Is Less Work Better Work?

A shorter working week from a managerial viewpoint

by

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Abstract

Visionaries around the world are advocating for a shorter working week, and there is a reason behind it. Long working hours have been shown to impede productivity while a reduction in working hours increases work-life balance. Future generations' economic and environmental sustainability may furthermore benefit from a shorter working week. Through a redistribution of working hours, equality and employment might even increase. Even though a 40-hour working week is widely accepted as the norm; it is not set in stone.

Previous research on the topic, the shorter working week, has mainly studied the effects of shorter working hours on productivity and work-life balance. Little attention, however, has been given to the manager's viewpoint when it comes to the issue. How managers react to a shorter working week is important for the study of management as the trend towards a shorter working week is likely to continue, even though the trajectory of the change is uncertain.

This research aims to fill this gap in the literature. To do so, we studied three organizations, each participating in an experiment where working hours were reduced. Two of the organizations are located in Iceland but the third one is located in Sweden, and they are all divisions on the municipality level. We took a qualitative approach and interviewed managers using semi-structured interviews.

Our findings, first of all, suggest that there is room for efficiency improvements, e.g. by prioritizing work and reducing and shortening meetings. Secondly, the managers experimenting with a shorter working week, in general, seem to be inclusive, engaging and democratic. Our results furthermore indicate that a shorter working week enhances work-life balance, especially for shift-workers and people with young children. At last, our results indicate that implementing a shorter working week might be impeded by culture.

In conclusion, reducing working hours may be a positive-sum game, especially when useful countermeasures are exerted.

KEYWORDS: managers, leadership, shorter working week, shorter hours, productivity, efficiency, work-life balance, culture, stress, meetings, qualitative research, comparison, evaluation

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1   Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the length of the average working week. It concerns everyone on the labour market and is widely discussed, both publicly and in private. A shorter working week is of interest for various reasons. Studies have shown that working long hours impedes productivity (Cette, Chang & Conte, 2011), while others emphasize the benefits reduced working hours have on work-life balance and gender equality (e.g. Crompton & Lyonette, 2006). Working less might furthermore generate environmental and economic sustainability for future generations (Victor, 2007) and lead to a more evenly distributed workload and decreased unemployment (Coote, Franklin & Simms, 2010; Guillaume & Pochic, 2009).

This thesis examines the shorter working week from a managerial viewpoint, building on a qualitative study among managers. In this introductory chapter we discuss the background and the relevance of the topic along with the purpose of our research and possible limitations.

1.1   Background

A 40-hour working week, even though generally accepted nowadays, is not a law of nature. Before the industrial revolution, there was little separation between work and people´s private life. It may therefore be difficult to fathom how much people actually worked back then. During and after the industrial revolution, however, work gradually began to change. The definition of the workday became clearer and people started to separate work from their private life (Poor, 2010). Around the break of the 20th century, a 70-hour working week was the standard. Now, more than a century later, a 40-hour working week is considered to be the norm and has in fact been the norm since the 1940s (Poor, 2010). In 1926, it was no other than Henry Ford that lead the way by shortening his employees' working week from 6 days to 5 and each workday from 10 hours to 8 (Ochse, 2014). The 40-hour working week is thus not set in stone and redefining of the modern working week may be necessary for future generations.

The mere fact that a 40-hour working week has become the norm does not automatically mean that it is the best fit. In fact, it might even be out-dated. The world is rapidly changing and the outlook for the information age is very different from what it was at the dawn of the 21st century. With the advent of smart phones and telecommuting, the line between individuals' work and private life is getting blurred (LaFollette, 2011). It might therefore be the right time to shorten the working week.

The economist John Maynard Keynes predicted in the early 20th century that in the beginning of the 21st century the working week could be cut to as little as 15 hours and still be sufficient to satisfy people's material needs (Keynes, 1963). Obviously, that prediction did not come true but many visionaries continue advocating for a massive reduction of the working week to match up with modern society. The New Economic Foundation (NEF), with Anna Coote in the lead, e.g. advocates for a 21 hour working week for social, environmental and economic benefits. According to NEF it would reduce unemployment and have positive effects on the environment. Through a redistribution of working hours, equality and employment would increase while a reduction in production would lead to less degradation of the environment. Ultimately it would thus improve the quality of life and allow people to enjoy life more due to increased spare time (Coote, Franklin & Simms, 2010). The Global Campaign for the 4 Hour Work-day uses the same arguments in their advocacy for a shorter working week (Global Campaign for the 4 Hour Work-day, 2015).

Some studies have tapped on the importance of environmental issues and sustainability in regards to working less hours. Juliet B. Schor (2005) e.g. argues that the universalization of the *global North's* way of living will lead to a degradation of the earth, that consumerism and ever-increasing rate of production will exhaust hitherto untouched resources of the earth. Working less hours, she claims, is one way of countering this fate. This view deliberately acknowledges that economic growth is not a prerequisite for a stable economy. Peter A. Victor (2007) expresses his concerns in a similar manner. He states that a continuing economic growth will endanger the environment and that countries should, among other initiatives, consider a shorter working week as a way of managing without growth.

Other studies discuss more individualistic views on a shorter working week. Increased well-being could accompany a shorter working week as individuals would have the possibility to have more leisure time. The work-life balance and gender equality are key topics in this discussion. Working long hours is often considered to be a token of status; a sign of devotion and ambition. Furthermore, women in management positions, more often than men, are not able to fulfil these requirements since their share of household responsibilities is usually higher than men's (Watson, 2001). Along similar lines, Guillaume and Pochic (2009) conclude their study on a large French company by pointing at the persistent inequality in family responsibilities and the patriarchal nature of organizations as limitations to equal opportunities for the genders. By loosening the constraints imposed by long working hours, workplaces can become an environment of equal opportunities. Shortening the working week can be a part of the solution.

