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Working hours: a hot topic for the Labour Inspection Authority director

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Agency workers should have equal rights

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Finnish presidency to continue fight against youth unemployment

Feb 11, 2011

# Newsletter from the Nordic Labour Journal 1/2011

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Theme: Portable working hours



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# Editorial: The need to limit working life without boundaries

Mixing work and free time can have unwanted consequences. Nordic Labour Journal puts the spotlight on our portable working hours. How will we deal with the grey zone between work and free time?

EDITORIAL

11.02.2011

BY: BERIT KVAM

One in three Norwegian workers is contacted by work outside of working hours once a week or more, according to figures from the latest Statistics Norway survey on work environments presented in this edition of Nordic Labour Journal.

Danish unions are increasingly worried about the lack of working life boundaries, as you can read in Online culture's effect on work-life balance. A survey commissioned by the Danish union representing lawyers and economists, Djøf, shows one third of members feel work and private life blend because of increasing expectations of self management and because it is now possible to work from home in the evenings, at weekends and during holidays. Many feel such flexibility to be an advantage. But it can also be a source of stress, and long-term stress without any chance of restitution can be a health hazard, according to research in Work without boundaries can severely increase number of burnouts. The Danish unions find it difficult to give standard advice on how to limit the tendency to mix work and private life. Djøf encourages members to enter into collective agreements at work and argues work-life balance should be a topic in employee conversations.

Working hour agreements are under pressure, says the director at Norway's Labour Inspection Authority in the Portrait. Often the need to be flexible and the need to look after your health collide. One of the most difficult tasks is to map exactly how much academics really work outside of agreed working hours. Yet the Labour Inspection Authority, she says, is not a life inspection authority. People must be allowed to decide how they spend their free time.

Working hours and flexibility is also a concern on a Nordic level. In Finnish presidency to continue fight against youth unemployment you can read about how these issues are the topic for a Nordic conference in October.

The author of the book "Working life without boundaries" from Copenhagen Business School feels the unions are doing a poor job when it comes to helping members manage themselves. He also argues employers who leave employees to define their own boundaries are letting them down. His message: a business must define clear targets and leaders must communicate that it is OK to say no to certain tasks.

The grey zone can trick us and it can be detrimental to our health in the long run. That's why the boundary must be made clearer. Perhaps the Finnish IT company which keeps on growing and growing is right when it says: the working day is 7.5 hours.



When is a telephone conversation private and when is it work? We're available all the time, both privately and professionally. But at what price?

## Work without boundaries can severely increase number of burnouts

The borderline between work and leisure time is becoming fuzzy. It's getting increasingly difficult to achieve the old dream of eight hours' work, eight hours' off and eight hours' sleep when the smartphone wants your attention, colleagues work in other timezones and you need to work a night shift to get through your inbox.

THEME

11.02.2011

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

"It used to be about being 'on time'. Now it's about being 'online'," says Norwegian work environment researcher Asbjørn Grimsmo at Oslo's Work Research Institute.

He warns work without boundaries could have major future consequences to our health, because there is a clear link between how much we work and how healthy we are.

"If you work more than 50 hours a week you are at increased risk of developing health problems at a later stage."

Norway's latest work environment research from 2009 for the first time detailed how often workers were contacted by their employer in their spare time.

"Four percent said it happened every day and nearly one third said at least once a week."

It is not possible to assess whether this reflects an increase, because no such data has been collected before. The reason for contact will have different impacts on the level of stress caused, but there is no data on why the employees are contacted. You can read more on this further down the page, but first a snapshot of today's situation:

If you collate various Nordic statistics you'll quickly see how so-called work without boundaries is becoming more and more common. Work no longer happens within clearly defined working hours or at certain locations.

### **More people work flexible hours**

In 2001 in Sweden some 80 percent men and women still worked exclusively in the daytime. That number is now down by 15 percent, according to a Swedish labour market report from 2009.

### **More people use computers at work**

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of people using computers at work. Nearly twice as many women used computers at work in 2005 compared to 1991 - an increase from 36 to 70 percent. The figures for male workers showed an increase from 41 to 68 percent. There is no longer a gender gap in the use of workplace computers.

### **More people can perform work tasks everywhere**

Internet allows more and more people to connect and perform work tasks from home or while travelling. Smartphones and social media increase this number further. We can send and reply to messages in ever increasing ways. Only ten percent of smartphone usage is actual telephone conversations - the rest of the time we use them for internet browsing, email and Facebook as well as games, maps and apps.

