**Article 1 - Here's What Happened When Sweden Tried To Implement A 6-Hour Workday**

**https://www.good.is/articles/sweden-work-day**

*by*[*Penn Collins*](https://www.good.is/contributors/penn-collins)

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With much of the world moving towards automation, efficiency, and telecommuting, we hold out hope that these developments could one day result in people spending less time at work doing their job. Even without taking into account recent developments and attitudes, studies have shown that trying to keep focus during an eight-hour workday is a herculean effort that just doesn’t pan out as often as we would hope.

What normally happens is, to undertake a full eight hours of work, a worker needs to implement breaks in the day, which can cause an eight-hour workday to reach ten hours, stifling quality of life and time outside the office. [Put succinctly by Linus Feldt](http://www.fastcoexist.com/3051448/why-sweden-is-shifting-to-a-6-hour-work-day), the CEO of Swedish app development firm Filimundus, "To stay focused on a specific work task for eight hours is a huge challenge. . . . In order to cope, we mix in things and pauses to make the workday more endurable. At the same time, we are having it hard to manage our private life outside of work. We want to spend more time with our families, we want to learn new things or exercise more. I wanted to see if there could be a way to mix these things."

On paper, it’s appealing enough to earn even the support of Fox News in this discussion:

But would something this progressive and employee-friendly prove to be sustainable?

Never ones to shy away from a progressive solution to quality of life, Sweden decided to [run trials of six-hour work days in select environments](http://www.viralthread.com/what-really-happened-when-sweden-trialed-a-six-hour-working-day/?all), giving workers at a retirement home the same pay as they were earning for eight-hour shifts.

That was two years ago. Now, [the data is coming back](http://www.fastcoexist.com/3051448/why-sweden-is-shifting-to-a-6-hour-work-day), allowing us to see what a six-hour workday really does for people and companies, good and bad.

The good news?

Employee quality of life went way up, in and out of the office. Staff satisfaction, quality patient care, and health all climbed. I’m not sure this is a big surprise, considering people who work less tend to be happier, more fulfilled, and more focused when they are working.

The bad news?

It’s expensive for employers. The nursing home in this trial, Svartedalens retirement home, had to pick up 17 more part-time employees to fill the gaps in a 24-hour day left by shorter shifts. Even a local politician and proponent of the initiative, Daniel Bernmar, says that the cost to employers is just too high to see this as a viable change in the near future. He stated, “It’s associated with higher costs, absolutely. It’s far too expensive to carry out a general shortening of working hours within a reasonable time frame.”

That’s probably why you haven’t heard about this concept more often. In fact, Sweden gave it a go previously in the 90s, and the result was the same: great benefits for workers, untenable for employers/companies.

But for firms that aren’t round-the-clock, or are based primarily on output rather than face time or availability? Well, those guys have already moved to the six-hour workday in Sweden. Feldt’s tech firm Filimundus, took it on last year as the company standard. So far, here’s happy with what has come back to the organization. "My impression now is that it is easier to focus more intensely on the work that needs to be done and you have the stamina to do it and still have energy left when leaving the office," he says.

The concept of having people around the office for the sake of availability or corporate culture is fast becoming a relic of a bygone era. Workers are still available outside of sleeping hours and for something like tech, there’s enough individual work to be done that cutting office hours by 25% doesn’t unduly infringe on interaction or meetings. In fact, it might allow workers to be more social and forthright than they would be in a longer day.

Whether or not the concept becomes an industry standard overnight may not matter. It’s possible, or as Feldt thinks, likely, that a candidate would choose a six-hour firm over an eight-hour one if with a proportionate change in pay.

He says:

 "I believe that we value time more than money today. I am absolutely sure that more and more people would choose more free time before a high salary. Going from an eight-hour day to six has helped us spread the message that we invest in our staff. That we believe that a happy staff is the absolute top priority for a successful company. If your staff is happy, your company is happy."

So the concept doesn’t need to get adopted across the board to get traction. All it takes is one firm willing to offer this, then noticeably higher returns when it comes to production, value, and retention. Capitalism dictates other companies would forget their objections and follow suit, so stay tuned.