An aging population and the automation of the work force are further arguments for a shorter working week. Increasing life-expectancy means that people will, on average, live longer after they retire, i.e. unless the age of retirement is increased (Maestas & Zissimopoulos, 2010). Instead of forcing fully capable individuals off the labour market it may be necessary to encourage them to work longer. However, his might not be possible unless people work less over the years, thereby redistributing the workload among the demography (Coote, Franklin & Simms, 2010). A shorter working week could furthermore smooth the transition into the

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future where robots substitute more and more jobs (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014). By redistributing the workload, a shorter working week could mean that automation would lead to more quality of life instead of increasing inequality. Regardless of the cause (aging population or automation), a shorter working week could be one piece of the puzzle when it comes to sustaining economic stability and employment.

Even though the working week is still far from what aforementioned visionaries advocate, some countries have started to reduce working hours. The four OECD countries that work the fewest hours annually (the Netherlands, Germany, Norway and Denmark) annually work around 1,400 hours while the average among all OECD countries is about 1,770 hours (OECD, 2015a). At the same time these countries remain above the OECD average in productivity per hour (OECD, 2015b). Looking at the other spectrum, countries like Turkey, Russia, Mexico, and Chile work on average significantly more annually than other OECD countries while their productivity per hour ranks lowest among the OECD countries (OECD, 2015b). Perhaps working fewer hours could be considered a symptom of a successful economy rather than an explanation for high productivity. Countries with a stable economy might therefore need a shorter working week on their agenda.

Two countries are of special interest to us; Sweden (our country of residency) and Iceland (our country of origin). The annual hours worked in these countries are approximately 1,600 in Sweden and 1,700 in Iceland. Productivity per hour worked is quite low in Iceland, just reaching the OECD average, whilst it is higher in Sweden (OECD, 2015a). Both countries have the 40-hour working week as the norm but the call for shortening it is getting louder. Municipalities in both countries are experimenting with a shorter working week; two divisions in Reykjavik municipality and an elderly home in Göteborg. In addition, some political parties in Sweden have a shorter working week on their agenda (e.g. Vänsterpartiet, 2015). Meanwhile, a bill is pending in the Icelandic parliament proposing the shortening of the working week from 40 hours to 35 hours (Alþingi, 2014).

1.2   Research gap

There is ample reason, it seems, to consider the implications of a shorter working week in Iceland and Sweden. Researches in the length of working hours have primarily focused on productivity and work-life balance. Little attention, however, has been given to the implications a shorter working week has, seen from the managers' viewpoint. How managers react to a shorter working week is important for the study of management, as the trend towards a shorter working week is likely to continue even though the trajectory of the change is uncertain.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The aim of this study is to get an insight into the minds of managers who are faced with shortening of the working week. By *evaluating* and *comparing* three different cases, two in Iceland and one in Sweden, all of which have recently started experimenting with shorter working week, we hope to achieve a better understanding on the managerial role in the process. We aim to observe how managers maintain efficiency in the workplace in relation to their leadership style. Furthermore, the study strives to investigate how work-life balance and working culture play a role when implementing a shorter working week. We therefore aim to answer one primary research question and four secondary questions.

Primary research question:
  ➢ How do managers meet the challenges and the benefits a shorter working week brings?

To be able to answer this question we find it necessary to narrow the challenges and benefits down. Four secondary research questions were therefore formulated:

  A. How do managers maintain efficiency in the workplace when working hours have been reduced?
  B. How does manager's´ perception of themselves as leaders influence the implementation of a shorter working week?
  C. How do managers perceive the effects a shorter working week has on work-life balance?
  D. How do managers perceive the working culture in their home country?

1.4 Outline of the thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters. In the introductory chapter we have summarized the importance of the topic, and the purpose and aim of our study. Chapter 2, *Theoretical review,* summarizes published research on topics related to the subject. Chapter 3, *Methodology,* describes the methods we used in our research and analysis, and argues why we made those choices. It also accounts for the research and methodological limitations. Chapter 4, *Findings*, summarizes the empirical data gathered from the interviews we conducted. The chapter also explains the background of the three cases researched. Chapter 5, *Analysis and Discussion*, evaluates and compares the findings from the three cases and relates the findings to the theoretical review. The last chapter, *Conclusion*, articulates the findings and weaknesses of the research. In addition it suggests practical implications and puts forward recommendations for future research.

2 Theoretical Review

As we discussed in the introductory chapter, a shorter working week is an intriguing concept for various reasons. We found it to be most relevant to narrow the theoretical review down to the four secondary research questions we aim to answer in our theses. This chapter is therefore divided into four subchapters, where each subchapter represents published literature on subjects related to the questions under discussion.

2.1 Work performance and efficiency

This first subchapter discusses efficiency and productivity in the workplace, in relation to a shorter working week. It furthermore addresses other factors, such as stress and job satisfaction, and how these factors might influence efficiency.

2.1.1 Productivity

As was pointed out in the introductory chapter, there seems to be a negative correlation between productivity on the one hand and working hours on the other (OECD, 2015a & b). However, this correlation might be spurious in the sense that one might not automatically lead to the other. Instead, both are perhaps a consequences of a healthy economy. Studies show contradicting indicators on this relation, suggesting that the effects of the amount of working hours is neither universal nor the same in all industries.

