



# Better Daytime Working Hours

INSTRUCTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

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# Introduction

Most collective agreements signed in the winter of 2019-2020 contain a clause on the right to make changes to the organization of working hours and shorten the working week to up to 36 working hours per week. However, this does not apply to all unions, as various groups have a different form of work obligation than the traditional 40 hour working week, such as teachers.

The main goal of the changes is to aid the reform of operations of government institutions, improve the workplace culture and the utilization of working hours without reducing the efficiency and quality of service, better ensure mutual flexibility and thus contribute to an improved quality of life and harmony between family and work life.

Changes in working arrangement and a reduction in working hours require preparation and planning by staff and managers. Since the mid-twentieth century, the working week has been 40 hours and it's obvious that a lot has changed in that time. Therefore, it is good for everyone to consider how the working day can be rethought, and technological advances and new knowledge should make it easier for staff and managers to utilize the working hours better.

Negotiations on changes in the organization of working hours will take place at each institution/organizational structure. This summary describes the process of the dialogue on reform and instructs staff and management on what needs to be kept in mind in order to reorganize work arrangements and utilize working hours better towards the mutual benefit of staff and the institution.

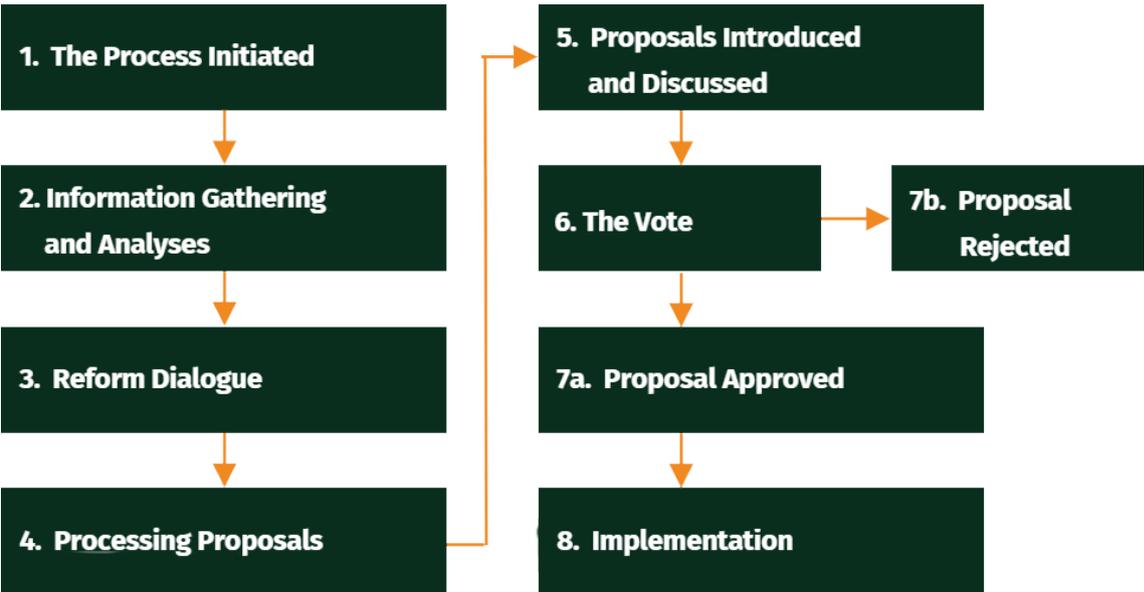
An agreement on the configuration of daytime working hours is in a separate attachment since no changes were made to the provisions of collective agreements at this time. Before the current collective agreements expire, the parties will make a joint assessment of the impact of the changes and whether the current presentation of the working hours provisions in collective agreements best suits the future organization and working environment of government institutions.

# Shortening the Working Week for Day Workers

Today, the working week for day workers is 40 hours, but it may be shortened by four hours per week, or up to 36 hours, without a reduction in wages. The shortening of the working week for day workers will be configured at each institution or workplace separately. That way, after a consultation process within the institution, the staff themselves decide by how much it should be shortened and in what way. Before the dialogue can begin in the workplace, it is important to familiarize yourself with educational material on how to organize the work better so that the working week can be shortened.