### **More work happens in 'realtime'**

We live in a world of 24 hours news, and more and more companies operate 24/7. This increases the need to contact employers and management. Many companies allow customers to complain via Twitter, and an answer is often expected as soon as possible.

### **More people are expected to be accessible at all times - at work or at home**

More and more people choose to have only one telephone, or they cannot afford more than one. They ditch the landline and stick to a mobile or smartphone. This is also often paid for by the employer who might want to make sure all employees are accessible. Called 'Generation Standby' - they're people who never completely disconnect from their work nor their leisure time. They are 'online' for most of the day's 24 hours, except when they sleep.

### **Not only negative**

Asbjørn Grimsmo says there aren't only negative sides to this new technology. It can also result in more flexibility and safety. We can to a larger extent choose for ourselves when we want to do our work.

"We see an individualisation of work. We are no longer hired to work for a certain number of hours, but to carry out a certain task. Work has become more closely linked to you and your abilities.

"This provides greater opportunities to be noticed and to be awarded for what you do, but it also leaves you more vulnerable if things don't work out the way they should. Project work means it can be very hard to say no to colleagues."

Individualisation also means employees expect to be able to take responsibility for their own working hours and that they should be able to use the internet as they please. According to a survey by internet safety company Clearswift, one in five people would not accept a job where they could not access Facebook and Twitter. 57 percent of 25 to 34 year olds said they updated their social network, sent private email or did internet shopping during working hours. 66 percent of employees also said they compensated for this by working longer hours or during their lunch break.

### **Many work during their spare time**

Working overtime is nothing new. The Swedish work environment survey shows the number of employees forced to cut down on lunch hours/stay late/bring work home on a weekly basis has been relatively stable. The number even decreased somewhat for all groups of workers from 37 percent in 2007 to 36 percent in 2009. That could be a result of the economic downturn, however. Those who need to use their spare time to manage their jobs are most often management level workers within large and medium size companies. For this group the numbers were 68 percent in 2007 and 67 percent in 2009.

Yet for one group of workers things are looking worse still: primary school teachers. 69 percent of them must spend some leisure time working in order to stay on top of work, and for female teachers the number is 72 percent.

In Denmark a study looked at how many spend at least seven hours on their home computer for work each week.

College teachers topped the survey with 51 percent. The number of primary school teachers taking work home was markedly lower than what came out of the Swedish survey - 27 percent. This could, of course, be down to this group of teachers marking papers by hand rather than using a computer.

### **"It's just the culture"**

People in these surveys say they don't bring work home to earn more or to impress their bosses. 40 percent did it because "you couldn't fit it all in in a 37 hour week" while 45 percent said they did it because "that's just the work culture in our office".

But let's return to the previous question - why does it matter if our employer contacts us in our spare time? Why the fuss?

Asbjørn Grimsmo has an anecdotal answer:

"In research we have something called the Zeigarnik effect. It's named after the Russian psychologist Bluma Zeigarnik

who during a restaurant visit with colleagues witnessed a waiter who'd remember orders which had not yet been paid better than those he had been paid for. Their table asked to share the bill, but later realised there was a mistake in the calculation. When confronting the waiter, he had no recollection whatsoever of what they had been eating."

### **Unsolved questions cause the most stress**

"It's the same with unsolved problems. If you get a call from work with an urgent problem which is not solved during the conversation it will linger at the back of your mind in the same way that a crossword solution can suddenly come to you in the middle of the night, waking you up.

"When work calls you quickly go into work modus, but the stress level takes a long time to go back to normal. If you're disturbed too often you won't get the undisturbed rest which you need."

That's why it is not only important how often the office gets in touch, but what kind of contact it is.

"The material from the labour market research shows that those who come home from work psychologically exhausted are also those who are most often contacted by their employer in their spare time."

The situation the employee finds him or herself in at the time of contact also matters of course. A conversation during a family meal is perhaps more stressful than if you are home alone. Danish researchers have used a number of questions to look at this particular problem:

Questions about work and private life	%
Do you sometimes experience a conflict between work and private life, when you feel you ought to be "in two places at once?"	38*
Does your professional life take so much energy that it has a negative impact on your private life?	42
Does your professional life take so much time that it has a negative impact on your private life?	31

\*people answering "always or often".

### **How to address the problem?**

Many people experience a work/life conflict. Others might feel the need to be accessible at all times is a given because that is the culture in their workplace. But the risk of a future burnout is the same. So how to address the problem? Should unions force employers to pay every time they contact an employee in their spare time?

