

THE PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED IN SETTING UP A 24HR SYSTEM MONITORING AND CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE



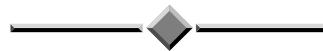
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*70th Annual Water Industry Engineers and Operators' Conference
Bendigo Exhibition Centre
4 to 6 September, 2007*

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ABSTRACT

This paper will highlight the problems that occurred in the staffing when implementing a 24 hour customer service centre and SCADA monitoring system at Goulburn Valley Water (GVW).

The satisfactory resolution was a credit to all involved and has led to the more efficient handling of customer queries and a quick response to any system faults that may arise.

KEY WORDS

SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition)

AWA (Australian Workplace Agreement)

EBA (Enterprise Bargaining Agreement)

ASA (Annualised Salary Agreement)

CSC (Customer Service Centre)

1.0 INTRODUCTION.

The State Government started removing control of water and sewerage systems from local councils and forming Water Boards in the early 1980's.

By 1994 these smaller Water Boards were being amalgamated into larger Authorities, Goulburn Valley Water was the result of the amalgamation of 23 of these Water Boards.

To maintain a high standard of Customer Service and quality control Goulburn Valley Water implemented a 24hr system monitoring and customer call centre in 1998 with objectives of monitoring its, SCADA telemetry system and providing a manned 24hr emergency 1800 phone number for customers.

The Customer Service Centre (CSC) was fully operational by July 1st 1998 and, consisted of four permanent operators employed on an Australian Workplace Agreement (AWA) and working to an agreed roster. Absences were covered by two fill-in operators from other departments.

By early 2000 management wanted to negotiate a new agreement to include a fifth full time operator and remove the disruption caused by using the two fill-in operators from other departments.

This was to involve a completely new roster and a change in conditions for the four staff already employed in the CSC.

This paper highlights the problems that occurred and the way they were resolved during implementation of the new system.

2.0 1998 ROSTER AND CONDITIONS

The original roster incorporated two teams each with two operators working opposite on a four day/night on and four day/night off system, rotating from days to nights or nights to days every three groups of four shifts.

Annual leave was taken on the same basis of four on and four off with only one operator off at a time and all allowed leave had to be taken in each twelve month period. No leave was permitted to be taken over the Christmas or Easter periods and the rotation of the roster determined who worked on these days. This meant operators could be rostered on at Christmas several years in a row.

The salary paid was averaged over a twelve month period and was mainly a guesstimate rather than an accurate breakdown; overtime was worked out as 1.5 of the annual hourly rate and was paid for any work outside the normal roster.

3.0 REASONS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE FIFTH MAN

The calculation for annual leave for each of the permanent staff was based on 20 annual leave days plus an added 6 days for shift workers plus 10 days public holidays for a total of 36 days per operator per year. A fill-in was therefore required for 144 days or nights per year, not counting sick leave.

The use of two standbys personal from other areas had shown to be disruptive for the departments they were being drawn from. It also proved to be a bit of a juggling act as well as leading to disputes on pay rates and leave accruals.

When one of these staff left the employ of GVW it was next to impossible to recruit another fill-in and one fill-in operator could not handle the workload. This led to leave requests being refused.

This, and the removal of AWA's by the State Government meant a new agreement in the form of an Enterprise Agreement or an Annualised Salary Agreement had to be negotiated.

Management decided to restructure and add a permanent fifth person and remove most of the current staffing problems. The biggest problem was then to find an agreeable roster without too great a change in the current conditions.

4.0 NEGOTIATIONS

After 18 months of designing and discarding rosters through three managers and many heated discussions an agreeable structure for five operators could not be found.

The main problem was the communication breakdown; the operators believed that management were trying to set up a new structure for management's requirements without fully understanding the staff's requirements. The operators were concerned with what they believed was a loss of a majority of their conditions and refused to agree to any proposed rosters, but were offering no alternatives. This led to a stalemate with no resolution in sight. When the stalemate was reached one operator acknowledged that a change was inevitable and that if an agreement was not reached between the party's then management could be forced to act.