## Implementation Process for Better Working Hours

For guidance, the overview of the implementation process for better working hours divide into 8 steps. Since institutions have very different roles, have diverse daily operations and a disparate composition of human resources, it is important that better working hours are configured in each local environment. In some instances a different process might be more suitable. The main goal of the changes is to promote the mutual benefits of staff and institutions, and therefore the decision on work arrangements must be joint. Therefore, the requirements for information acquisition and consultation with staff on the implementation of better working hours must be met. The results must be reported to, and confirmed by, the relevant ministry/board of an institution with copies sent to the Department of Public Management and Reform and the relevant trade union, cf. Step 7a.



# Step 1 - The Process Initiated

**The director of an institution initiates the process, calls for nominations to the Working Hours Committee and convenes the first meeting of the committee.**

The Working Hours Committee leads the discussion on changes to the working hours in the workplace. The Working Hours Committee includes representatives of staff and the institution. The director shall take initiative to begin preparations for the changes and convene the Working Hours Committee after receiving proposals from staff/shop stewards and management. The group needs to reflect the diversity of jobs and the different circumstances of the staff, such as a fixed or flexible attendance. When selecting representatives, it must be ensured that ASÍ, BHM and BSRB each have a representative, provided that the staff are members of the member associations of these general associations. Generally the committees should be small, but each workplace decides what is most suitable.

# Step 2 - Information Gathering and Analyses

**The Working Hours Committee prepares the project with information gathering, mapping and analysis and defines the main opportunities for reform**

The goal of the analytical work is to highlight the mutual benefits for staff and the workplace from the changes to working hours. The Working Hours Committee will study educational material and guidelines on better working hours. The Working Hours Committee will also prepare by gathering information and analyzing the institution's operations.

Example:

- Analysis of services and key stress points;
- Analysis of the nature of jobs and staff. The changes to the working arrangement might not apply to all groups working for the institution in question since some professions have a different form of work obligation than the traditional 40 hour work week, e.g. teachers;
- Define the benefits to staff and the institution from changes to the working arrangement;
- Discuss opportunities in working arrangement, procedure, collaboration and time management, e.g.:
  - What changes need to be made to the working arrangement in order to achieve maximum shortening?
  - How can working hours be better utilized?
  - Is it possible to simplify working methods with the help of technological innovations?
  - What kind of flexibility is needed alongside a shorter working week?

Through gathering information and analysis, the committee formulates discussion points for consultation meetings with staff, cf. step 3.

## Step 3 - Reform Dialogue

**A meeting in an institution where the results of analyses are presented and staff participate in a discussion about opportunities and new ways in an improved working hours arrangement.**

The goal of the consultation meeting is to ensure the participation of all staff, as appropriate, in the discussion and decisions on changes. It should be noted, however, that not all unions agreed to changes in working hours, and that a number of government employees are not members of unions. Consultation with staff can be configured in different ways depending on circumstances. The Working Hours Committee convenes the consultation meeting and reports on the gathering of information and the results of analyses. The meeting will discuss staff's wishes and proposals for changes in working hours with regard to the operations and services of the institution. The timing of when the changes will take effect should also be discussed.

In larger workplaces, a national assembly arrangement could be most suitable and for staff then to be divided into groups according to e.g. divisions or departments. In smaller workplaces, an informal conversation in fewer steps could be more suitable, where everyone is given the opportunity to participate in the conversation and express their views. The Working Hours Committee in each workplace will decide the best way to conduct the conversation.

The following is useful information and questions that could be a starting point in the conversation about better working hours.

### Reform

The workplaces that have already shortened the working week underwent organizational changes in work arrangements, procedures, collaboration and time management in order to achieve goals for the mutual benefit of staff and the workplace. Management and staff saw the project as an opportunity for reform and agree that it is to everyone's benefit, although it was certainly an effort to begin with. The conclusion is that it is possible to have a shorter workday and nevertheless deliver the same, or even better, performance in the workplace.

A good start would be to give lectures or receive consultation on project management and time management to help staff with the conceptualization of better utilization of working hours.