"No, I wouldn't like to turn this into an economic question because that would mean neither the employer nor the employee would actually do anything to address the problem.

It's like extra pay for a dirty work environment - the employee doesn't want to clean up because it pays more not to," says Asbjørn Grimsmo.

"A better solution would be time in lieu which would allow people the recovery they need."

# Online culture's effect on work-life balance

A working life without boundaries puts new demands on management, employers and unions. They all need to prevent workers slaving away until they drop.

THEME

11.02.2011

TEKST: MARIE PREISLER

When is it work to send an email and to post something on Facebook? It's becoming more and more difficult for employees and employers to answer this as the borderline between work and private life is disappearing. Unions don't have a simple answer either, but they do call for clear leadership and agreements in the workplace.

Marianne Boje Andersen is a development consultant at the Danish Society of Engineers (IDA) and an expert in psychological work environments. Every time she talks to engineers about the risks of a working life without boundaries, her audience always runs out during the intermission to check their text messages and mail.



"Our members are techno freaks. They have the latest smartphones and applications which keep them connected to work and the rest of the world at all times. At the same time these wonders of technology make it even harder to be mentally present and relaxed in your spare time with your family. This is an enormous dilemma," she says.

Academics also seem to be keen on flexible working hours and easy access to their job networks, yet they too feel the price they have to pay is high. The union representing lawyers and economists amongst others, Djøf, says nine in ten members have access to their work computers from home. The union's latest major survey of members' work-life balance shows one in three feels the borderline between work and private life is disappearing because many are responsible for managing their own careers and because it is possible to work at home in the evening, at weekends and during holidays with remote access and mobile telephones.

## Hard to give good advice

Nearly three in four say they work more from home because of remote access and mobile telephones. Two in three feel this gives them a better work-life balance. Yet the number of people who feel this development is not to their benefit is growing. The lack of a work-life balance is stress factor number one.



"There's a major duality in all of this. Members feel it is a great benefit to be free to leave the office early and finish off some tasks in the evening once the children are in bed. But more and more are seeing the other side of the coin," says Lisbeth Kjersgård, senior political advisor at Djøf.

Newer stress research shows the same factors cause both stress and happiness among knowledge workers. This makes it difficult for unions like Djøf and IDA to advise members on what they should be doing to avoid stress. The unions encourage workplaces to discuss their work culture.

"It might be good advice to turn off your work mobile at home, but nobody will do that if the work culture says otherwise. That's why people in each individual department must discuss what they are willing to live with and what is causing them stress," says Marianne Boje Andersen.

Djøf also encourages people to agree collectively on how to approach the problem within each workplace. Managers should also use employee performance conversations to ask about people's work-life balance. A working life without boundaries in effect means a range of new and important leadership responsibilities, says Lisbeth Kjersgård:

"There is no standard advice to be had, so it has become a major and important role for leaders to help their workers find a good work-life balance and to be good role models. Many bosses will send emails late at night and at weekends. Many of our members feel they are expected to be online and to answer. More than half of them say this will further their career. At the same time the majority of our members feel both directly and indirectly under pressure from their boss to work more than they want to."

Lisbeth Kjersgård feels sending emails in the evening is not necessarily a problem as long as there is a clear agreement in place between management and employers. Problems arise when there is no clear agreement.

### No more emotional leadership

Anders Raastrup Kristensen, ph.d. and lecturer at Copenhagen Business School, also thinks a working life without boundaries lands leaders with new responsibilities. One of his areas of research is leadership of self-managing workers and he has just published a book called "Working life without boundaries" in which he declares the 'emotional leader' dead and replaced by a leader who stakes out a clear course.



"For some years now leaders have let workers draw up their own borders. But this kind of emotional leadership does not help employers and it also damages a business' productivity, because employees first become aware of their own limits when these limits are broken. And then the employee is left with the entire responsibility and might feel like a personal fiasco in cases where no borders have been drawn up," says Anders Raastrup Kristensen.

He advocates a change of course: out with the principle of each worker drawing his or her own borderlines, and in with clearly defined goals set out by the company.

"A leader must define quite clearly what is most important, challenge employees on their own priorities and make it legitimate for them to say no to tasks which are outside of their defined goals," says Anders Raastrup Kristensen.

Leaders are far from being at that stage yet, however. A 2008 survey showed no more than one in ten of Djøf's members felt their job was defined by clear targets and priorities.