Shepard and Clifton (2000) made a convincing argument in their study on productivity in the US where they concluded that use of overtime hours lowers average productivity. These claims were a result of comparing data covering 35 years, and 18 manufacturing industries. The conclusion suggested that a 10% increase in overtime might decrease productivity by 2-4% in most of the industries explored. These findings are intriguing, but can hardly be used to generalize about the phenomena of a shorter working week. The study focuses on the marginal effects of additional overtime hours but falls short when it comes to explaining the effects that a reduction in working hours, below the regular 40 hour working week, might have.

A parallel argument was presented in Cette, Chang, and Conte (2011) where the law of diminishing marginal utility (from the employer's viewpoint) was shown to apply to employees working time. In other words, the more employees work, the less they produce each hour. However, just like Shepard and Clifton (2000) fail to extend their argument

downwards, to a reduced amount of working hours, Cette, Chang, and Conte (2011) narrow their research upwards, to an increased amount of working hours. They considered productivity changes in 18 OECD countries but did so only for working hours above a certain threshold. They found a significant correlation between additional working hours and decreasing productivity, but only when the initial amount of working hours was above 1,925 hours. Whether a reduction in working hours below that threshold improves productivity remained unanswered.

Studies on the elasticity of output compared to working hours generally lack generalizability as they set their focus on particular industries or particular economies. Anxo and Bigsten (1989) attempted to combine available research on productivity and working hours. Their conclusion was that no significant productivity effects would stem from a reduction in working hours. Such an exposition, however, is unsatisfactory because it omits discussing various methods of reducing working hours and possible countermeasures that might accompany these methods. Other studies have acknowledged that a policy of shorter working hours in itself is unlikely to yield more productivity, i.e. unless workers can be induced to contribute a higher work effort (Huang, Chang, Lai & Lin, 2002). In simpler terms, they would need to run faster.

In an official report from the International Labour Organization, Lonnie Golden (2012) compensates for these shortcomings. Previously mentioned studies argued for the existence of a threshold, above which any additional working hours would be offset by a reduction in productivity. Golden (2012), on the other hand, argues that not all workers need to have reached "excessively" long hours before their alertness and resourcefulness is compromised. He added that excessive working hours could be reduced by either heightening the pace of work, or by reducing unauthorized break periods and attending to personal affairs during working hours (Golden, 2012).

2.1.2   Job satisfaction

Concluding from previously mentioned articles, a reduction in working hours, all else being equal, is unlikely to lead to an automatic improvement of productivity. However, if shorter working hours lead to improved happiness in the long-run and increased job satisfaction, it may improve the performance of managers (Hosie, Willemyns & Sevastos, 2012) and even of workers in general (Zelenski, Murphy, and Jenkins, 2008). In fact, a significant correlation has been identified between job satisfaction and productivity, even though the exact mechanisms that affect this relationship are difficult to pinpoint (Böckerman & Ilmakunnas, 2012).

2.1.3   Stress

Even though Golden (2010) associates long working hours with increased stress, the extent of this relationship is ambiguous. Meanwhile, the connection between stress and productivity

has been widely recognized. Halkos and Bousinakis (2010) examined the effect of stress and job satisfaction on productivity. They took a random sample of 425 individuals both in the private and public sector in Greece and identified which specific variables influenced productivity. Their findings indicate that increased stress leads to decreased productivity and increased job satisfaction leads to increased productivity. Furthermore, they observed, that when work overlaps with employees´ personal life, productivity decreases. Other factors, such as age, family and financial status matter as well. Only limited generalizability can be drawn from these findings, but when such findings start piling up, the picture becomes clearer. Ajayi and Abimbola (2013) conducted a study on a large company in Nigeria and concluded that employee performance was directly linked with organizational stress. Other studies, from various fields, have yielded similar results (Donald et al., 2005 and Gilboa et al., 2008). However, it is worth noting that the ability to cope with work-related stress differs between individuals (Harzer & Ruch, 2015).

This thesis' topic is a shorter working week seen from the managerial viewpoint. Bloom and Reenen (2006) demonstrated that good management practices are in fact a prerequisite for both high productivity and good work-life balance policies. Deriving from that statement, we now commence with a discussion on leadership styles and useful managerial tools.

2.2 Leadership styles

As noted in the introductory chapter, there is a gap in the literature regarding managers and shorter working weeks. Therefore, in this subchapter, we will focus on literature regarding leadership and appropriate tools needed for handling the managerial role successfully.

The theory behind leadership is manifold. Different approaches have shed light on the subject in recent decades and Yukl (1989) had a point when he stated that attempts to define leadership have little in common. He claimed, however, that most definitions seem to have one thing in common; that leadership involves an influencing process, i.e., a leader must be capable of influencing others.

In spite of different opinions on what leadership truly is, Sveningsson, Alvehus and Alvesson (2012) claim to have managed to concentrate the literature down to two managerial leadership styles; the heroic leadership style (also called transformative), and the post-heroic leadership style. Heroic leaders are charismatic, create a vision and strongly affect their followers. They rely heavily on personal talent and share extraordinary leadership traits. Recently, however, the post-heroic leader has been recognized and gained increased attention. The post-heroic leaders take part in more everyday based actions; they talk, listen and create personal relationships by socializing, motivating and encouraging others. Their focus is on the interaction between themselves and their followers. Those leaders are often seen as everyday heroes, on whom the fate of organizations depends.

