

## Redefining Workplace Flexibility: VTO, VET, and MET as Strategic Scheduling Opportunities

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the dynamics and implications of Voluntary Time Off (VTO), Voluntary Extra Time (VET), and Mandatory Extra Time (MET) within the workforce. VTO, as a dual concept, includes both voluntary leave for workload management and paid leave for volunteer work, emphasizing corporate social responsibility. VET is an optional policy for additional work hours, used to adapt to fluctuating demands, improve productivity, and enhance employee satisfaction. On the other hand, MET is a compulsory policy for extra work hours, implemented during peak periods or urgent project demands. The paper examines the benefits and challenges of these models, with a particular focus on their impact on employee well-being, legal compliance, and communication strategies in the workplace. A case study on the retail industry illustrates how these models can be practically applied and adapted to meet various business needs.

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**Received:** July 25, 2022; **Accepted:** August 08, 2022; **Published:** August 16, 2022

**Keywords:** Voluntary Time Off (VTO), Voluntary Extra Time (VET), Mandatory Extra Time (MET), Workforce Management, Employee Well-being, Operational Efficiency, Retail Industry, Labor Scheduling Systems, Corporate Social Responsibility

### Introduction

In the rapidly evolving corporate landscape, workforce management models such as Voluntary Time Off (VTO), Voluntary Extra Time (VET), and Mandatory Extra Time (MET) play a crucial role in aligning employee availability with organizational needs. VTO offers a dual benefit of balancing staffing requirements and promoting corporate social responsibility. VET emerges as a flexible option for managing operational demands, while MET is a strategic response to urgent business needs. This paper explores the intricacies of these models, their implementation in the retail sector, and their impact on the work environment, with a focus on balancing operational efficiency and employee well-being.

### Understanding VTO, VET, and MET

#### Voluntary Time Off (VTO)

Voluntary Time Off (VTO) can refer to one of two leave categories: voluntary time off or volunteer time off [1].

Voluntary time off is a leave category used by companies to balance staffing requirements with quickly shifting workloads. When more employees are available to work than needed on a given day, they're granted the option to take unpaid time off without repercussions to their employment status [1].

Volunteer time off is a form of paid leave where employees receive their regular compensation for hours spent volunteering for an approved charity or community organization. This form of VTO reinforces an organization's value in corporate social responsibility

and may be one of several programs used to make an impact or help attract employees who want to make a difference in their local communities [1].

#### Benefits for Employees

1. Increased job satisfaction [2].
2. Boosted physical and mental health [2].
3. Opportunity for skill development [3].
4. Strengthened bonds between coworkers [3].
5. Work-life integration [4].

#### Benefits for Employers

1. Attraction and retention of top talent [2,3].
2. Improved business image [2].
3. Enhanced work environment [3].
4. Increased employee engagement [3].
5. Support for non-profits or communities beyond monetary donations [1].

#### Voluntary Extra Time (VET)

Voluntary Extra Time (VET) is a policy that allows employees to work additional hours beyond their regular scheduled shifts. It is an optional opportunity and is often used by companies, such as Amazon, to manage fluctuating workloads and meet operational demands.

The implementation of VET varies by company and even by individual workplaces within a company. For instance, at Amazon, VET is offered in fulfillment centers where demand and workload can change daily and seasonally. The extra time can be additional hours in the morning or evening added to an existing shift, or an extra shift on a different day. The specifics depend on the facility and the workplace's needs. Employees are informed about the

VET policy when they start their job and can choose whether they want to take on the extra time or not.

### Advantages of VET for Workforce Flexibility

1. **Adapting to Demand Fluctuations:** VET allows companies to adjust their workforce size to meet varying demand levels, ensuring that they have enough staff during peak times and aren't overstaffed during slower periods.
2. **Increased Productivity:** By allowing employees to work extra hours when they are willing and able, companies can increase overall productivity.
3. **Employee Satisfaction:** Some employees appreciate the opportunity to earn extra income by working additional hours. This can lead to increased job satisfaction and employee retention [5].
4. **Operational Efficiency:** By offering VET, companies can ensure that they have the necessary staff to meet operational goals without having to hire additional permanent staff.
5. **Flexibility:** VET provides employees with the flexibility to work additional hours when it suits them, which can help to improve work-life balance.

However, it's important to note that while VET can offer benefits, it should be managed carefully to ensure that employees are not overworked and that all extra hours are compensated appropriately.

### Mandatory Extra Time (MET)

Mandatory Extra Time (MET) is a policy that requires employees to work additional hours beyond their regular scheduled shifts. This policy is often implemented by companies to meet operational demands, particularly during peak periods or when there are urgent projects and deadlines [5,6,7].

MET is typically assigned by a supervisor when there are not enough volunteers for the extra work, or when there is mandatory training that lasts three hours or more [5]. In some cases, if all employees refuse a voluntary overtime assignment, MET is assigned in reverse seniority order [5].

While MET can help companies meet their operational goals, it's important to balance this policy with employee well-being. Overworking employees can lead to lower morale, increased turnover rates, and heightened risks of injury [7].