Unions must also find new ways to help members who work in an environment without boundaries, says Anders Raastrup Kristensen.

"Unions have been very successful at putting work-life balance on the agenda, but have yet to offer members proper help to manage their own work time. What makes it even more difficult is that these problems cannot be solved through traditional agreements and inflexible rules. One solution would be more offers of personal advise for individual members," he says.



## Rocketing Finnish IT business: less bureaucracy saves our spare time

Today's software businesses face demands for a shorter journey from idea to product and expectations of higher returns of investments. Finnish company Houston Inc. claims this can still be achieved with a 7.5 hour working day and a work tempo which won't lead to burnouts.

THEME

11.02.2011

TEXT: CARL-GUSTAV LINDÉN PHOTO: CATA PORTIN

You immediately get the feeling motormouth Tomi Ruotimo and his business represent something different. Their initial meeting with a customer is a 90 minutes long introduction called Harakiri in which the leadership team is told the ugly truth about their own company's poor project model. If the customer doesn't like the first impression he can simply tear up the bill. If the project is carried forward but the customer is unhappy with the software the contract can be cancelled there and then and the customer gets a free trip to the Niagara Falls for her troubles.

The customer list shows there are at least a few who are still not on their way to take in the waterfall just yet. Houston develops digital services for banks, media companies and telecoms operators.

"We're about to penetrate the public sector in addition to our existing key customers."

### Unnecessary documentation

The company employs forty people but is growing fast. Ten new people came on board in January. Annual growth of more than 50 percent might put the employees' patience to the test, but the boss claims Houston's workers are more efficient per hour than any of their competitors because they don't need to execute time-wasting and often unnecessary documentation of projects.



Documentation, budgeting, test periods, spreadsheets - words that are like a red flag to a bull for the head of Houston. Leadership tools which were invented over a century ago have no place in today's world, he says. Ruotimo's style of leadership is intuitive, he says, and he is against "engineered Excel leadership".

It's all about profitability and constant improvement. The program development is structured like a sprint with deadlines every other week. The teams working with the customers cut to the chase and always begin with the measures which will give the best return.

"A supple strategy allows you to do U-turns if the market so commands," says Ruotimo, and this is at the essence of Houston's challenge. Developing software means you cannot be tied to long-term plans - you must be ready to adapt to challenges which pop up during the process. It's the same with budgeting: the financial plan is a nuisance which ties people down far too much."

Tomi Ruotimo has adapted 'agile software development' i.e. agile methods for the development of software with a focus on what is beneficial to the company. The philosophy behind agile development was presented in an American manifesto in 2001:

- Individuals and interactions over processes and tools
- Working software over comprehensive documentation
- Customer collaboration over contract negotiation
- Responding to change over following a plan

Tomi Ruotimo ran companies in Scotland, England, Germany and Saudi Arabia for many years before returning to Finland. Even when his company is running red hot he claims his employees only work 7.5 hour days. And himself?

"I had a customer meeting yesterday which ended around midnight. Then I read in bed until 3 or 4 in the morning. I read a lot of books."

### Stress research

Houston Inc. takes part in a research project on stress among programmers run by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, Åbo Akademi University and Tekes - the Finnish

funding agency for technology and innovation. Even though the job is hectic it should be carried out within normal working hours, with as little overtime as possible and with a focus on continuous learning. What stresses Ruotimo is customers who want to buy Houston's services when there aren't enough resources to produce them.

So how do the personnel policies work in a company with such close focus on what benefits the business? Houston Inc. employees are allowed to spend 10 percent of their working hours on private projects. This falls short of Google's 20 percent, yet it is still something of a revolution in the Finnish software trade. Google is without doubt one of the role models even though Tomi compares the search engine giant to the Chinese Communist party: all Communists are similar yet none are direct copies. There is space for variation. Constant improvement is another Google heritage, but it is called 'The Houston Way'.

### Women get more

Employees are mostly young diploma engineers educated within the American consulting company Accenture. Tomi jokes that Accenture has become an education institution for Houston Inc. because 85 percent of all his employees come from there.

"There are a lot of men. I'd like to get more women, right now we only have four".

How will he do that?

One carrot would be the salary. Houston Inc. offers women 20 percent more money than men.

The company also tempts recruits with all kinds of activities, from sleighing and pea soup days for the entire family to restaurant VIP cards, iPhones, Macs, and comprehensive health care plans.

### Flat structure

"I am the only boss here."

Workers have employee performance conversations twice a year, and are encouraged to attend courses and seminars, read books and improve their career prospects.