The shortening of the working week is a collaborative project where everyone has to be diligent in order for it to be successful. It is important that staff know the goals of the institution and the work they perform, know how to prioritize projects and that technology and work equipment supports their work. It is also necessary to examine whether it is possible to distribute tasks and the daily division of tasks in a different way and define what needs to be changed in order to achieve the set goals. Everyone needs to participate in examining for which projects it's possible to change procedures and keep in mind how important technology is.



## **Discussion Points for a Dialogue in the Workplace**

*Below you will find examples of discussion points for a dialogue between staff and management regarding procedures and work arrangements to preparing for the shortening of the working week.*

### **Operations and Work Environment**

- How is work allocated?
- How is the collaboration between staff, divisions and departments?
- How is job training structured and what are the opportunities in more definite training processes?
- How is the information flow?
- Is there peace and quiet in the workplace?
- How is morale?
- How is it ensured that the staff's skills are utilized in the best way?
- Where are the priorities and how is prioritization made clear?
- How is the staff guaranteed focus when needed?

### **Procedures and Responsibilities**

- How is the area of responsibility defined?
- Who has the authority to make decisions?
- How can approval be sped up to avoid delays?
- How can tasks and/or cases coming to a stop with one/few be avoided?
- How is equality in the distribution of projects ensured?

### **Waste in the Local Environment**

- How to reduce emails or send to a more targeted group?
- How to utilize time better with more targeted workshops or education?
- How are meetings prepared and conducted?
- How can video conferencing equipment be utilized better?
- How can tasks be handled better to prevent them from having to be reworked?
- How to minimize exceptions to procedures/working methods?
- How to prepare in advance for seasonal fluctuations?
- How is necessary or useful information being recorded?
- What information is being recorded more than once?
- What information is being recorded into different systems?

- How is information updated and made accessible?
- How do the information systems communicate?
- How is data collected and stored?
- How can the data search time be shortened?
- How can the waiting time for reviewing data be shortened?
- How can commute, relocation or movement of staff between places be reduced?
- How can time management be improved?

### *Flexible or Fixed Attendance*

*Government jobs are diverse and therefore some groups can choose their workplace, working hours and/or projects and thus enjoy flexibility in their work.*

*An example of this is staff who can generally influence their working hours, even the workplace, and decide, e.g., to work from home and plan their tasks accordingly.*

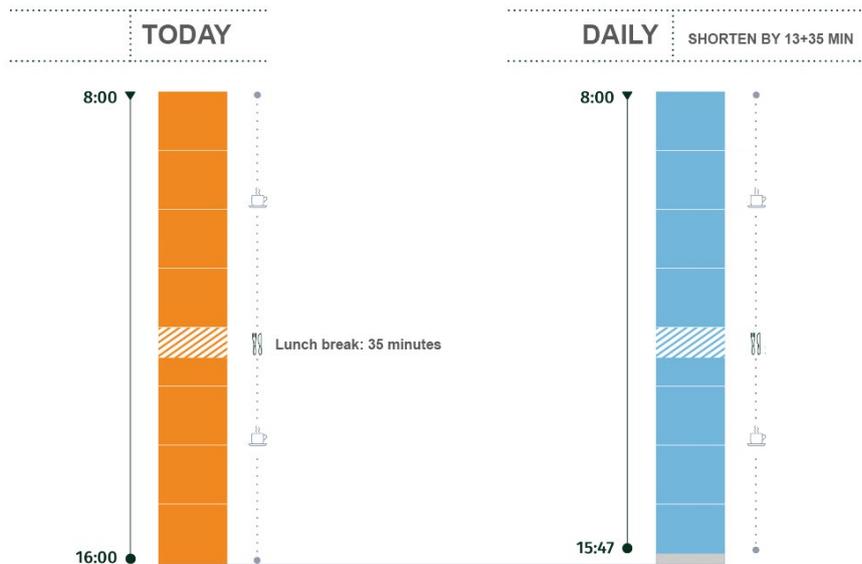
*Other groups have a fixed attendance and then their immediate superior is in charge of working hours, tasks and/or the workplace. Therefore, it is most common that the employee in question needs cover in order for them to take a break from work.*