He spoke with the other operators and logged their concerns, then after attempting to address these concerns with their manager he realised the current roster structure would not work, he then sought an alternative via the internet.

After spending some time researching rosters via the internet a possible suitable base for a five man roster was found on the NOHSC web site.

5.0 THE ROSTER SOLUTION

The roster that GVW was trying to modify from 4 to 5 operators was based on the 4 shifts on and then 4 shifts off base (Figure 1). This meant that only 4 operators worked at a time and the 5th was on annual leave. The operators found this too inflexible and believed it showed no regard to the requirements of their family lives.

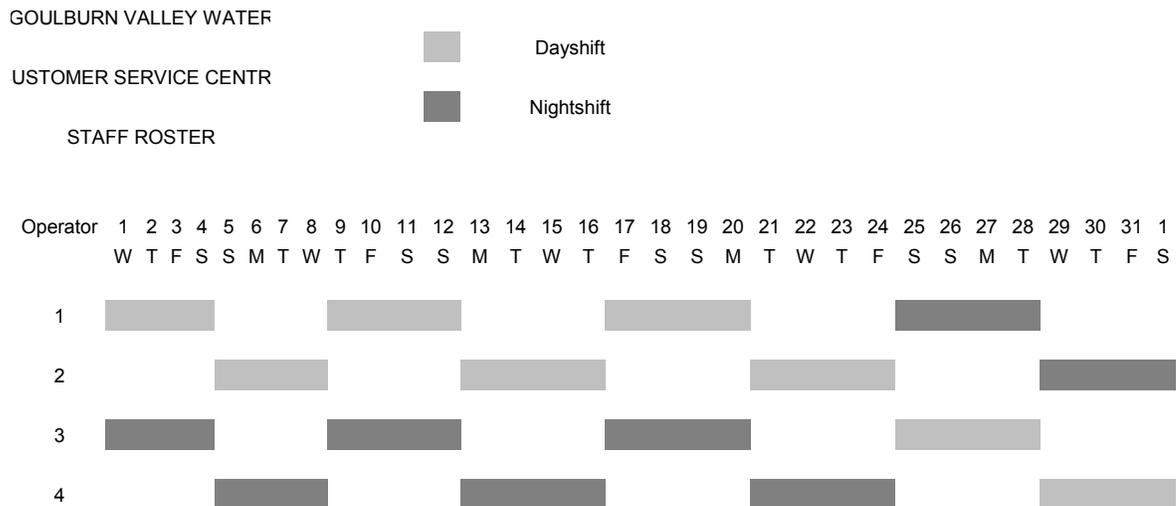


Figure 1: *Original 4 man roster layout*

The other issue discovered was the emerging information on the health hazards of shift work. This type of roster was outside the suggested OH&S guidelines for 12 hour shifts.

The roster discovered on the internet met all the OH&S guidelines and appeared to be less demanding on operators. The only problem was that annual leave was built into the roster and allowed for only one 7 day break per operator every five weeks.

This roster was set on a five week rotation with each operator working 7 dayshifts and 7 nightshifts in each rotation with a maximum of three consecutive shifts being worked by a single operator at a time and no more than two consecutive nightshifts. In addition 3 out of 5 of the weekends were also rostered off.

The issues that now had to be addressed were flexibility for the taking of leave and a fairer allocation of Christmas duties.

Closer inspection found a point in the roster where operators could be rotated to share Christmas duties: this meant that a five year roster could be laid out and each operator would work 2 out of 5 Christmases. Further adjustments could then be made to ensure the rotations did not cause an uneven distribution of shifts.

Then another roster point was located just prior to the 7 day break where rostered on shifts for one operator could be distributed to other operators, allowing for an extended 12 day break (Figure 2). This could be repeated to allow for 4 x 12 day breaks per operator in each 12 month period. This created enough flexibility to be acceptable to the other operators in the team.