"The point of performance conversations is to put new steps in the ladder."

Most people who leave the company do so to start their own business, but Tomi believes this is most often about realising a life dream and to achieve freedom more than doing something which actually creates growth.

"We're talking about businesses for people to realise their own potential. I live, therefore I have a business. They think they are industrialists, when they really are businesspeople: a one man show."

Houston Inc. has no leadership, only a group of advisors, and Tomi acknowledges that he depends on free advice from a number of acquaintances when it comes to making strategic decisions - a kind of crowd sourcing. Future plans still consist of finding ways of ensuring continued growth without the use of risk capital or share issues to the public. Instead the employees will share the fruits of the economic progress.

# Finnish presidency to continue fight against youth unemployment

The Finnish presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers' wants to spend 2011 to focus on global cooperation, border cooperation, youth, the future needs for labour market competence, extended careers and the prevention of accidents in the workplace.

NEWS

11.02.2011

TEXT: CARL-GUSTAV LINDÉN

In light of the continuing economic uncertainty and the powers of globalisation, the presidency will keep a keen eye on the need for skilled and foreign labour. The rapidly ageing population is also a concern in Finland where the population pyramid does not change as a result of immigration, unlike in other Nordic countries. That's why it is considered so important to make people work for longer in that country.

In light of globalisation it remains important to continue the work to ease travel and work within the Nordic countries. A new expert group has been named by the Council to analyse some 40 different cases of social insurance discrimination - ranging from issues of handicaps to unemployment benefits. The group will present the Council with a report by the end of this year.

"We need to remove many obstacles, but legislation is often dependent on EU law, so we need to identify what role the Nordic region can play," says Aila Tommola-Kruse who is head of the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Labour.

## Young unemployed

The Finnish presidency will also continue fighting youth unemployment. A meeting of labour ministers in November, during Denmark's presidency, discussed the labour market conditions for youths in the Nordic countries. Included in that discussion were also the parties to the labour market and the Nordic Youth Council. (Read: Meeting of Nordic Labour Ministers: Turning point for youth politics)

A two-day expert seminar in Helsinki is planned for May this year to look at the situation of young people. The meeting aims to identify the models that do work. There is a need to improve young people's employment rate, high quality training must be developed alongside a drive for life-long learning, business' need for skilled workers needs to be identified at an earlier stage and there is a need for increased labour

market mobility so that people can seek work where it can be found.

The second highlight of the year will be a conference on working time arrangements and flexibility, to be held in Helsinki in October.

"Working hours can be used in so many different ways. Working time arrangements can contribute to a prolonged career and in an economic crisis they act as a buffer against growing unemployment. The challenge is to please both employers' and employees' needs for new working time arrangements."

There are parliamentary elections in both Finland and Denmark this year, meaning a minister level meeting will not happen until towards the end of the year. The theme for that meeting is still to be decided.

"The economic situation is brighter now that the recession is over, so we might want to look at how we can fight the structural unemployment."

Aila Tommola-Kruse has been working with Nordic issues since the late 1980s, including a period at the Council of Ministers' secretariat in Copenhagen. She is pleased to see an increased international interest in the Nordic model. There was brisk debate on how to combine economic growth and welfare during January's Davos summit. This focus can give the Nordic multilateral debates a much needed boost.

"This can increase the interest for Nordic cooperation even here in the Nordic region," says Aila Tommola-Kruse.

Read:

Meeting of Nordic Labour Ministers: Turning point for youth politics





## Working hours: a hot topic for the Labour Inspection Authority director

Ingrid Finboe Svendsen's dream is to create a popular drive for a better work environment. The Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority has often been in the spotlight for dealing with cases of social dumbing, but the Authority's director wants to showcase the full scope of what the organisation does. And this is where Facebook comes in.

PORTRAIT

11.02.2011

TEXT: BERIT KVAM, PHOTO: THE LABOUR INSPECTION DIRECTORATE

"My dream is that more people start thinking how important our work environment is, and that more people learn more about what is needed in order to create a good work environment. It's what we as workers are part of each and every working day, and that's why it is so important that everybody contributes," says Ingrid Finboe Svendsen, director at the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority.

Her guess is that working hours will remain a hot topic for some time. It's all about work-life balance, invisible working hours, dream rotas and full time employment. Many want a

so-called oil rota; i.e. work long shifts for two weeks and then have three weeks off. But the director is not too keen on the idea:

"We have to ask whether this is good for people's health. What are the possible long-term damages? Can it affect safety and lead to more accidents because people get tired? This is not easy to assess. Could such a rota become a selection process where only the healthiest workers would be able to take on such jobs, or people without family commitments?"

