

Retail's sharing economy – shared personnel are double personnel



As retailing encounters an increasingly complex and competitive world, demands on personnel and their skills are increasing at the same rate. Even so, not all retailers can afford to employ specialists. The given solution is to make use of retail's sharing economy.

Digitalisation within retailing entails enormous changes, not least for bricks and mortar stores. To meet digital competition, bricks and mortar stores have to change from being a place customers must visit, to become a place customers want to visit. This will not happen by itself, work must be done by store personnel and to make their jobs better than they are today, the personnel must become better than they are today. The time of the generalists is over, now it is specialists with specialist know-how that the situation calls for. Roles now in demand include store communicators who know how a store should be styled to maximise sales, bakers that bake bread on site and data analysts that forecast sales.

The challenge is that many companies are too small to justify employing specialist expertise on a full-time basis. The simple solution is for an employee to take on the role of store communicator for part of their working day and work in some other capacity for the rest of the time. That is not a bad solution, but it flies in the face of the thinking that greater expertise is called for. Instead of employees being permitted to become as good as they can be in one of the roles, the solution guarantees that the employees will not reach their full potential in any of the roles.

How then, should employees reach their full potential? The answer lies in the sharing economy, a concept that within retailing, can be perceived as somewhat confusing, until you realise that what is being shared is the personnel. If this is done, personnel will be able to learn more within their area of expertise while smaller companies can also avail themselves of experts at the same time. In other words, it is not only an opportunity for the individual employee, but also just as much an opportunity for the employer.

Part-time working is already widespread within retailing. Retailing is the sector with by far the highest proportion of part-time staff, and amounted to 67 percent in 2016, according to LO (Swedish Trades Union Confederation). Historically, scheduling working hours has often been the driving force behind part-time jobs, and is likely to remain the case. Scheduling working hours of personnel with specialist expertise is also challenging, as the need for their services goes in waves.



A telephone survey done by HUI of a number of retailing companies, from smaller stores to larger chains, shows that there is both a big need and a big interest in being able to share personnel with specialist expertise. Some companies are already working along these lines today. One example is a large group that employs a group of analysts and programmers at group level. They then hop in and work in those companies where there is a need for them at the time. This is not only because the need for them varies between the companies over time, but also because it is both more stimulating and developing for the personnel to work in this way. However, not all companies are big enough to permit their employees to work like this. But retail's sharing economy is also the solution for them, to buy in the specialist expertise needed on a part-time basis, or alternatively to work smarter with part-time employment.

Instead of opposing the increased future need for specialist expertise and for flexible personnel solutions, politicians and employers ought to do the reverse. Making it easier to employ people part-time and to buy in specialist services would benefit all parties, employers and employees alike.

1. Forms of employment and working hours in 2017, LO

This report has been produced by Storesupport and HUI Research.