*Prior to changes, it is useful to identify which staff enjoy flexibility and who have a fixed attendance. The reason being that if the intention is to go for maximum shortening, lunch and coffee breaks will be defunct. This does not mean that staff will not have the opportunity to eat during working hours, but that specific lunch and coffee breaks will not be defined in the new working hours schedule. Instead they become flexible and staff commit to try and utilize their working hours better, but still get lunch, coffee or a light snack in between. That type of arrangement is easy for staff who have flexibility and can plan their own lunch breaks. The same does not apply to staff with a fixed attendance and therefore their breaks need to be planned. Lunch and coffee breaks will be discussed in more detail below.*

## Working Hours

Staff's wishes regarding the arrangement of the shortening, how much should be shortened and whether hours will be shortened daily, weekly, variously, such as daily and weekly or in another manner, need to be discussed. The collective agreements of BHM's member associations stipulate that holidays may be accumulated throughout the year due to the agreed minimum reduction of 13 minutes per day, but the collective agreements of BSRB's and ASÍ member associations do not. It is also necessary to discuss whether configurations need to be different according to departments, divisions, etc.

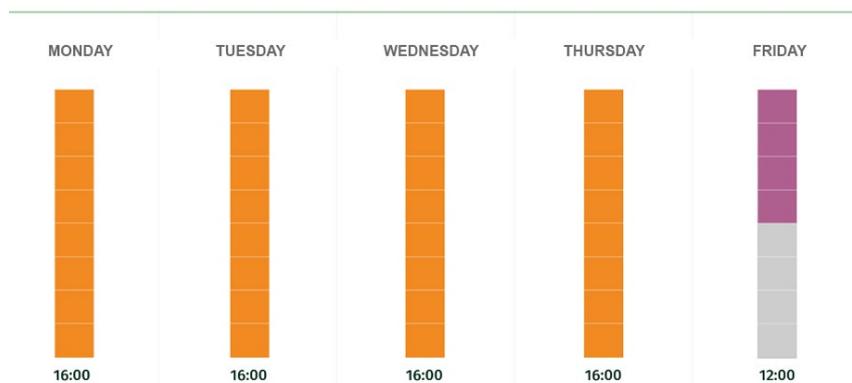
### Examples of Configurations for Shortened Working Hours - Shortening each workday



Example 1: Traditional breaks are part of working hours and are therefore not under the employee's control. The schedule assumes that the working day is continuous. Daily shortening: Each working day is shortened at the beginning or end of the day and traditional breaks are part of the working hours. Working hours could then, for example, be from 8:00-15:12.

### Shortening once per week

**WEEK: Day begins at 8 a.m.**



Weekly shortening: Continuous shortening is taken out of one working day a week and traditional breaks are part of the working hours. Working hours could then, for example be from 8-16 four days a week, but from 8-12 one day a week.