There is a widespread use of involuntary part-time work within Norway's health sector, and this she feels needs to be looked at "to a far greater extent than it is today."

"We need unions and employers to help find new ways of organising this work."

Invisible labour is a greater challenge still, she says.

"The Labour Inspection Authority must make sure work environment legislation is being followed, but invisible labour - especially among academics - is hard to measure."

Working hours is a complicated subject, says Finboe Svendsen.

"So many different interests must be taken into account and there is increasing pressure on the working hour regulations.

"Working hours will most likely be central in the new white paper on the work environment which the Labour party is preparing right now," she says.

"Some question whether the working hour regulations have been too inflexible in light of the challenges of modern working life. We feel the regulations are flexible enough," she says and adds:

"We have a politically agreed framework for working hours, but this is decided on the basis of what is safe from a health point of view and the work environment law deals with minimum standards."

### **When spare time turns into work**

With smartphones and portable offices, new social media like blogs, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and...

*How is it possible to separate work and leisure when everyone is online 'all the time' and a lot of things end up being on the borderline between work and private life?*

"The role of the Labour Inspection Authority remains the same, namely to follow up the law as laid out in our work environment legislation," says Ingrid Finboe Svendsen.

"We define borderlines for working hours but we are not a life inspection authority. If someone chooses to spend time in front of their computer rather than their TV it's none of our business. But we know that in order to safeguard a good psychosocial work environment people need more than just time in front of the computer."

### **The campaign paradox**

The Labour Inspection Authority has recently launched their campaign on Facebook. The aim is to be come clearer, to create interest and to make sure a wider audience hears their message: "good colleagues - part of the job".

*Is there not a paradox here? Does she not encourage people to do work-related activities at home by using social media like this?*

"For us it's about meeting people where they are. On Facebook we can tell 2 million people to be aware of how much they use their computer mouse for instance, and at the same time we become more approachable for anyone who has questions about working hours, contracts or other things. We use Facebook to get the knowledge out there, including what it might mean if people spend too much time in front of their computer."

There's a fire alarm, and we're half-way through the interview.

"Come," she says, "let's go to a café."

We pour out of the door with the other employees while the bell chimes ever louder. We have been enjoying the view of Trondheim from the fifth floor, admiring the mighty Nidaros Cathedral from new angles. We go to a café but are soon back in the office to continue our conversation.

Sweden's Work Environment Authority has made good use of Facebook, she says. In not too long, she believes, most of the 15 people who now answer mail and telephones in her office will be dealing with requests on Facebook. The authority has launched its campaign "good colleagues" which includes the question "when did you last praise your good colleagues? Do it today."

*Are you not risking individualising work place protection and reducing it to whether people praise each other?*

"Absolutely not," says Ingrid Finboe Svendsen.

That question has already been raised in the office.

"A company's management is still responsible for a safe and good work environment, but if we want to reach as many employees as possible we need to be willing to use new tools to spread our message," she says.

"We aren't good enough at spreading the knowledge which is already there. Much of what we know about work environments is nearly hundred years old knowledge but we still haven't started using it - for instance this fact that we have a great need to be seen and appreciated at work."

### **Genius technology**

To her new media and technology is a godsend. A smartphones and laptops are convenient when you travel some 100 days a year.

"This is genius. I can do my job at an airport for instance."

Ingrid Finboe Svendsen has been in her job for nearly 6 years. She used to work with organisation development. Her

first year at the Labour Inspection Authority represented a steep learning curve where she followed the outgoing head of directorate Ivar Leveraas. Then the office moved from Oslo to Trondheim, as part of the then conservative government's drive to decentralise several official authorities.

The authority was also slimmed down during this time while it strengthened its regional operations.

"It was a challenging period. The worst thing was all the really committed people who lost their jobs. Still many of them found work in the regions as part of the strengthening of our operations there.

"One of the challenges with the new organisation is to maintain an overview and know everything we are doing, so that we can jump into action when a situation arises."

An analysis and documentation department is working to establish more knowledge on issues like what too much overtime does to us physically and psychologically.

"We need to make sure that perspective is part of the debate too," she says.

### **Nordic cooperation**

Ingrid Finboe Svendsen meets her Nordic colleagues twice a year. Their common denominator is that their work is based on the Nordic welfare model and the cooperation between authorities, employers and employees.