In their valuable contribution to the study of leadership, Sveningsson, Alvehus and Alvesson (2012) suggest a problem within this leadership theory; a problem that lies within the fact that leadership is often overpraised. They claim that leadership is a complex social process, where interpretation and meaning should be in the front. In order to prove their point they gathered empirical data through interviews with mid-level and senior managers with the ambition to embrace a more open approach to leadership. Their findings indicate inconsistencies within what managers do and how they act, concluding that leadership might actually be a rather rare phenomenon. Accordingly, how managers perceive themselves and what they actually do, can cause an identity dilemma. Should managers engage in leadership, such as creating vision and strategizing, or be involved in administrative and operational tasks? In their conclusion they found it to be imperative to acknowledge the third managerial type, the mundane manager, which might indeed be the most realistic one. Mundane managers are inclusive, influence the accomplishment of expectations, meanings and values between employees and are required to manage everyday problems, be good listeners and accept their role in the organization (Sveningsson, Alvehus & Alvesson, 2012).

2.2.1 The manager's self

Watson (2001), agrees with Sveningsson, Alvehus and Alvesson´s (2012) claim that an identity dilemma is a frequent impediment to managers' performance. Watson (2001), however, looks further in his argument and states that to shape identities, managers need to combine their individual values and strengths. Watson´s (2001) approach is deeper rooted, as he touches upon the personal perspective as an important factor in management. Drucker (1999) shares Watson´s (2001) thought on the importance of values to the manager.

Furthermore, Drucker (1999) stresses the importance of managing oneself in order to manage others. Managers need to acknowledge their strengths and only then can they manage others successfully. The magic behind recognizing your own strengths is to do a feedback analysis. After conducting the analysis, managers can focus on their strengths and remedy bad habits that emphasise weaknesses and inhibit performance. He furthermore claims that "it takes far more energy and work to improve from incompetence to mediocrity than it takes to improve from first-rate performance to excellence" (Drucker, 1999, p. 102).

Gosling and Mintzberg (2003) are on the same page in their review on the five minds of a manager. As Sveningsson, Alvehus and Alvesson (2012) state, an overemphasize has been on leadership in the literature, and Gosling and Mintzberg (2012) agree with that statement. In response, they come up with a framework of five key ideas, or mind-sets, useful for a manager to use in practice. One of the five mind-sets is in agreement with the thoughts of previous mentioned authors, about managing oneself. They name it the reflective mind-set, which in a nutshell means that managers need to stop, take a step back, and reflect upon their experiences in order to improve their management skills.

2.2.2　Managing interactions

Knowing oneself is not enough for good management practices; managers also need to be capable of working with other people to perform well. One mind-set in Gosling and Mintzberg's (2012) article discusses exactly that. To manage relationships they suggest the collaborative mind-set, getting beyond mere empowerment and into commitment. It also suggests drifting away from the heroic managerial leadership style towards a more engaging style, similar to the mundane manager (Sveningsson, Alvehus & Alvesson, 2012). Listening rather than talking and being amongst people rather than sitting behind a desk are appropriate approaches for engaging managers. Furthermore, they suggest that a manager should possess a bottom-up leadership style. However, this view contradicts Drucker´s (1999) view on acknowledging your own strengths. Managers are different and the strengths of an introverted manager might not lie in constant chit-chatting with employees. In this respect, it might be beneficial for the manager to make use of each and everyone's strengths and extract knowledge by recognizing expertise among the employees (Kuhn & Jackson, 2008). Here, good communicational skills are the key.

Good communicational skills are the foundation when managing others (Pentland, 2012 and Eisenhardt, Kahwajy & Bourgeois, 1999). In Pentland's (2012) experiment on communication, the importance of body language and tone is acknowledged, arguing that how we communicate is more important than what we communicate. In addition, face-to-face interaction proved to be the best communicational arrangement. Eisenhardt, Kahwajy and Bourgeois' (1999) article on fights in management teams underpins the importance of face-to-face communications. The essence of their review demonstrates that having a good fight can benefit teams. If arguments are based on facts they are less likely to get personal. Furthermore, listening to all perspectives and taking them into consideration is essential. It is the decision making process itself that matters and when people experience that they have been listened to they are more likely to accept losing a debate (Eisenhardt, Kahwajy & Bourgeois, 1999).

As previously argued, good management practices correlate with good work-life balance (Bloom & Reenen, 2006). Work-life balance, in relation to a shorter working week, is the subject of the next subchapter.

2.3　Work-life balance

Until the last few decades of the twentieth century the balance between work and the personal life was so to say unproblematic. The ideal worker was usually a man, working full time, while the woman fulfilled the unpaid work, taking care of the domestic household and the family (Kossek, Lewis & Hammer, 2009). However, with increasing gender equality, discussions about work-life balance have become louder. For dual-earning couples and single parents, working long hours can become a burden as it makes fulfilling responsibilities

towards the household, family, and work more difficult (Kossek, Lewis, & Hammer, 2009). The degree to which countries compensate their citizens for these burdens varies greatly, even within Europe. Crompton and Lyonette's (2006) study on 5 European countries highlighted these differences.

2.3.1   Work-life conflicts

Work-life conflict has been described as the constraints caused by the pressure from individuals' work or family life (Roehling, Moen & Batt, 2003). The concepts of work-life balance and work-life conflicts are therefore closely related. Crompton and Lyonette (2006) conducted a comparative study in five European countries; Norway, Finland, Britain, France and Portugal, where they measured levels of work-life conflict. The study examined the effects certain variables have on work-life conflict, i.e. country, sex, social class, children in household, and age. Even though strong correlations were found in each of these five variables they seem irrelevant when compared to the sixth variable, working hours. In all five countries, the strongest predictor of work-life conflict was the number of weekly working hours.