**Article 2 - Sweden tested out 6-hour work day - and it mostly worked http://www.businessinsider.com/swedens-short-workdays-boosted-happiness-too-expensive-2017-1**

Chris Weller, January 9th, 2017

Sweden is known for its commitment to keeping citizens happy, but a recent experiment shows boosting happiness can come at a high cost. As part of a government study, a select group of retirement­home workers in Gothenburg, Sweden have been working just 30 hours each week for the past two years. The results of that study, unveiled last week, were about what you'd expect — people claimed they were happier, less stressed, and enjoyed the work more.

The only downside: The schedule was a bit pricey.

The city council of Gothenburg pushed for the experiment in 2015, but Daniel Bernmar, a local politician, recently told Bloomberg that "it's far too expensive to carry out a general shortening of working hours within a reasonable time frame." To give the roughly 80 workers at the Svartedalen old folks' home more time off, the city government had to hire 17 additional people to cover the shifts. The new hires put a $738,000­sized dent in the payroll — an increase of about 22%. (Although, as Bernmar told the New York Times, lower unemployment costs offset that increase by about 10%.) A couple other experiments in shorter work weeks are also underway in Sweden, with final results still to come.

Sub­40­hour workweeks are common in other parts of Europe — in France, workweeks are 35 hours — but that's hardly the norm worldwide. In the US, the average full­time worker commits 47 hours to their job. In certain Asian countries, such as South Korea and Japan, the numbers are even higher.

A few large American companies have also started experimenting with shorter workweeks to see whether employees can maintain the same level of output with the added time off.

Amazon, for instance, recently began giving part­time workers (those logging only 30 hours a week) full benefits at 75% pay. And the sales and marketing company SteelHouse kicked off 2017 by announcing there will be at least one three­day weekend every month. SteelHouse CEO Mark Douglas told Business Insider in December that the next logical step will be to test out a four­day workweek.

Sweden's experiment may throw a bit of cold water on the idea that fewer working hours are a good thing in the long run.

But Bernmar told Bloomberg that the government might be too short-sighted in its judgment about costs. A long-term benefit of shortening the workweek could be that people wouldn't get as fatigued over the course of their careers. Bernmar also mentioned that the experiment poses an important existential question about how a government views work. If a city government or business prizes lower expenses over increased well-being for workers, as he says Gothenburg will likely do, that sends an entirely different message than if it were the reverse.

**Article 3 - Sweden to drop 6-hour workday experiment**

[**http://www.rawstory.com/2017/01/sweden-to-drop-6-hour-workday-experiment/**](http://www.rawstory.com/2017/01/sweden-to-drop-6-hour-workday-experiment/)

International Business Times, January 5th, 2017

Sweden will abandon its two-year experiment on the six-hour work day after findings revealed that the costs outweigh the benefits. The experiment involved shortening work hours but maintaining pay levels for nurses at an old people’s home in the city of Gothenburg.

While there were improvements in patient care and nurses reported feeling healthier thereby reducing the number of sick leaves they took, making the measure a permanent one or expanding the experiment would cost the Gothenburg city council much more money and would require funds from the national government.

“It’s associated with higher costs, absolutely,” Daniel Bernmar, the leader of the Left party running the trial at the Svartedalen old people’s home, told Bloomberg. “It’s far too expensive to carry out a general shortening of working hours within a reasonable time frame.”

In order to maintain the staff’s shortened working hours, the home had to employ 17 extra people costing them nearly 12 million kronor ($1.3 million). However, Bernmar, whose party pushed for the experiment at Svartedalens, dismissed reports calling the experiment a failure.

“It still remains to be seen whether the economic costs of reduced working hours outweigh the benefits. The costs of the trial for the public economy were actually half of what we thought they would be,” he told the Guardian.

The final set of findings is expected in March but the latest report said unemployment costs were slashed by 4.7 million kronor during the first 18 months of the experiment thanks to the added hiring.

“I personally believe in shorter working hours as a long-term solution,” Bernmar said. “The richer we become, the more we need to take advantage of that wealth in other ways than through a newer car or higher consumption.”

Cutting work hours has proved beneficial in terms of addressing issues like health, overwork, unemployment and inequality. The U.S. is one of the few countries that does not require employers to offer paid parental leave or paid time off. A report by market research firm Harris Interactive and careers website Glassdoor found that Americans only take half of their total paid vacation days.