"This three-party cooperation sets the Nordic countries apart from the rest of Europe."

*What is the focus for the Nordic cooperation right now?*

"All of the countries are busy making new strategies for the work environment. We're also keen to assess the effect of what we're doing. We need to document the benefits to society in a way which politicians and the general public understand."

*What's the greatest challenge within the European cooperation?*

"I feel it is very important that we uphold the work environment standard which we have today, and to strengthen it further. The main trend now is an increased focus on the psychosocial work environment. Social dumping is another important issue which remains on the agenda for the Nordic cooperation," says Ingrid Finboe Svendsen.

"Decent working conditions is a basic right. We've been working systematically with labour immigration since 2004. We witnessed an improvement after a couple of years, but the financial crisis was a setback. It meant more labour immigrants entered less serious businesses. Today we see generally good conditions in larger companies while social dumping is more common with smaller businesses.

"The public opinion has changed too. One of our surveys showed 90 percent of Norwegians felt social dumping was not OK. It's also no longer socially acceptable to brag about using cheap labour," says the pleased director at the Labour Inspection Authority.

But back to working hours - how much does she work herself? How often is she available outside of office hours?

"Well, the working hour rules don't apply to leaders, but yes - I do work a lot sometimes. But I don't expect my colleagues to do the same. We work to a rule saying we will not work overtime, and we should not be available outside of working hours. But, of course, if something happens I'm here."

# Work is top priority in integration of Sweden's new arrivals

As soon as newly arrived refugees are granted permission to stay in Sweden the process of getting them established in society begins. The goal is to cut the time it takes to get settled into the labour market. Those who want to can use personal guides who'll help them with work and integration.

INSIGHT

09.02.2011

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN

In December 2010 Sweden introduced a comprehensive integration reform. Before its introduction it could take up to one year from someone being granted permission to stay until they came into contact with the public employment service. Now this happens nearly immediately. The Migration Authority employs a job counsellor who instantly books the new arrival a time slot for a conversation at a local job centre about how to establish themselves in Sweden.

Greater Stockholm has received 100 people since the launch of the reform. The Farsta job centre is one of two in Greater Stockholm with responsibility for newly arrived refugees who have been given permission to stay.

"Now we can begin talking about a job from the very beginning of their stay. We should have an introduction plan within two months, and this plan is central to how a person can settle in quicker. It's our ambition to cut from seven to two years the average time it takes to settle in Sweden," says Margareta Sörqvist who heads the Farsta job centre.

## Taking back responsibility

The employment service has been responsible for the integration of new arrivals before. This responsibility was shifted from them to the immigration authorities and municipalities in 1985.

The return of this responsibility to the employment service allows for a renewed focus on work, while many other parts of the integration process stay with the municipalities. They will be responsible for language training through Swedish For Immigrants (SFI) and for society and culture training. The municipalities will also guarantee accommodation to the set number of refugees they have agreed to receive. Schooling and child care is also a municipal responsibility, as is the responsibility for refugees under 18 who arrive alone. The majority of family reunion cases will not be affected by the re-

form, as those who already know a person with connections to the country are expected to manage better.

"We are the main actor, but we cannot do this on our own without cooperating with the municipalities, the county administration and employers. We will be the spider in the web. Our main advantage now is that we have a national mandate which allows us to match people to the labour market in the whole of Sweden," says Margareta Sörqvist.

## The all-important personal number

One thing which has slowed down the integration process and made things harder for new arrivals has been the personal number. Without it you won't get far in Sweden and many new arrivals have had to wait for a long time to get one, which again has made any contact with the authorities more difficult. The employment service will now prioritise the speeding up of this process in cooperation with the tax authorities.

"We do what we can to make it go quicker. I think it will be easier to speed up the process when two major authorities like ourselves and the tax authorities can work together," says Margareta Sörqvist.

There is also renewed focus on people's skills - activities will be tailored to the individual person's strength and abilities. All plans include Swedish For Immigrants and society and culture training, plus a range of individually tailored measures - from finding work, following children to nurseries or taking part in health promoting activities.

The employment service can grant an introduction benefit of 231 Kronor (€26) a day while the introduction plan is being worked out, and 308 Kronor (€35) a day after that. If someone chooses not to follow the job centre plan, they risk losing that benefit. Within six months there must also be a decision on where in the country a person might apply for work

after an evaluation of the need for his or her skills in a particular location. The problem is that the availability of jobs rarely corresponds with the availability of places to live.