### Balancing MET with Employee Well-Being

1. **Clear Communication:** Employers should clearly communicate the MET policy to employees, including when and why it might be implemented, and how employees will be compensated for the extra time [3,6].
2. **Advance Notice:** Whenever possible, employers should provide employees with advance notice of MET to allow them to adjust their personal schedules [8].
3. **Compensatory Time Off:** After periods of MET, employers can offer compensatory time off to allow employees to rest and recharge [7].
4. **Flexible Leave Utilization:** Employers can foster a culture of flexibility in utilizing accrued leave, encouraging employees to take time off after intensive periods of MET [7].
5. **Legal Compliance:** Employers must comply with all relevant laws and regulations regarding overtime, including paying at least 1.5 times the regular rate for hours worked beyond the standard 40-hour workweek, as mandated by the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) [3].
6. **Employee Support:** Employers should provide support to

employees during periods of MET, such as offering resources for stress management and ensuring that employees have the necessary resources to perform their tasks effectively [9,10].

7. **Work-Life Balance:** Employers should strive to maintain a healthy work-life balance for their employees, even during periods of MET. This can include respecting employees' personal time, promoting open communication about work-life balance needs, and exploring flexible work arrangements [10].

While MET can be a useful tool for managing operational demands, it's crucial for employers to implement this policy in a way that respects and supports the well-being of their employees [7,9,10].

### Adaptive Workforce Management Models: Balancing Operational Demands and Employee Well-Being in Retail Case Study

Voluntary Extra Time (VET), Mandatory Extra Time (MET), and Voluntary Time Off (VTO) are workforce management models commonly used by businesses. These models are especially common in industries with fluctuating demand, such as retail and logistics.

Retailer companies are notable examples of companies that utilize these models. VET (Voluntary Extra Time) enables employees to voluntarily work additional hours beyond their scheduled shifts, typically during peak periods or when there is a backlog of work. On the other hand, MET (Mandatory Extra Time) is a policy that requires employees to work extra hours beyond their regular shifts in situations where there are insufficient volunteers or when there is mandatory training lasting three hours or more. VTO (Voluntary Time Off) is offered during periods of reduced work demand, allowing employees to take time off without facing any penalties.

These models are adapted to the company's varying business needs. For instance, during peak periods such as the holiday season, retailers may implement MET to ensure that all orders are processed and shipped on time. Conversely, during slower periods, retailers may offer VTO to employees, reducing labor costs while also providing employees with the opportunity for additional rest.

However, it is important to manage these models carefully to avoid any negative impact on employee well-being. For instance, some employees may have concerns about the use of mandatory overtime (MET), citing overwork and stress as potential consequences. To address these concerns, employers can consider implementing strategies such as clear communication about MET policies, providing advance notice of MET, offering compensatory time off after periods of MET, and promoting a flexible culture in using accrued leave.

VET, MET, and VTO are flexible models that can be adapted to different business needs. However, it is important to manage them carefully to avoid any negative impact on employee well-being. Retail Companies provide examples of how these models can be adjusted to meet operational demands while also considering the needs of employees and stakeholders.

Workforce planning involves aligning workforce capacity with project demand. For example, during peak periods, a company may implement Mandatory Extra Time (MET) to ensure that all orders are processed and shipped on time. Conversely, during slower periods, the company may offer Voluntary Time Off (VTO) to employees, reducing labor costs while also providing them with

the opportunity for additional rest.

### Effective Implementation of VTO, VET, and MET in Labor Scheduling Systems

To address staffing optimization, a dual-service approach should be implemented within the forecasting and labor scheduling architecture. The primary service will assimilate data on potential overstaffing scenarios, while a secondary service will focus on identifying and forecasting potential understaffing and production delays.

These dedicated services analyze staffing requirements and communicate this information as actionable items within the Time and Attendance Application (TAA) or a similar scheduling interface. For example, if overstaffing is detected, a VTO opportunity is offered, while understaffing prompts the issuance of a VET opportunity.

Transitioning from VET (Voluntary Extra Time) to MET (Mandatory Extra Time) requires an intervention from floor management. This intervention involves adapting the scheduling system from a voluntary to a mandatory framework. The need for this transition is often triggered by unforeseen staffing fluctuations or a shortfall in voluntary schedule uptake, such as unanticipated absences.

The proposed service model should prioritize MET allocations based on criteria such as employee tenure. It should also consider historical work hours over a biweekly period to prevent exceeding regulated work limits.

Furthermore, the understaffing service should validate compliance with the prescribed schedules over a retrospective seven-day window. This validation should ensure that employees do not exceed a three-day working maximum.

Finally, the system should dynamically align workforce demand with vocational education and training (VET) uptake. It should revert to VET from traditional higher education (MET) as necessary to maintain equilibrium between operational demands and employee welfare.