**Shorten by one day, every other week by 480 minutes**

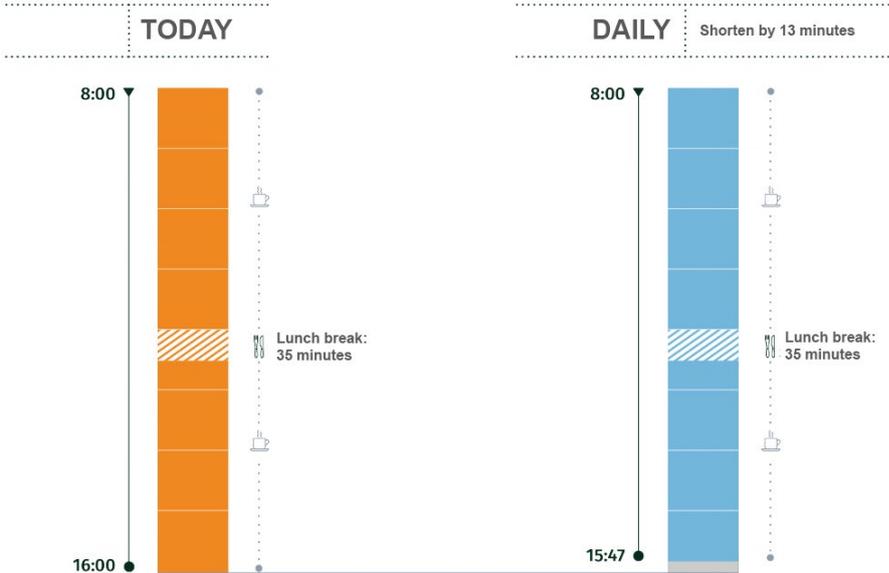
**MONTH: Day begins at 8 a.m.**



Bi-weekly shortening or accumulated according to the collective agreements of BHM member associations: Continuous shortening is taken as a holiday bi-weekly or over a certain period and traditional breaks are part of the working day. Working hours could then, for example, be from 8-16 with a holiday every tenth working day or on certain days through the year.

Example 2: Shortening the working hours by 13 minutes a day, or 65 minutes a week. Breaks do not count toward working hours since they are under the employee’s control to allocate at will.

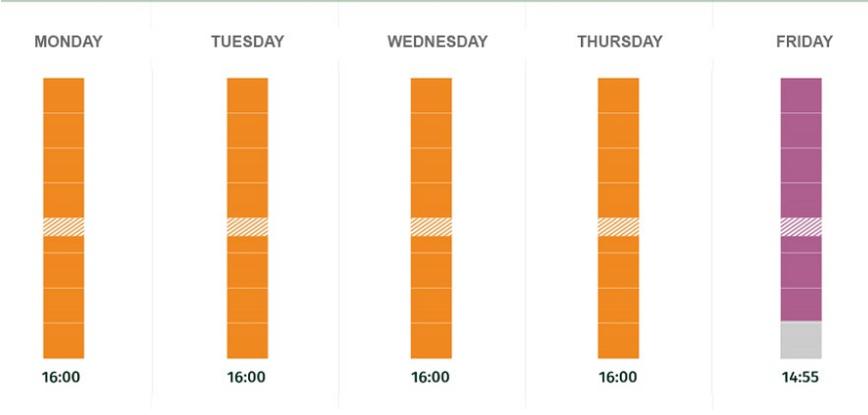
**Shortening each day**



Daily shortening: Each working day is shortened at the beginning or end of the day and traditional breaks, such as 35 minute lunch breaks, are not part of the working hours. Working hours could then, for example, be from 8:00-15:47.

**Shorten once a week**

**WEEK: Day begins at 8 a.m.**



Weekly shortening: Continuous shortening is taken out of one working day a week and traditional breaks, such as 35 minute lunch breaks, are not part of the working hours. Working hours could then be from 8-16 four days a week, but from 8-14:55 one day a week.

Bi-weekly shortening or accumulated throughout the year according to the collective agreements of BHM member associations: Continuous shortening is taken as a holiday bi-weekly or over a longer period and traditional breaks, such as 35 minute lunch breaks, are not part of the working hours. Working hours could then be from 8-16 for nine days but from 8-13:50 every tenth day, or days accumulated throughout the year.

Numerous options are available, so it is possible to plan the shortening of the working week in a different way than these examples show. Therefore, it is possible to choose a mixed route with varying degrees of shortening by days any time of the week or take the shortening out at the beginning of the day.

It is also possible to choose between other methods, e.g., staff can decide to shorten their lunch breaks to 20 minutes, thus shortening the working hours by 15 minutes a day. In addition to that there is a shortening of 13 minutes, which is part of the shortening according to the collective agreement. The daily shortening is then a total of 28 minutes, but this way staff still have control over lunch breaks and can then, for example, leave the workplace. That way lunch breaks are not part of the working hours.

**Break Arrangements**

A part of implementing better working hours is deciding on the arrangement of lunch and coffee breaks. Collective agreements previously assumed that lunch breaks were not part of working hours, but that two paid coffee breaks, a total of 35 minutes were, and therefore part of working hours.

In most workplaces, the coffee breaks have usually been used for lunch, so the working hours have been a total of 8 hours, with a 35-minute lunch break. Staff also have the opportunity to have coffee before and after lunch, but those coffee breaks have been flexible and rarely timed, as the mandatory break stipulated in the collective agreement has been taken during the lunch break.