“Americans are among the hardest working people in the world,” Mark Hamrick, the Washington, D.C. bureau chief at Bankrate.com, told MarketWatch.

**Article 4 - Why one CEO shortened his company workday to 6 hours**

**http://www.cnbc.com/2016/12/23/why-one-ceo-shortened-his-company-workday-to-6-hours.html**

Kathleen Elkins | @kathleen\_elk Friday, 23 Dec 2016 | 12:14 PM ET

In May 2015, founder and CEO of Acuity Scheduling Gavin Zuchlinski decided to offer his employees six-hour workdays during the summer months, while still offering full pay and benefits.

"I wanted to let everyone enjoy the summer, but it just worked out well enough that we kept it throughout the year," Zuchlinski tells CNBC. "We've been doing this for nearly two years now and we have the same productivity that we had during the eight-hour days."

The online scheduling company, which Zuchlinski built from scratch a decade ago, places an emphasis on customer service.

In fact, "the biggest role in our company is customer support, which can be emotionally draining," the CEO says. "We're not just trying to grind people out for hours. You need to be able to have your time off to really be fresh, show your personality, and actually be a human while offering customer support."

Acuity employees typically work for three hours in the morning, take a couple of hours off during the middle of the day, and are on for another three hours in the afternoon.

What's more, each of the company's 15 employees works remotely, meaning they don't have to deal with a commute.

Employees are scattered all over the globe from New York, where Acuity is headquartered, to Greece and Scotland. The geographic diversity works to the company's advantage, Zuchlinski explains: "Having everyone in different time zones means people can work roughly normal hours. Nobody is working crazy night shifts — but we're still able to provide about 15 hours of customer support throughout the day."

The CEO doesn't advertise Acuity's 30-hour workweek in job postings. "It's just a nice surprise after you're hopefully attracted to Acuity through everything else we offer here," he says.

Zuchlinski isn't the only one experimenting with a shortened schedule. Amazon is piloting a 30-hour workweek, and an online search optimization company based in Sweden, Brath, operates on a six-hour workday schedule.

And then there's the San Diego-based start-up where employees work from just 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., without a lunch break, for a total of 25 hours a week.

"It's OK to give that time back to employees," Zuchlinski says. "Ultimately, it will make them happier and more productive — and if you're happy and enjoy your life, you're probably going to share that with all of our customers."

**Article 5 - How Open Office Plans Affect Workplace Productivity**

**http://www.business.com/human-resources/dan-scalco-workplace-productivity/**

Learn the pros and cons of working in an open office

January 15, 2017 Posted by Dan Scalco

Open office spaces have initiated the halcyon days of productivity. Or they’re a harbinger of workplace productivity doom. It all depends on whom you ask.

Open offices were meant to be the antidote to the woes of cubicle dwelling — a friendlier, more efficient and generally more human workplace. And while these office setups do come with some benefits, they’re also not without their shortcomings. As a result, open office plans have received a fair amount of backlash in recent years.

So do open office plans help productivity, or do they inhibit it? Turns out the answer is both.

**The benefits**

The open office concept was devised in Germany in the 1950s, but it’s only become popular in the United States within the past decade. The U.S. trend caught on fast: A whopping near­70 percent of American workers now find themselves in open offices. From corporate behemoths like Google to scrappy e­commerce startups like Saatva Mattress Company, companies large and small have made the transition to collaborative workspaces.

For employers, the benefits of open office spaces are obvious. They reduce overhead by minimizing the cost of office space and equipment. There are no cubicle materials to purchase, more people can be squeezed into less square footage, and consequently there are fewer maintenance costs for the company as a whole. Open offices also allow for easy observation of employees and greater assurance that workers aren’t slacking off on the job.

Beyond their cost­saving benefits, open offices are thought to foster a sense of shared mission, create a less hierarchical, more laid­back atmosphere, and facilitate collaboration between coworkers. This collaboration, in turn, can promote greater productivity and creative thinking amongst coworkers (or so the thinking goes).

There is some evidence that open office spaces achieve exactly what they set out to do. Some studies have found they can indeed cultivate a sense of community and increase the efficiency with which information is distributed throughout a team. When executives and workers share the same workspace, it can break down barriers and increase understanding between employees at all levels of the company. This can increase the likelihood that problems will be solved efficiently and effectively. All of this can have a profound effect on workplace productivity.

