

Defining High Quality Rotations

by Tila Smith, Managing Partner, Workforce Edge

FTE	Row length	#	WEEK 1							WEEK 2							WEEK 3							WEEK 4							Wkend		Shift type %'s		
Annual Hours			M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	off %	D	E		
2022.75																																			
1.00	4	1	D	D	D	D	D	~		D	D	E	E	E	E	E								E	E	E	E	E	E		50%	50.0%	50.0%		
1.00	4	2			E	E	E	E	E			D	D	D	~		D	D	D	D	D	~		D	D	E	E	E	E	E	50%	50.0%	50.0%		
0.40	4	3	E	E				~							D	D								E	E					D	D	50%	50.0%	50.0%	
0.40	4	4					D	D	E	E					~		E	E												~		50%	50.0%	50.0%	
2.80																																			
07:00-15:15		D	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7.75				
15:00-23:15		E	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7.75				

A master rotation provides a repeating schedule of shifts for a group of employees over a set number of weeks. Each line on the rotation represents one employee, and when the last week of the rotation is worked, the schedule starts over or “rotates” back to week one. The above example of a four line, four week rotation provides coverage for 1 D and 1 E shift per day.

Master rotations are significantly easier to maintain than most other scheduling approaches, such as manager-created scheduling or employee self-scheduling, as there is no need for a new schedule to be created each period. However, as the rotation is repeated over and over until a new rotation is created and implemented, a poor quality rotation can have an immense effect on the ability to effectively operate your unit or department, and on employee satisfaction and retention. This article will identify a number of factors to consider when assessing the quality of your master rotation, and will provide a checklist which you can use to evaluate your existing or newly-created rotation.

Covering the Rotation Baseline

One of the first considerations in establishing a high-quality rotation is how well it meets your operational needs. The rotation baseline determines the number of staff you need per shift and per day, and is typically established per staff type. For example, a given unit may need one RN at all times of the day, and an additional two LPN’s between 07:00 to 23:00. The baseline may be different on different days of the week (for example, to accommodate operating room schedules) or different on weekends vs. weekdays (for example, to add a senior nurse on weekends when a unit manager is typically unavailable).

A high quality rotation will meet the baseline requirements completely and cost-effectively. This means having no shifts where there is an extra staff member scheduled, and no shifts where the unit is working short.

Rotation building is a complex endeavor that requires special training and expertise.

Workforce Edge offers rotation build courses for managers, rotation specialists, clerks, and others responsible for creating and managing your employee schedules.

Contact us to be added to our mailing list to receive notification of our next rotation build course

OR

Contact us if you would like assistance in evaluating your current rotation or building a new master rotation for your unit, department, or facility

A high quality rotation will meet the baseline requirements completely and cost-effectively.

Selecting a Mix of Full Time and Part Time Positions

The ratio of full time and part time positions impacts patient care and your ability to recruit and retain employees. Full time positions increase job stability for employees, and improve the continuity of care for patients having longer stays, who see the same staff more frequently, and are more comfortable in expressing their needs. Part time positions, especially those at a lower FTE, may provide extra relief capacity if casual staff are hard to retain, and can allow retention of employees not willing to work full time.

Ensuring Compliance with Collective Agreements & Labour Laws

Many organizations have labour agreements in place that constrain how an employee can be scheduled. This may include a maximum number of shifts in a row, minimum number of weekends off per period, or constraints on how many hours off an employee must have before working the next shift. The specific details will typically vary based on staff type and length of shift (e.g. 8 hr shifts versus 10 or 12 hr shifts).

Non-unionized positions, instead of having Collective Agreements, will need to comply with the labour laws applicable in your area. Typically these laws will include provisions for time off per week, minimum length of a shift, and definition of conditions under which a meal break must be provided.

Consult with your human resources department and/or labour relations to get details of what conditions need to be met in your organization.

Minimizing Employee Fatigue

When building a rotation, it is critical to make every effort to minimize the fatigue associated with shift work, due to the potential impact on patient safety. Within the constraints of employee FTE and operational requirements, every attempt must be made to reduce the number of long stretches of worked shifts, avoid single days on or single days off, provide as much time as possible when changing from night to day shifts, and ensure that employees do not switch from nights to days and back to nights very frequently in a short period of time. The ability to make these changes are often constrained by collective agreement rules and by the number of shifts that a full time employee must work.

Treating Employees Equitably

All rotations should be seen to be fair and equitable between rotation lines. Unless there are special circumstances, employees should share the burdens of shift and weekend work equally. An equitable rotation would have all employees having similar numbers of weekends off over the course of the rotation, and similar percentage of day shifts worked. This ensures that all employees have similar schedules and avoids having evening, night, and weekend shifts overwhelmingly staffed by junior team members as senior staff request to work lines with more Monday to Friday day shifts.

The ratio of full time and part time positions impacts patient care and your ability to recruit and retain employees.

It is critical to make every effort to minimize the fatigue associated with shift work.

Employees should share the burdens of shift work and weekend work equally.

A Simple Checklist for Evaluating Your Rotation

In reviewing your current unit, department or facility rotation, consider the following questions:

1. Do you know how many staff you need for each shift and each day, and is this based on patient flow data or a similar assessment of operational needs?
2. Are there any shifts in your current rotation where you have extra staff, or not enough staff?
3. Do you know how many FTE are needed to cover your required baseline, and how does that compare to your budget?
4. Do you have too many or too few full time positions in your rotation? If more full time positions are desirable, is it possible to have more full time positions?
5. Do you have too many part time positions below 0.50 FTE, and is this impacting retention or the ability of your part time employees to maintain required skills?
6. Does every line of your current rotation meet all of the scheduling rules defined within your Collective Agreements?
7. How many long stretches of shifts do you have in an average full time line? (e.g., 4x12 hr shifts or 7x8 hr shifts)
8. Are there any part time lines in your rotation that include long stretches of shifts?
9. Are there lines in your rotation with single worked shifts? How often does this happen, and how does it impact attendance?
10. Are there lines in your rotation that have many single days off?
11. Do employees change frequently between shifts? (e.g., more than 2 start times per week)
12. When changing from Night to Day shifts, how many days off does the employee get? Considering that the first day is typically a “sleep day”, does that provide enough of a break?
13. Do all lines of your rotation work a similar percent of weekends?
14. Do all lines of your rotation work a similar percent of Day shifts?
15. Do you or your staff feel that some lines in your rotation are better than other lines?

The above questions are some of the more common issues or discussion points we have seen in our tenure of working with healthcare organizations to optimize their rotations and improving coverage.

For more information on our services for evaluating your rotation or providing a new master rotation for your unit or facility, see www.workforce-edge.com

Key Indicators of a Rotation Needing Redevelopment

Are there any shifts in current rotation where you have extra staff, or not enough staff?

Does every line of your current rotation meet all of the scheduling rules defined within your Collective Agreements?

Do you or your staff feel that some lines in your rotation are better than other lines?