This arrangement can change with the shortening of working hours. If staff choose the maximum shortening, so that the working week will be 36 hours, staff will relinquish control of coffee and lunch breaks and they will be flexible. That doesn't mean that there will be no lunch and coffee breaks. An example of this is that in workplaces where there are canteens and break rooms, staff will continue to be able to have lunch and take a shorter break from work. In cases where staff have a fixed attendance and cannot get away without cover, arrangements will be made that provide cover during meals and so that people can have coffee or get up before and after lunch. Coffee breaks in the morning and afternoon will stay the same, i.e. flexible and not always timed. Lunch and coffee breaks will then be part of the working hours. Some workplaces don't have a canteen and staff have found solutions to this, e.g. everyone brings a packed lunch to save time going out to the grocery store or restaurant.

The Working Hours Committees must ensure that these issues are raised in the conversations with staff. Part of what needs to be decided is the reference time for lunch, depending on, for example, people's access to a canteen or the conditions for eating. In workplaces where the working week has been shortened, this has invariably meant that lunch and coffee breaks are shortened so that the time can be utilized better. If staff want to keep the same arrangement and get their 35 minute lunch break, which they can allocate at will, e.g. by leaving the workplace, the working week is shortened by 65 minutes, or 13 minutes a day.

### *Periodic Breaks*

*It is important for staff's mental and physical health to take periodic breaks. Workplaces are encouraged to plan changes to working hours with that in mind. One of the most important change in attitudes that need to happen is that attendance and long periods of sitting or monotonous posture does not necessarily yield the best performance, but regular breaks and nutrition can give staff increased energy and concentration. And taking a break can give staff a new perspective on demanding tasks. Employees who take periodical breaks show fewer signs of fatigue and stress and the end of the working day than those who don't. Mutual flexibility in these matters, with regards to the nature of the work, is a major factor in the change in attitudes. There is a risk that staff will be reluctant to take a break if their supervisors indicate in some way that this is not acceptable. Therefore, management needs to consider their own habits because they lead by example.*

### *Overtime*

*Overtime culture in the workplace is a particular topic. It is vital to analyze and discuss the need for overtime. It is common for there to be a generational difference when it comes to people's willingness to work overtime and it is often related to family responsibilities. In those workplaces that have implemented a shorter working week, overtime has generally not increased, but management has pointed out that this must be followed up systematically. The goal of better working hours is to reduce total working hours, not to increase staff's wages since overtime starts earlier. The shortening also provides an opportunity to adopt new attitudes about working better in a shorter period of time. Therefore, for example, the workplace may agree that overtime will not be worked except in exceptional cases as recommended by the supervisor, and then only due to a lack of staff, unexpected workloads or other temporary circumstances.*

### *Popping Out*

Efficiency during working hours depend largely on whether staff can do their job without interruption. Many workplaces already offer a lot of flexibility so staff can take care of family and private errands during working hours, as it is often the only time of day when it's possible to carry out certain errands. Specific discussions must be had on how to deal with "popping out", whether it is possible to eliminate it altogether during working hours, as staff can take care of what they need in their free time after the working week has been shortened, whether there should be any exceptions, and what those exceptions should be

### *Procedure for Attendance*

Examples of issues that need to be considered when reviewing procedure for attendance and logging of absence:

- Popping out during working hours
- Absence related to staff's health.
- Absence related to staff's children's health.
- Absence related to the health of staff's close relatives, such as spouses, parents and siblings or long-term illness in the family of other than the employee's children.
- Absence related to emergencies

### *Preparation for New Working Hours Arrangement*

- Reform - institution/workplace's adaptation to better utilizing time
  - Changes to arrangements or work processes, technological innovations, time management, collaboration
  - Increased autonomy and responsibility of staff
  - Increased trust of management to staff and between staff members
  - Flexibility of parties
- Adaptation of workplace culture
- New working hours arrangements
  - Length of working week (number of hours)
  - Daily/weekly working hours (e.g.. 8:00-15:12 or working to 12:00 on Fridays)
    - Different arrangement by groups, departments or divisions
    - Fixed or flexible attendance?
  - Break Arrangements
    - Fixed or flexible attendance?
- Clear message
  - Accumulation of shortening, conflicts with illness, red days, holidays, etc.
  - Impact on the acquisition of rights
- Resumption of total/position/period of agreement on changed work arrangements