In support of these claims, empirical research concluded that in a dual-earner household with children, a distribution of 60 hours between the breadwinners is an ideal combination (Hill, Mead, Dean, Hafen, Gadd, Palmer & Ferris, 2006). While this could be achieved by one partner working full-time (conventionally the man) and one partner working part-time, a more equal solution would be for the partners to work 30 hours each. When compared to two control groups, the group where the combined number of weekly hours worked did not exceed 60 hours, a significant higher level of family satisfaction was evidenced, greater work-family fit, more job-flexibility and less work-family conflict (Hill et al., 2006).

Crompton and Lyonette (2006) identified working hours as the strongest predictor of work-life conflict compared to other variables but Hill et al. showed that the optimal combination is when weekly hours worked remain below 60 hours. These authors focused their attention on work-life balance when discussing shorter working hours. Golden (2010), on the other hand, takes a broader approach in his review on the topic. He claims that social and individual welfare is only one criteria of interest when contemplating working hour policies. The other criterias are, economic efficiency, social equity and economic growth. His account of welfare harmonizes both with Crompton and Lyonette (2006), and Hill et al. (2006) to the extent that he claims that individual's well-being may decrease with over-employment. He puts his argument into perspective when he claims that the marginal utility of income is limited by one's health. The same may be derived for individuals' family life; that the marginal utility of income from working long hours adds diminishing value to individual's personal life if a trade-off between the two exists. The degree to which this holds true may, however, vary

greatly between individuals. Hill et al.'s (2006) approach emphasizes the effect working hours have on one group in particular, i.e. couples with children, and has therefore limited representativeness for other demographic groups.

Allard, Haas and Hwang (2007) conversely found the amount of hours worked to have less impact on work-family conflicts than other variables. This was among their findings in a study aimed at Swedish male managers and may therefore have no more representativeness than Hill et al.'s (2006) study. Nevertheless, Allard, Haas and Hwang (2007) study underlines the importance of working hours as a correlate for work-family conflict even though they find sharing of domestic responsibilities and job flexibility to be stronger indicators of work-family conflicts.

2.3.2 State run experiments: an example from Finland

The problem with implementing new working hour arrangements of any kind may perhaps lie in companies' reluctance towards such ideas. The potential gains may be overshadowed by potential expenses that new arrangements could incur for companies in question. Golden (2010) acknowledges that short run gains may be difficult to pinpoint but argues that most of the monetary benefits occur on the long run, through e.g. diminished absenteeism and reduced turnover. Moreover, reduced and flexible working hours have broad spillover effects that benefit society as a whole by improving employees' health as well as being sustainable, both in economic and ecological terms. For this reason, any efforts towards implementing policies on the topic may be best suited to stem from governments (Golden, 2010). That is exactly what happened in Finland between 1996 and 1998.

For the purpose of fighting unemployment the Finnish state reimbursed 19 municipalities for reducing working hours and conducting necessary reorganization. This experiment is deliberated in Anttila, Nätti and Väisänen's (2005) article where the effects of reducing employees' working hours are discussed. Their article is a valuable contribution to the understanding of experiments on working hour reduction as they conducted a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods and made a strong case as to which method of reducing working hours are most likely to lead to a reduction in work-family conflict.

In the Finnish experiment, municipalities participating offered their employees to cut down their working hours to 30 hours a week (from around 37 hours) but in turn they had to endure an average wage loss of 7%. Employees opted for three different ways of reducing hours; some negotiated for extra weeks off, others had extra days off each week, but most exerted six-hour working days. By measuring work-family conflict, the authors conduce to the argument that shorter working hours reduce work-family conflict. Surprisingly though, the effects shorter working hours have, were shown to be limited to employees with children.

The disparity of the effect shorter working hours had in the Finnish experiment was evident when different ways of reducing working hours were compared. The evidence showed that a well distributed reduction (6-hour workday) lead to significantly more reduction of work-

family conflict than extra weeks or extra days off each week (Anttila, Nätti & Väisänen, 2005). Furthermore, shorter working hours had different effect on people according to their professional status. That is, people classified as blue-collar and lower-level white collar workers reported a reduction in work-family conflict whereas upper-level white collar workers demonstrated no such trend. This contradicts Allard, Haas and Hwang's (2007) findings as they found working hours to correlate with Swedish male managers' level of work-family conflict. These contradictions may be caused by different methodologies but could also be caused by unaccounted variables. Anttila et al.'s (2005) sample included e.g. mostly women while Allard, Haas and Hwang´s (2007) sample included only men.

However, the level of work-life conflicts in one country, might not reflect the situation in another. Ida Öun (2012) examined the levels of work-family conflicts in the Nordic welfare states (excluding Iceland). Even though these countries´ gender equality is amongst the highest in the world, the question still remains, whether their policies and social-norms help reducing work-family conflicts. Öun (2012) attempted to answer the question, by analysing data from the International Social Survey programme (2002). According to her analysis, work-family conflict among men and women in the Nordic countries can be clustered into three categories; work-family balance, occupational overload and dual work overload. Despite working less hours, women experience higher levels of work-family conflicts, as their burden of household chores is often higher than that of men's. In addition, work-family conflicts are similar between Norway, Sweden and Denmark, whereas in Finland a lower level of work-life conflict was present. In Finland, the topic of gender equality has been less visible than in the other Nordic countries, and Finnish mothers are less integrated into the labour market (Hiilamo & Kangas, 2006 in Öun, 2012). However, these findings do not draw any conclusion on whether working fewer hours reduces or increases work-life conflicts, they only underscore the differences of work-life conflicts between similar societies. The findings from Finland (Anttila, Nätti & Väisänen, 2005) may thus not reflect reality in other Nordic countries, cultural asymmetries may exist. The next subchapter touches upon the topic in the discussion of working culture.

