

## Sweden's Intriguing 6-Hour Workday Experiment

Richard Eisenberg – Jun 7, 2016

I have to say, I was more than a little intrigued by the recent New York Times article, *In Sweden, an Experiment Turns Shorter Workdays Into Bigger Gains*, about employees in Gothenburg, the country's second-largest city, testing out a six-hour workday at full pay to prevent burnout.

**Odds** are, if you're putting in eight, nine, 10 or even more hours a day at work, you'll be curious to see how the experiment goes. So far, the results of the two-year test in Gothenburg look encouraging.

According to The Times, Gothenburg's Sahlgrenska University Hospital's orthopedics unit switched 89 nurses and doctors to a six-hour day last year, hiring 15 staffers to ensure the hospital work got done. The test was expensive — costing the hospital \$123,000 a month — but no one has **called in sick** since it began and the nurses and doctors have been more efficient.

Similarly, since February 2015, the publicly funded Svartedalens nursing home has let 80 nurses work six-hour shifts and receive their eight-hour salaries while 80 staffers at another nursing home work their standard hours. The result? So far, sick leave is half the average absenteeism rate in Gothenburg city, the nurses are happier and the care is better.

Bengt Lorensen, lead consultant contracted by the city council to analyze the data, just told BBC that “right now, we're only looking at early indications, but we can see that the quality of work is higher among the six-hour workers.”

Arturo Perez, a Svartedalens caregiver and single father who formerly came home **frazzled** after his eight hours a day caring to residents with senility or Alzheimer's, said in The New York Times: “What's good is that we're happy. And a happy worker is a better worker.”

Much of America's workforce, I believe, is as frazzled as Perez was. The average workweek is roughly 39 hours — that's about eight hours a day and roughly the same length it's been since World War II.

A few businesses in Sweden — including a Toyota service center and a marketing company — have voluntarily switched to six-hour workdays, saying that they've seen less turnover, more productivity and increased creativity. There is also a 20-person Stockholm Internet startup that's had six-hour workdays for three years and has doubled its revenue and profit each year. “We don't send unnecessary emails or **get tied up** in meetings. If you have only six hours to work, you don't waste your time or other people's time,” a staffer told the Times.

However, Pramila Rao, an associate professor of human resource management at Marymount University, said: “The six-hour workday has not been well accepted in many countries because organizations are worried their productivity might fall. Even in Sweden some politicians have tried to **pull the plug** on the experiment.”

Could a 6-Hour Workday Happen Here? Frankly, I doubt many U.S. companies will switch to six-hour workdays, even though doing so would likely make their employees less stressed and happier. As Rao said: “The Swedish model will not be easily accepted in the U.S. because we are a nation of workaholics.”

But maybe Sweden's experiments will be so impressive, a few progressive firms here will give it a shot. Meantime, I can't wait to take vacation next week so I can get a chance to **recharge my batteries** before returning to my typical workday.