## Step 4 - Processing Proposals

**The Working Hours Committee processes the results of the meeting and makes proposals for the arrangements of working hours at the institution.**

The Working Hours Committee processes the conversation with staff described in Step 3 and makes proposals for changes to the organization of working hours and the layout of breaks. A specific proposal shall be made for the organization of working hours for staff who work jobs where flexible breaks are not possible and cover is needed. The proposals may vary depending on departments, divisions or different work arrangements. The committee may decide to request further data when processing the proposals.

## Step 5 - Proposals Introduced and Discussed

**Proposals introduced and discussed with staff and management.**

The Working Hours Committee introduces its proposals to staff and management. The goal of the conversation is to ensure that there is agreement and consensus on the proposals for better working hours before they are put to a vote.

After which, the Working Hours Committee prepares proposals for an agreement in accordance with the outcome of the conversation and prepares a vote.

## Step 6 - The Vote

**Final proposals are put to a vote.**

Staff and management vote on the Working Hours Committee's proposals and at least half of the staff must participate. Since proposals are multi-layered, e.g. by staff groups, departments or divisions, a majority must approve the proposal or a majority of the staff the proposal refers to. In those instances the vote might have to be repeated in order to get a result. If more than one configuration is offered for each staff group, the proposal that receives the most votes is chosen. If the votes of each proposal have similar support, a second vote between the two top proposals could better reflect the will of the majority and contribute to an agreement on the result.

Voting takes place in a meeting or electronically.

## Step 7a - Proposal Approved

### **Proposal approved.**

If the proposal for changes in the organization of working hours is approved, the director will send it to the relevant ministry for confirmation. Once the ministry has confirmed the proposed changes, the proposal is considered approved. The Ministry sends a copy to the trade union of workers and the Department of Public Management and Reform for information.

## Step 7b - Proposal Rejected

### **Proposal rejected.**

If the proposal is rejected, a notification of an unsuccessful dialogue shall be sent to the relevant ministry and the relevant trade union as well as the Department of Public Management and Reform for information. The director convenes the Working Hours Committee and the next steps are decided. Assistance can be sought from an implementation group that will be operated during the term of the collective agreements, or until 31 March 2023.

## Step 8 - Implementation

### **Implementing better working hours in an institution.**

The changes in working hours will take effect no later than 1 January 2021. If an agreement is reached, the change may take effect earlier. The decision on when the change takes effect shall be made in a consultation meeting between the Working Hours Committee and staff, cf. Step 3

# The Benefits of Better Working Hours

The goal of allowing the working week to be shortened is to improve the workplace culture and utilization of working hours, increase efficiency, improve the quality of service, ensure better mutual flexibility and thus promote a better quality of life and harmony between family life and work. A number of studies show that a shorter working week contributes to increased job satisfaction, increased well-being, better health as well as increased security of staff and those who use the service where appropriate, without affecting performance.

Staff get more time with their families and the divide between work and private life become clearer with better organization of working hours. The work environment gets better and absences related to illness decrease. Staff turnover is reduced and it is easier to hire new people in the workplace, which increases its competitiveness compared to other workplaces.

## Better Utilization of Working Hours

Experience shows that shortening the working week contributes to increased positivity and greater job satisfaction in the workplace. The change in attitudes leads to people showing more initiative in their work and positive changes are reflected in different working methods. That way, everyone strives to find the opportunities that lie in improving the organization of work, whether in their own working methods or with the help of technology, for example.

Employees consider both themselves to be more organized, and the workplace as a whole, because of a good dialogue on how to better utilize the working hours. Increased cooperation also plays a major role in success.

An example of quotes from participants in these kind of pilot projects is the following. One employee describes that “job satisfaction has increased” and another says that “morale has greatly improved” in his workplace after working hours were shortened. The third says that in his “workplace, people seem to be much happier and ready to do things, after this experiment started”. The participants also stated that positivity and joy in their work “[encourages] initiative in the staff”.