### A new player

Another new measure is individual professional help for refugees. These 'guides' will coach people and help them see their introduction plan through until they are properly established in Swedish society. This is a voluntary service. The guides will all be hired externally by the employment service, and compensation will be linked to how well they manage to help in the establishing process. Each individual household member has the right to this support.

"This is a wide, large and exciting task. It is important for people who come here to be able to contribute, and Sweden has a lot to gain. We are facing a massive generational shift and it is important for our welfare and society as a whole that we manage to take care of our labour force," says Margareta Sörqvist.

Between 11 and 12,000 people are expected to be granted permission to stay in Sweden this year. The employment service is facing negative attitudes among the Swedish work force.



"But it's not like everyone of these people are knocking on our door at the same time. They have skills and these can be developed over time," says Bengt Greiff at the employment service head office's department of integration.

### Easier to follow up

The employment service has already organised 140 meetings nationally to help various authorities discuss and prepare for the reform. The mood has been generally good among our partners and ourselves, says Bengt Greiff.

"Giving a state organisation the overall responsibility has its advantages. It allows a comprehensive follow up of which measures work in the establishing process. This has not been so easy as long as responsibility has rested with the municipalities," he says.

Bengt Greiff feels the reform is a great challenge both in terms of its goals and in terms of getting all parties to be flexible and to pull in the same direction. It's a positive sign that people have started talking about work and that everyone has begun figuring out what can be done collectively as soon as a person has been granted permission to stay.

"Our challenge is to make sure new arrivals get jobs faster and to cooperate with many different partners to achieve that task. This means we need to get accommodation and other structures in tune with the labour market. Another challenge is to encourage people to move to the regions where their chance of finding work is higher," says Bengt Greiff.

He highlights the importance of cooperation between municipalities and central authorities in order to reduce the time it takes for someone to establish themselves in Swedish society. It is also important to build on the experiences which municipalities have gathered over many years.

"We will also approach the voluntary sector. We welcome all the help we can get," he says.

# Agency workers should have equal rights

Workers hired through labour agencies should be granted the same rights to salaries, holidays and working hours as if they were hired directly by the company employing them, says a Swedish special investigator.

NEWS

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TEXT: KERSTIN AHLBERG, EDITOR EU & ARBETSRÄTT

This should also cover people hired through foreign labour agencies by Swedish companies. These are the recommendations by a special investigator responsible for looking at how the EU's agency workers directive should be implemented in Sweden. In her work she gathered arguments from Denmark and Norway.

EU's directive on temporary agency workers (nr 2008/104) must be implemented by all member states by 5 December this year. Norway and Iceland have a slightly longer deadline to allow time to adopt the directive into the EEA agreement.

A central part of the directive stipulates hired workers must enjoy the same basic working and employment rights as those who are directly employed by a company. Member states can make exceptions to this equality principle in some cases, and the special investigator suggests that Sweden make use of two opportunities to make such exceptions. If the employee is permanent staff with the labour agency and is also paid between jobs, the principle of equal pay no longer applies, only the principle of other working and employment conditions. Exceptions can also be made through collective agreements as long as the agreement "respects the overarching protection" of the employees.

The new law will perhaps mostly affect workers hired out to Swedish companies from foreign countries. Swedish labour agencies are already tied to collective agreements which are based on the same principles as the new directive. As a result they have been facing hard competition from foreign labour agencies which provide workers from low wage countries like Lithuania and Poland.

Sweden's existing law on the posting of workers does indeed apply as it does for all other foreign workers, but it does not guarantee them more than Sweden's established minimum conditions. But the Nordic countries' adaptation of the directive on agency workers offers a new opportunity to fight low wage competition. The countries are now free to decide that the rules on hired labour shall be the same as those that ap-

ply to a company's own staff (not only the minimum requirements) and that this must also apply to workers hired out by foreign labour agencies. The special investigator advises Sweden to do this.

This means workers stationed by labour agencies can demand more advantageous working conditions compared to workers stationed by other companies. This part of the proposal is very controversial and employers' organisations are very much against it. Yet the special investigator defends her proposal by referring to the fact that governments in Denmark and Norway are following a similar path.

Employers are unhappy with other parts of the directive too. In addition to the principle of equal treatment, the directive stipulates that member states must revise their legislation and collective agreement to see whether these contain anything that is not in the public interest and which would be of hindrance to the hiring of agency labour. Such obstacles must be removed. Employers' organisations feel the special investigator has failed to address this point properly.