a major factor in combating these particular problems
- Belief that the concepts of “flexible working time” and “industry” are mutually incompatible

- Certain working periods where the work is considerably much less than at 'peak hours' and increased potential for the introduction of flexible working hours
- Doubts were expressed as to whether employees would accept 'flexible wages'
- General feeling of skepticism and mistrust of concepts related to any introduction of flexible working time patterns

Construction

- Many workers are hired on a casual basis by sub-contractors
- The piece rate system is used to act as an incentive
- Nature of work in the construction sector is hard and demanding
- Not convinced that the introduction of flexible working time arrangements would benefit the industry
- Flexibility in task allocation and performance expected of employees but belief that start and finish times have to be strictly imposed

- Changes to working time in the construction sector would require an holistic approach
- Flexible working time arrangements or shift work would entail additional costs to the employer
- Misunderstanding and mistrust of flexible working arrangements
- Transport issues cited as part of a generally expressed fear that everything to do with the industry will collapse if any changes are made to the standard working procedures

Security Guards

- Flexible working time procedures cannot be introduced in the security sector
- Any attempt at the introduction would inevitably mean employing more personnel placing an additional cost on the company
- Belief that a certain level of flexibility exists enabling employees to change their shifts in exceptional cases was sufficient
- Current procedures cannot be adapted
- Employers generally unaware of the different types of working time arrangements

ICT

- Young women are employed but seen as “potential future mothers” and therefore problematic
- “Employees are already aware of their hours and conditions of work when they are recruited and have therefore chosen to accept them”
- Flexible working time patterns would benefit the employees, but would involve additional costs for the company and additional staff
- ICT working patterns suit young people who have fewer social commitments

Financial Sector

- Traffic congestion seen as problematic
- Flexible working arrangements more suited to white-collar workers
- Employers feel they have a soft and flexible approach towards employees
- Alternative working-time practices not likely to be considered as costs envisaged for additional security and insurance charges negate implementation of flexible work patterns
- A lack of understanding of what flexible working-time arrangements actually are

Agriculture

- Working hours differ during the *intercrop* season and the *crop* season
- Working time in the sector is well defined and the workers are used to it “Because it has been in operation for centuries”
- Would be difficult to implement flexible working patterns except for administrative staff
- Sugar industry relies heavily on part-time workers, for whom more flexible working time arrangements are tolerated
- More flexible working time patterns would increase the cost of production
- Would cause disruption to the transport arrangements for the workers

Transport

- The introduction of flexi-time system would benefit the employees perhaps contributing to a decrease in the level of absenteeism
- Difficulties with the distribution of premium shifts
- The existing shift systems of the larger companies can often allow employees to choose working hours that are more suited to their needs
- This type of procedure is unofficial and discretionary and not an officially instituted policy of flexible working time patterns

Distributive Trades

- Employees in the distributive trades usually work to a shift system with hours of work tied in with the operating hours of the commercial centres
- The shift pattern is believed to give the staff the required flexibility to balance their work and family life
- For small companies it is easier to manage more flexible working time arrangements but where there are 600 or more workers it is more difficult to manage
- flexible working time “was not an issue that needed addressing” as main priorities were “giving the employees a decent salary and providing transport facilities”

Service Sector

- Discretionary permission is given to employees in certain circumstances
- Essential to have a global vision to better organize flexible working time
- Traditional hierarchy of the pyramid has to be reduced so that the structure is “more horizontal”
- Transport problems a potential obstacle to the implementation of flexible working time patterns

Conclusion

- Misunderstanding of flexible working patterns gives rise to distrust of the concept
- Belief that flexible working arrangements would be exploited by many employees
- The current established practice of dispensing “permissions” to an employee was seen as an humane and flexible approach
- The long working day is compounded by congested traffic but there is little ambition to recognise that more flexible working time patterns might alleviate this
- Any flexibility in working time patterns would automatically mean increased costs and would affect productivity
- A general agreement that the implementation of flexible working time practices is remote.
- Need effective information exercises on the benefits of flexible working time practices that might benefit employers, employees and the nation at large.

Constraints

- There has been little or no practical implementation in the private sector in Mauritius.
- Lack of understanding of flexibility and different forms of flexible working time
- Lack of local examples of introduction of flexible working time as a reference model
- Labour Legislation does not provide for flexible working time

- Mindset and culture of employers and employees with respect to vacation/sick leaves
- Uncertainty in the financial viability of flexible working time
- Perceived as additional costs by employers
- Perceived as a reduction in overtime thereby aggravating the existing low salaries in some sectors of employment
- Lack of trust between partners
- Lack of implementation of gain-sharing system in enterprise
- Lack of standardization of competencies

Recommendations

- Information and training of employers and employees (enterprise/national level) in order to encourage a paradigm shift towards flexible working time
- Provide trained facilitators in the field of working time at enterprise level including trade unions to explain and promote flexible working time
- Review of Labour Legislation and Remuneration Orders to enable introduction of flexible working time
- Encourage and support employers' initiatives in favour of more flexible working time
- Sensitize workers and employers on health hazards arising from continuous night work
- Ensure that working hours are not detrimental to the workers' health and safety

- Put in place clear and transparent control system at enterprise level to build trust
- Improve the transport system at the national level
- Ensure the provision of transport facilities at the enterprise level in line with flexible working time
- Encourage decentralization of working places from Port Louis
- A tripartite technical committee be set up by the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment to follow up the recommendations of the workshop and to monitor progress.

End of Presentation
Thank you for your attention