When asked about changes in working methods, some participants specifically stated that they work harder, take shorter lunch and coffee breaks and utilize working hours better. One employee says the shortening has cause “less dawdling and online browsing when people get tired in the afternoon”. Fatigue causes people to lose focus on work related tasks and search for entertainment during working hours or run personal errands online. Another sums up the effect of shortening the working week like this:

*“I’m incredibly happy with the shortening of the working week. I feel like I get through as many, if not more, tasks with a 36 hour working week than I did with a 40 hour working week. I spend a lot less time browsing the internet or taking breaks and I can balance my work and personal life much better. I’ve been a part of this project in my workplace since it began and I feel like the productivity of all staff has increased and I can tell that everyone is very happy about this project.”*

Staff satisfaction, which is described here as a prerequisite for increased efficiency, is then reflected in increased productivity of staff, work units and workplaces as a whole.

## **Quality Time With the Family**

Many participants in pilot projects on shortening the working week often experienced, before their working week was shortened, that they were exhausted by the end of the working week, but say that has changed after the working week was shortened. They say they are a lot less tired at the end of the working day and have more energy for family activities during the working week and on weekends, as well as having more time to themselves.

There is a lot of pressure on families with children and many find it difficult to handle both work and private life to their satisfaction. A shorter working week makes it easier for families with children to balance work and private life and reduce the pressures at home, especially in relation to driving children to school and leisure activities, and parents feel less likely to have to ask others to pick up or drive their children. It was especially mentioned that shortening the working week helps to make the complicated puzzle that is running a home, easier. Family quality time increased and participants felt more calm and relaxed and felt that communication with coworkers and family members had improved. This reduces stress communication since there is less pressure on the home.

Grandparents also mentioned increased quality time with the grandkids and participants also mentioned that they had more time to look after older or sick relatives.

## **Less Stress**

High demands in work and private life take their toll on staff. A pilot project on shortening the working week for employees of the City of Reykjavik shows that work-related stress decreased by 1.6% when shortened by one hour per week. Individuals who get a shortening of three hours per week therefore experience about 5% less work-related stress on average.

In light of the increase in cases of high levels of stress and burnout at work, there is a lot to gain by promoting the mental well-being of staff. One of the most common advice give to battle stress in the workplace, other than reviewing the work environment and a systematic reduction in workload, is to create space for staff to rest, pursue hobbies, exercise, spend time outdoors and make a clear distinction between work and private time. It has been pointed out that the integration of the home and work is an important public health task due to the great strain it puts on modern families. Furthermore, that imbalance between the two can increase the risk of cardiovascular disease, cancer, obesity and diabetes.

A Swedish study shows a correlation between a six hour working day and better sleep, as well as less stress. Lack of retrieval can lead to exhaustion and sleep disturbances but the best solution is increased free time. After the pilot project on shortening the working week had run for eighteen months, the result was clear and it was obvious that the staff slept better and longer.

## **Me Time**

Many who have experienced a shortening of the working week themselves mention that entails a much higher quality of life than they initially expected. Staff also found that they had more

time to themselves and improved mental and physical health. Furthermore, they had more energy for socializing or exercising.

There was a difference in what people used the extra time saved by the shortening for, but many mentioned that they have more time to do things they enjoy doing. For example hobbies, socializing, taking care of parents and other relatives, self-care and cleaning before other family members come home and walk the kids to and from school. In general, participants' job satisfaction increased, the interviewees said, which according to them led to better service.

## **Increased Equality**

Shortening the working week can promote increased gender equality. Generally, women are more likely to cut back on work in order to take care of children and the home, which affects their wages and career prospects negatively. Therefore, shortening the working week is more likely to promote gender equality in the labor market and in the home.

A shorter working week can contribute to increased participation of women in employment, reduce the number of women applying for part-time work and contribute to more equal responsibility for childcare and domestic work. A shorter working week can lead to more people choosing full-time work or a higher employment rate, thereby raising their wages. That will affect women's income in the labor market, but also payments from the pension fund after the end of their professional career.