2.4   Working culture

In the introductory chapter we pointed out that for the last 70 years the 40-hour working week has been considered to be the norm. This, however, differs between countries and cultures. Even though a 40-hour working week is stipulated in the laws in many countries the enforcement is often weak in reality. It is e.g. estimated that 22% of workers in the world are working more than 48 hours per week (Lee, McCann & Messenger, 2007). Lehndorff (2014) claims that even though state interventions are important in setting norms stipulating working hours, they are not enough. Realizing such norms is instead a mixture of social processes and legislation.

On the one hand, culture is described as something a group learns over a period of time and is invented, discovered or developed by this given group. Such learning is a behavioural, cognitive, and emotional process and is the correct way to perceive, think and feel (Schein, 1990). Social norms, on the other hand, are described as learned understandings about actions that are obligatory, permitted or forbidden (Crawford & Ostrom, 1995 and Ostrom, 2000). This indicates that creating cultural norms is a learned process that cannot be changed overnight.

In his paper, Lehndorff (2014) claimed that changing working-time standards takes time; it had e.g. taken several decades to transfer the norm of a 8 hour working day, which was made mandatory in the 1940s in Europe, into everyday life. In his research he compared the statutory 35-hour working week in France, with the contractual 35-hour working week in the German metal industry. It was in the late 1990s that France introduced the 35-hour working week. This was a state intervention and a top-down, a combination of legislation and collective agreements. In Germany, on the other hand, collective agreements on weekly working hours are more important as the law does not make any explicit reference to weekly hours. The German metal industry is the only industry in Germany where a collectively-agreed 35-hour working week is the norm and was implemented in the early 1990s.

Lehndorff´s (2014) analysis on actual worked hours in France, between 1998-2008, indicated a net-drop of 1.5 hours per week, but not a 4 hour reduction, as was statutory. In addition, the reduction differed between industries, the reduction for blue-collar workers was roughly two hours per week, whereas there was no observable reduction for high-skilled employees. Furthermore, he claimed that, by looking at the distribution of working hours, the statutory working week for full-time workers represented actual working hours for women better than for men and the number of employees working more than 48 hours per week was higher in France than the EU average. This indicates that social norms lag behind legal norms.

For the German metal industry it took both time and several steps for unions and employers to agree upon a 35-hour working week. There was great resistance among employers and in the late 2000s the gap between agreed upon and realized working hours was still immense, 4-4.5 hours. This shows that in the German metal industry, similar to France, normalizing the 35-hour working week proved problematic (Lehndorff, 2014). These result s indicate that setting statutory and collective norms is a long term social process.

Lehndorff's (2014) contribution, even though invaluable when understanding the difficulties countries might face when implementing a shorter working week, does not take deeply embedded cultural differences into consideration. This may make any generalization unreasonable. However, if the aim is to make assumptions about shorter working weeks in other countries, these differences need to be addressed.

The Nordic countries, such as Sweden and Iceland, both score low on masculinity on Hofstede's five dimensions of national culture (The Hofstede Centre, 2015). Countries that score low on masculinity, are considered to be feminine societies. To have a good work-life balance is extremely important for feminine societies, and they stress concern for people,

quality of life, and sexual equality (Hofstede, 1994 and Maude, 2011). Masculine countries, on the other hand, thrive on competition, achievement, success, and performance is highly valued. Men are usually assertive and competitive, showing a difference between men's and women's values (Hofstede, 1994). Both Germany and France score high on masculinity (The Hofstede Centre, 2015), and the mere fact that a shorter working week seems to be more representative for women in France than man, could be reflected in France being a masculine society. Hofstede's classification of societies can therefore substantiate the argument that implementing a shorter working week would turn out more effectively in the more feminine countries.

2.5   Theoretical summary

This chapter has reviewed literature that relates to the research questions we aim to answer. The discussion was sorted into four sections. In the first section we shed light on productivity and working hours. The literature on the subject does not suggest that shorter working hours leads to an automatic reduction in working hours. However, if shorter working hours are managed effectively and job satisfaction and stress is managed, then higher productivity may pursue. In the second section different leadership styles were addressed and the mundane manager was introduced. The importance of engagement and good communication was addressed as well as the importance of knowing one's strength. The third section discussed work-life balance. Among arguments presented was the positive correlation between amount of working hours and work-life balance. The correlation, however, was shown to vary between demographics. The fourth section argues that it takes time to change working time standards. However, even though implementing a 35-hour working week in France and Germany had its difficulties, cultural differences make any generalization from that experience towards the Nordic countries ill-founded.

3   Methodology

Our research strives to examine how managers meet the challenges and the benefits a shorter working week brings. However, one important question remains unanswered, how do we intend to answer our research question? This chapter discusses the methodology behind our research and how we aim to answer the research questions. In short, we interviewed managers in three public organizations, two in Iceland and one in Sweden. What connects these three organizations is that they are all participating in an experiment run by their municipalities, where working hours were significantly reduced.

3.1   Methodological choices

When studying managers, and how they cope with changes in their working environment, we find it to be most suitable to conduct a qualitative research (Silverman, 2005 and Creswell, 2007). The aim of the study is to shed light on phenomena; perceptions and feelings, rather than to make standardized and systematic comparison. That, on contrary, would warrant for the use of quantitative methods (Silverman, 2005). Now that this has been cleared, a further decision as to what design frame to follow is needed. According to Creswell (2007) and Silverman (2005) a collective case study seems to be a good fit for us because it uses multiple cases to illustrate an issue. In our case that issue is a shorter working week. We find this approach feasible because our cases, organizations experimenting with shorter working week, are easily identifiable and with boundaries (Creswell, 2007).