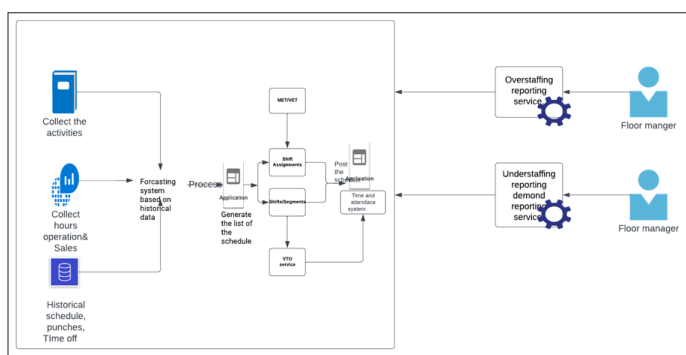


Figure 1: Labour Forecasting with Dynamic Overstaffing and Dynamic Understaffing Services

### Post-Implementation Review (PIR)

The Post-Implementation Review is a critical step in assessing the effectiveness and impact of the MET period. It allows for a comprehensive analysis of various aspects related to the implementation, including the outcomes achieved, the challenges encountered, and the lessons learned. By conducting a thorough PIR, organizations can gain valuable insights that can be used

to improve future projects and initiatives. Through a careful examination of the MET period, its objectives, and the strategies employed, the PIR aims to provide a holistic understanding of its overall success and identify areas for potential enhancement. This review process involves gathering relevant data, conducting interviews with key stakeholders, and evaluating the performance against predetermined metrics. By extending the analysis beyond the immediate outcomes, the PIR helps organizations gain a deeper understanding of the long-term impact and implications of the MET period. Through this comprehensive review, organizations can make informed decisions, refine their strategies, and ensure continuous improvement in future endeavors.

### Key Considerations

**Legal Compliance:** It is crucial to always ensure strict adherence and compliance with labor laws and regulations relating to mandatory overtime. This includes thoroughly reviewing and understanding the specific requirements and restrictions imposed by the relevant legislation. Additionally, it is imperative to consistently monitor and update company policies and procedures to reflect any changes in the legal landscape. By prioritizing legal compliance, organizations can uphold the rights and well-being of their employees while fostering a fair and ethical work environment.

**Employee Well-Being:** It is crucial to take into account the potential impact on employee morale and well-being when implementing mandatory extra time (MET).

By doing so, we can ensure that employees are not overwhelmed by excessive work demands and that their physical and mental health is prioritized. This can be achieved by providing adequate support, such as flexible working hours, regular breaks, and access to resources for managing stress. Additionally, fostering a positive work environment that promotes open communication and recognizes employee contributions can contribute to enhancing overall well-being. Ultimately, considering employee well-being in the implementation of MET can lead to a healthier and more productive workforce.

**Communication:** It is crucial to maintain clear and consistent communication throughout the MET, VET, VTO process. This includes regular updates, effective feedback exchange, and open lines of communication between all parties involved. By ensuring that everyone is on the same page and well-informed, we can foster a collaborative environment that promotes successful outcomes. Furthermore, proactive communication helps to address any potential issues or concerns, allowing for timely resolutions and smoother progress.

### Conclusion

The exploration of Voluntary Time Off (VTO), Voluntary Extra Time (VET), and Mandatory Extra Time (MET) within workforce management reveals a complex yet crucial aspect of modern organizational operations. These models not only demonstrate a company's adaptability to changing market demands but also its commitment to employee welfare and corporate responsibility.

VTO serves as a dual-purpose approach, highlighting a progressive stance on employee engagement and corporate social responsibility. By offering voluntary unpaid leave during low-demand periods, companies can effectively manage their workforce while respecting employee autonomy. The inclusion of paid leave for volunteering reflects the growing trend in corporate culture that

values community engagement and social responsibility. This reinforces the idea that a company's success is connected to its societal impact and employee satisfaction.

VET is a powerful tool for operational flexibility, enabling companies to meet fluctuating demands without the rigidity of traditional staffing models. Its voluntary nature respects employee choice, catering to those who desire additional working hours while avoiding imposing on those who do not. The success of VET lies in finding a balance between organizational needs and employee preferences, fostering a culture of mutual benefit and respect.

On the other hand, MET, while necessary in certain circumstances, presents challenges that require careful management. Its mandatory nature can cause stress and dissatisfaction if not implemented with consideration for employee well-being.

Clear communication, fair compensation, and an overall environment that prioritizes the health and morale of the workforce are essential. MET should be used strategically, in conjunction with measures that support employee recovery and work-life balance.

The retail industry case study provides a practical perspective on applying these models, highlighting their adaptability and the need for a tailored approach based on specific operational and workforce dynamics. The case study emphasizes the importance of strategic planning in workforce management and the necessity for a responsive system that can adjust to both market demands and employee needs.

In conclusion, VTO, VET, and MET are not just staffing mechanisms; they reflect a company's values and its approach to balancing business objectives with employee welfare. Their effective implementation can lead to enhanced productivity, improved employee satisfaction, and a positive organizational image. However, achieving this requires a nuanced understanding of the benefits and challenges these models present. As companies continue to evolve in a dynamic business landscape, thoughtful integration of VTO, VET, and MET will be crucial in shaping a workforce that is both efficient and ethically grounded [11-15].

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