Management accepted the new roster as it broke the impasse and they were able to then incorporate it into a new Annualised Salary Agreement (ASA).

6.0 SALARY BREAKDOWN

As stated earlier, the original pay structure was based more on a guesstimate rather than an accurate breakdown. This was mainly due to the difficulty in transferring the award conditions into the original roster. With the abolition of the AWA and implementation of an ASA this meant the no disadvantage clause had to be proven and a breakdown needed to be supplied. The new rostered was easier to break down and an agreed translation was able to be determined.

A clear and precise breakdown was negotiated and set up on a spreadsheet so any base hourly rate would be automatically converted into the annualised salary with all penalties and allowances clearly shown.

7.0 CONCLUSION

From start to finish, the negotiation for the roster took almost two years prior to implementation in August 2002. The breakdown of wage components was started two years later and negotiations took over twelve months.

The main reason for the delay was the reluctance of both parties at one stage or another to get together and thrash out the issues. When discussions were finished on both issues it was found that a resolution could have been reached much earlier if the lines of communications had been kept open and all concerns were addressed with an open mind.

Goulburn Valley Water has now set up an Enterprise Agreement Consultative Committee which opens up the channels of communication and will resolve all issues in a shorter time frame. As an operator who has worked under both rosters I have found the new roster to be less physically demanding and a lot friendlier in regards to family life, the ability to accrue extra leave that was implemented into the new salary agreement has improved the flexibility in this regard.

There is always room for improvement and one of the negatives with the system at present would be that CSC operators can feel isolated from other work groups due to working under a 24/7 roster.

8.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although most of the issues were resolved through discussions directly between staff and management, I would like to acknowledge the advice received from the ASU when negotiating the wage breakdown and that the base for the roster was sourced from the then NOHSC website.

Day Shift

Night Shift

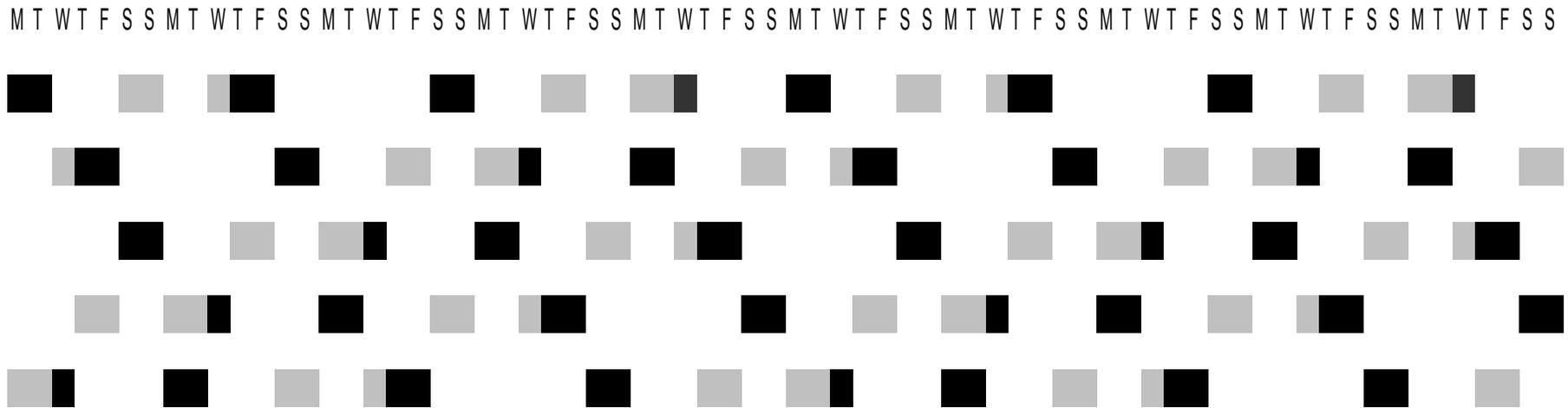


Figure 2: *NOHSC 5 Person Roster*