Previous researches have relied on similar methods. Anttila, Nätti & Väisänen (2005) e.g. used similar interviews when studying the effects a shorter working week had on work-life conflicts. However, that study went further than our research as they combined the method with repeated measures on work-family interaction over the course of the experiment. Alvesson and Sveningsson's (2008) case study of a high-tech company was a similar, but a more extensive approach to a qualitative research in the management field. They, like us, took an interpretative stance and succumbed themselves in the case, by "addressing not the 'objective' logic but the meanings, values, thinking and lines of action..." (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008, p.59).

3.2   Research design

As we were preparing our collective case study, we searched for organizations that had implemented a shorter working week (shorter than a normal 37-40 hours/week) but we were furthermore interested in organizations in the experimental phase towards a shorter working week. Our efforts resulted in us gaining access to three organizations, all of which were in the experimental phase, and all of which are public organization, two in Iceland and one in Sweden. Having gained access to these organizations we could then formulate our research design.

Since we chose our cases to be organizations experimenting with shorter working week, we found it to be most logical to conduct an evaluation (Thomas, 2013). Taking an interpretive stance throughout the research allows us to make evaluations from the interviews we conducted, interpreting the information obtained and relating them to the topic of the thesis; a managerial perspective towards a shorter working week. We interviewed managers during the course of the experiments, when they had been running for 2-3 months. This lead us to make use of evaluation as a design frame as it leaves considerable room for interpretation on our behalf. This may sound obscure as scientific methods generally demand disinterest from the researcher. We therefore have to be honest about the fact that we, the researchers, are highly interested in the topic of the thesis. The idea of a shorter working week is, as was discussed in the introduction, interesting for many reasons and the nature of the topic induces positive mental associations in people's minds, we bluntly argue. Distancing ourselves from the topic, albeit preferable, is therefore something we deemed not attainable.

As a design frame, evaluation is suitable when examining measurable changes caused by a particular programme (Thomas, 2013). This particular programme, in our research, is the shortening of the working week while the changes we aim to find are incorporated in the minds of the managers that we interviewed. This will not lead us to measurable variables, rendering it necessary to take an interpretive stance when wading through the interview data. While an evaluative approach is the backbone of this thesis, it does not suffice on its own as a design frame. An additional approach is therefore needed.

The fact that our research examines three different organizations prompts a need to mix our design frame with elements of a collective case study (Silverman, 2005). We will, to some extent, compare the knowledge that derives from the interviews, trying to spot inherent differences between the three organizations and in addition, the cultural differences between Iceland and Sweden. By addressing "unspoken and unquestioned cultural expectations" (Thomas, 2013, p.179) a comparative approach will guide us through the analyses of parts of the data gathered in the interviews.

The cases will furthermore be analysed and compared by focusing on a different facet; the various approach each case uses to reduce working hours. The differences in working hour reduction will be explained further in chapter four. We will then compare the findings from each organization and discuss whether any assumptions may be drawn from the comparison.

3.2.1   Selection

As previously mentioned, interviews were conducted with managers at three public organizations, two Icelandic and one Swedish, all of which were experimenting with a shorter working week. This choice was not random, we sought after those exact organizations as they were involved in the process that we wanted to conduct our research on. This method of sampling has been called purposive sampling (Silverman, 2005) and requires critical examination of the population and then to carefully choose the cases.

The organizations in Iceland (Organizations A and B) were taking part in a 9 month experimental project, where the working week was cut from 40 hours to 35-36 hours. During the experiment, one organization closed its office at noon on Fridays (Organization A) while in the other organization (Organization B), each working day is shortened from 8 hours to 7. The organization in Sweden (Organization C) was taking part in a similar experiment, weekly working hours were cut to 30 hours from about 38. However, the nature of the experiment was quite different as the managers were not participants, but only employees working shifts.

The different experimental approaches are summarized in table 3.1. Table 3.1 also demonstrates the number of interviews conducted within each organization. The three organizations, and their various experimental approaches, will be described in more depth in the first subchapter (Case Background) of chapter four, Findings.

Table 3.1 Overview of the experiments

Organization	Experiment starts	Experiment ends	Participants	Working hours	Hours worked	Managers interviewed
A	01.03.2015	30.11.2015	35	40 to 36	Friday afternoon off	4
B	01.03.2015	30.11.2015	25	40 to 35	7 hour workday	3
C	01.02.2015	01.02.2016	60	ca 38 to 30	6 hour shifts	2

3.2.2   Participants

Managers at organizations A, B and C were interviewed using the aforementioned semi-structured interview procedure (Thomas, 2013). Organization A has one executive manager and three heads of departments all of which were interviewed individually. Organization B holds one executive manager and two heads of departments, all interviewed individually as well. Organization C, has an executive manager and four heads of departments. We interviewed one of the four heads of departments and the executive manager in one interview session.

3.2.3 Interviews

By interviewing the managers, their experience of a shorter working week could be be revealed and valuable knowledge gained if appropriate topics are addressed. The aim of our interviews was to understand the particular issue (shorter working week) by looking at the manager's perceptions, ideas, and thoughts.

To be able to utilize their knowledge and experience on the subject to the fullest we found it feasible to conduct semi-structured interviews (Thomas, 2013 and Silverman, 2005). This gave the interviewees an option to express their feelings and thoughts freely on the topics we discussed (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews are open ended and the intention was to let the managers lead the conversation. We wanted to have a frame where the issues we wished to address were touched upon but at the same time we wanted to give the managers freedom to elaborate and express their thoughts in their own way. This lead to a discovery of new interesting topics and gave us the opportunity to observe the issue from new angles. Therefore, the interview schedule was open and flexible and changed directions as the interview went along, but was at the same time a reminder of our aims and themes.

