



# Increasing Opportunities to Influence Working Hours and Reducing Commitment to Work

## Objective

In Finland, night work is mostly done in the social welfare and health care sector, where irregular working hours are also very common. Especially those who do on-call and standby work have a high level of commitment to work.

Commitment to work refers to a situation in which work affects the employee's free time more than in normal circumstances. Commitment to work can manifest itself in a variety of ways, such as long working hours, thinking about work in free time, work stress or prioritizing work over other aspects of life.

Individual working hours flexibility agreed together at the workplace increases the opportunities for influencing the allocation of working hours and free time.

**Study the measures with which you can increase the opportunities to influence working hours and reduce commitment to work. Increasing opportunities to influence working hour characteristics can be achieved by utilizing innovative working time models and participatory shift planning. Developing and deciding on these measures is the responsibility of the organization and unit.**

## Steps

1. Assess the opportunities employees have to influence their own working hour characteristics and commitment to work.
  - Is it possible for employees to use, for example, participatory shift scheduling?

2. Try out working time models that increase flexibility or opportunities to influence working hours. Agree on the best model(s) together.
  - For example, can some units start using participatory shift scheduling?
  - Can shift wishes be better utilized as part of shift scheduling?
  - Can the opportunities related to part-time work increase the attractiveness of work and job retention?
3. New practices should be tested for at least a year.
4. After the test period, evaluate the new practices together with the employees and decide about the future.

### Working time models that improve worktime control

Worktime control by the employees increases workplace attraction and promotes employees'

- work-life balance
- sleep
- recovery and
- health.

In addition, good opportunities to influence working hours reduce sickness absences and disability pensions.

The following table presents various working time models and their benefits.

Working time model	Benefits
Part-time work, study leave and partial sick leave	Lightened workload
Flexitime in office and expert work	Improved work-life balance with flexitime
Carried over holidays and working hours bank	Flexibility of working hours and detachment from work
Participatory shift scheduling in period-based work and shift work	Opportunities to influence working hours

## Participatory shift scheduling

In participatory shift scheduling, working hours are planned in interaction. The planning is guided by common rules, the fluidity of operations, and the competence needs of each shift. Participatory shift scheduling requires employees to be able to negotiate and take responsibility.

A good shift planning software supports participatory shift scheduling process. Shifts are usually planned for one shift period at a time.

The successful implementation of participatory shift scheduling is supported by

- the management's commitment to the development of working hours
- training and job orientation of personnel
- mutually agreed shift planning rules at ward/shift planning unit level and commitment to these rules (e.g. number of night shifts, allocation of leave, prioritization of shift wishes)
- clarification and review of the rules, as necessary
- ensuring the fairness and ergonomics of shift lists

The shift planner or supervisor is responsible for ensuring the fairness and ergonomics of shift lists. Read more about the topic on the [\*\*“Promoting well-being and recovery in shift work” method card!\*\*](#)

## Reducing commitment to work

In addition to regular working hours, commitment to work refers to

- on-call duty, which is counted as working hours,
- standby time when the employee can be contacted by the employer as agreed and available to work,
- the employee's attachment to work outside working hours, on-call time and standby time (e.g. free time between split shifts, when the employee, in practice, cannot leave the workplace), and
- restrictions on free time due to work (e.g. requirement to reply to work emails and calls outside of regular working hours, and travel time that is not counted as working hours).

Areas of commitment to work include

- long average weekly working hours in the previous 12 months
- high level of overtime in the previous 12 months
- amount of standby time in the previous 12 months
- being available outside actual working hours
- management of stress related to travel work

Managing the stress caused by commitment to work well can increase the employee's ability to detach from work and recover sufficiently in their free time. A positive change can be seen as lower stress, an increased amount of sleep and active interpersonal relationships.

Excessive stress caused by commitment to work can be prevented by

- clearly agreeing on the terms and conditions under which, for example, on-call personnel must be available
- effective performance appraisal practices
- the example shown by supervisors

The practices should be tested, evaluated and developed, and any solutions that are found to be beneficial should be adopted more widely.

## **Additional reading**

- **[Study: Good work-time control decreases risk for musculoskeletal and mental symptoms, sickness absence and occupational accidents | Finnish Institute of Occupational Health \(ttl.fi\)](#)**
- **[Press release: People over 50 years of age should be offered the opportunity to reduce night shifts and long hours | Finnish Institute of Occupational Health \(ttl.fi\)](#)**