In spite of these benefits, we can’t just say that open office spaces are a productivity boon and leave it at that. Unfortunately, it’s not that simple.

**Potential downsides**

While open office spaces do promote more interaction between coworkers, this isn’t always a good thing.

For starters, several studies have found that open offices are noisy places, and this noise is a persistent distraction for workers. From ringing phones to water cooler talk, noisy interruptions can waste employees’ time and drain their productivity— especially when they feel they have no control over their environment. Headphones or “quiet hours” can help, but this sometimes inhibits the collaboration open spaces are meant to afford.

In addition to being a distraction, background noise can actually inhibit employees’ cognitive performance. It also contributes to a general sense of overstimulation in open offices, which has been linked to heightened stress. Stress, in turn, can be a serious productivity killer.

Another downside of open offices is they are devoid of privacy. (Anyone who’s ever received a call from their doctor while sitting elbow­to­elbow with their coworkers can attest to this.) This may facilitate collaboration, but it can also increase stress. When employees have nowhere to stash their valuables, take confidential meetings, or do anything else that might benefit from a little privacy, their ability to focus on their jobs is going to suffer. This explains why studies have found a sense of privacy can improve job performance. By depriving employees of privacy, you might decrease their ability to be productive.

Finally, open office spaces can hamper productivity by increasing absenteeism due to sickness. One study found that workers in open office spaces take an average of 62 percent more sick days than those who work in private offices. I don’t have to explain to you how productivity is affected by employees spending more time away from work.

So there are some downsides to open office spaces when it comes to productivity. But reverting to cubicles won’t solve all these workplace woes. (In fact, research has found cubicle dwellers are the most miserable workers of all.) So what’s the solution?

**Achieving a healthy balance**

According to research, the office setup that would best maximize productivity in the workspace would be to give every employee their own private office. But seeing as most companies aren’t going to spring for that floor plan anytime soon, the solution may lie in finding a healthy balance between collaborative and private office spaces.

Employees benefit from collaborative workspaces, but they also need to have places they can retreat to in order to process interactions, hold private meetings, conduct work that requires strict concentration or is time­sensitive, or otherwise satisfy their own personal work style. When employees feel empowered to shift their work environment depending on the type of work in front of them, it can increase their morale and their performance on the job.

To achieve this, consider adding

private alcoves, workdays or breakout rooms to an otherwise open office space. Also, don’t discount the impact of other environmental factors in the office. No matter the configuration of your workspace, you can improve employees’ health and productivity by ensuring the flow of quality air, using natural lighting and providing access to green spaces.

Perhaps the most important takeaway? Culture is king. If you create a work environment in which employees feel valued, executives are approachable and workers are empowered to adapt their workstation to their own needs (or work outside of the office if necessary), then you’ll have the best chance of inspiring a motivated and productive workforce.

**Article 6 - Why Germans Work Fewer Hours But Produce More: A Study In Culture**

**http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amol-sarva/why-germans-work-fewer-ho\_b\_6172262.html**

 11/18/2014 12:32 pm ET | Updated Jan 18, 2015

Amol Sarva

Startup founder: Knotel, Knotable, Halo Neuroscience

When many Americans think of Germany, images of WWII often come to mind. But what many people don’t realize is that Germany is the industrial powerhouse of Europe, and is a leading manufacturer of goods for export to developing Asian nations. We don’t hear about the superiority of German engineering in Volkswagen commercials for nothing!

The economic engine of the EU, Germany single-handedly saved the Eurozone from collapse in 2012. At the same time, German workers enjoy unparalleled worker protections and shorter working hours than most of their global counterparts. How can a country that works an average of 35 hours per week (with an average 24 paid vacation days to boot) maintain such a high level of productivity?

**Working Hours Mean Working Hours**

In German business culture, when an employee is at work, they should not be doing anything other than their work. Facebook, office gossip with co-workers, trolling Reddit for hours, and pulling up a fake spreadsheet when your boss walks by are socially unacceptable behaviors. Obviously, in the United States these behaviors are frowned up on by management. But in Germany, there is zero tolerance among peers for such frivolous activities.

In the BBC documentary “Make Me A German”, a young German woman explained her culture shock while on a working exchange to the UK.

“I was in England for an exchange... I was in the office and the people are talking all the time about their private things... ‘What’s the plan for tonight?’, and all the time drinking coffee...”

She was quite surprised by the casual nature of British workers. Upon further discussion, the Germans reveal that Facebook is not allowed in the office whatsoever, and no private email is permitted.

**Goal-Oriented, Direct Communication Is Valued**

German business culture is one of intense focus and direct communication. While Americans tend to value small talk and maintaining an upbeat atmosphere, Germans rarely beat around the bush. German workers will directly speak to a manager about performance reviews, launch into a business meeting without any ‘icebreakers’, and use commanding language without softening the directives with polite phrases. Whereas an American would say, “It would be great if you could get this to me by 3pm,” a German would say, “I need this by 3pm”. When a German is at work, they are focused and diligent, which in turn leads to higher productivity in a shorter period of time.

**Germans Have a Life Outside Work**

Germans work hard and play hard. Since the working day is focused on delivering efficient productivity, the off hours are truly off hours. Because of the focused atmosphere and formal environment of German businesses, employees don’t necessarily hang out together after work. Germans generally value a separation between private life and working life.

The German government is currently considering a ban on work-related emails after 6pm, to counter the accessibility that smartphones and constant connectivity give employers to their employees. Can you imagine President Obama enacting such a policy in the United States?

To occupy their plentiful Freizeit, most Germans are involved in Verein (clubs); regularly meeting others with shared interests in their community. Common interests in Germany include Sportvereine (sports clubs), Gesangvereine (choirs or singing clubs), Musikvereine (music clubs), Wandervereine (hiking clubs), Tierzuchtvereine (animal breeding clubs - generally rabbits/pigeons) and collectors’ clubs of all stripes. Even the smallest village in Germany will have several active Vereinen to accommodate residents’ interests. Rather than settling in for a night of TV after work, most Germans socialize with others in their community and cultivate themselves as people.

Germans also enjoy a high number of paid vacation days, with many salaried employees receiving 25-30 paid days (the law requires 20). Extended holidays mean families can enjoy up to a month together, renting an apartment by the seaside or taking a long trip to a new, exciting city.

**Business Respects Parenthood**

Germany’s system of Elternzeit (“parent time” or parental leave) is the stuff of fantasy for most working Americans. The United States does not currently have laws requiring maternity leave, while Germany has some of the most extensive parental protection policies in the developed world. The downside of these maternity leave benefits is that employers may avoid hiring women (with the fear that they will take advantage of the extensive benefits), and German boardrooms are consistently male-dominated at a higher rate than other developed nations, although the government is working to eradicate this trend. The financial benefits of staying home (from both Elternzeit and Elterngeld or parents’ money programs) are often too good to pass up for German mothers, and can lead to stagnant or non-existent careers.

Since “at will” employment does not exist in Germany, all employees have contracts with their employer. Parents who have been gainfully employed for the previous 12 months are eligible for Elternzeit benefits, which include up to three years of unpaid leave with a “sleeping” contract. The employee is eligible to work part-time up to 30 hours while on leave, and must be offered full-time employment at the conclusion of the parental leave. Parents may also choose to postpone up to one year of their leave until the child’s 8th birthday. Either parent is eligible for parental leave, and many couples make the choice based on financial considerations.

In addition to the preservation of the employee’s contract, the state will pay up 67% of the employee’s salary (with a cap of 1800 Euros per month) for 14 months. Parents may split the 14 months however they choose. These benefits apply equally to same-sex couples.

Have you picked your jaw up off the floor yet?

**Put Some German In Your Office**

The German work culture is very different from the average American office, but there are certainly lessons to be learned from our German counterparts. The diligent focus Germans bring to their working life is to be admired. Separating work from play can help us lead a more balanced life; putting the phone down after hours gives us a mental break from stressing about work, and we can return to the office refreshed in the morning. When it’s time to get something done, closing Facebook and turning off push notifications helps keep our minds quiet and the flow steady. Direct conversation can lead to increased efficiency, and more clarity of communication among team members.

Americans often equate longer hours with increased production and superior work ethic, but examining the German model makes one wonder: When it comes to time at work, maybe less really is more!

Originally published by Amol Sarva and Eryn Paul at Knote.com — a new blog about Productivity, Collaboration and Flow.