Interview guide

When using the semi-structured interview approach, we designed a schedule for the topics desired to address (Appendix A). To obtain answers to our research questions we chose to ask the managers questions about five different topics.

First, before we asked any question, we asked the interviewees to express their perception of the experiment (shorter working week) and his/her opinion on it. Secondly, we focused on the effects the experiment had had on the manager's capability to fulfil their tasks. Thirdly, we asked about the effects the experiment had had on their subordinates, both their well-being and their productivity. Then we proceeded by having the managers discuss their leadership style. After the first interviews, we discovered that cultural norms seemed to play a part in the managers' minds. This evoked our curiosity and we asked about social norms and culture in subsequent interviews. Finally, we opened up a discussion on the effects the experiment has had on the participants' (managers and employees) work-life balance. These topics, however, were only guidelines as the discussion was allowed to flow freely according to our interviewees' interest.

Interview procedure

The interviews with managers in Organizations A and B were conducted through phone. Unfortunately we lost contextual and behavioural details by doing so. However, the interviews were conducted in both the respondents' and the interviewers' mother language, which is a benefit as it makes it easier for respondents and interviewers to express their feeling and thoughts. All interviews were individual conversations that lasted for 30 minutes up to almost an hour. All the interviews were therefore in-depth discourses, with open-ended questions, allowing the interviewees to respond the way they wished. Telephones as a medium, have not necessarily been considered a good tool when conducting qualitative

research and have been regarded merely a fitting tool in quantitative research. This view, however, may be a misconception and the usability of telephone interviews may be greater than commonly believed (Cachia & Millward, 2011).

When interviewing the two managers at organization C, a face-to-face group interview was conducted. As discussed by Thomas (2013) people behave differently in a group, some might become more talkative while others hold back. We were aware of that and tried to get answers from both participants. The reason we conducted a group interview is simply that the managers at Organization C offered us to meet them in a joint session on a particular day. We kindly accepted. The group interview lasted for over an hour. The interview in Organization C was conducted in English, which is neither the interviewers' nor the interviewee's' first language. To limit the effects language barriers had on the interview we encouraged the interviewees to speak their mind in Swedish in case they could not find the English words they were looking for.

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

3.2.4   Analysing the data

We found the best way to analyse our data was to use the constant comparative method (Thomas, 2013). According to Thomas (2013) the data is compared by going over it continuously to find meanings behind the participants´ phrases and the words they use. The data was analysed and themes identified by using codes which summarized the content leading to a consistent view of the results. In our opinion the method that was the best fit to map our data was to use Thomas´s (2013) adaptation of construct mapping developed by Jones (1985), called theme mapping.

By using theme mapping we established our themes and found quotations that illustrated those themes. We found approximately 10 themes, which we then narrowed down to five themes, listed in next chapter. The themes will be reflected in our analysis. Most of the analysis took place after the interviews through aforementioned process of coding and mapping. However, the process of analysing started earlier. In fact, the process occurred concurrently with the collection of our data. Our understanding of the topics grew from interview to interview and we used that insight to ask successive respondents about subjects that were raised in previous interviews. This process of continuous analysis during data analysis was explained in DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006).d

3.3   Methodological limitations

Pinpointing certain limitations to our research is, admittedly, rather easy. Firstly, the timeframe for the research was very limited. Secondly, as is discussed in the methodology chapter, it is feasible to make an evaluation before, during, and after the initiative in question

(Thomas, 2013). This study does not meet these requirements as it is only conducted in the during-phase, however valuable insight can be obtained regardless. Not only is the research limited to the during-phase, it may also suffer from taking place in the beginning of the during phase. Interviewees have therefore very limited experience to build their answers upon.

Secondly, the conduct of the interviews may furthermore be criticised. By conducting interviews through phone calls, we risked losing some context that would otherwise be visible. In the group interview, we conversely benefitted from being face-to-face with the respondents. This allowed us to gain a better feeling for the respondents as well as encouraging them to speak their mind through active listening. Furthermore, being face-to-face with them may have compensated for the fact that all participants were speaking a language different from their mother tongue.

Thirdly, examining two organizational units in Iceland but only one in Sweden, makes it more difficult to make a comparison on the national level. Consequently, the comparison will mostly be on the organizational level even though we find it useful to use the findings to make assumption on the national level. Still, any assumptions on the national level may be diluted by the fact that the experiments in Iceland are conducted by the same governmental body and follow similar principles. Meanwhile, the experiment in Sweden follows a different set of principles. In addition, we conducted seven individually based interviews with Icelandic managers but only one group interview in Sweden. That leads to a skewed balance between responses, and diminishes the credibility of the comparison.

Finally, making generalizations may not necessarily be the objective in a qualitative research. In quantitative research, on the other hand, high reliability is obtained if other researchers are able to replicate the research with the same result (Thomas, 2013). This is not applicable in a research like ours. Should other researchers use the same methodology as we have, but on different cases, they would probably get different results.

4   Findings

In this chapter, our main findings from the interviews with managers from Organizations A, B and C are demonstrated. First, we briefly introduce the organizations under discussion to give the reader a better understanding on how these organizations operate and why they were chosen for this particular experiment. The case background is based on the interviews we conducted.

In the second part of this chapter, we present our findings according to the themes we found using the constant comparative method described in the methodology chapter. We had no difficulties finding the themes and similar phrases, as they were quite clear. We narrowed the themes down into six categories; attitudes towards the experiment, work performance, leadership styles, work-life balance, culture and norms, and doubts. To a certain extent, four themes harmonize with the research questions, partly because the semi-structured interviews guided the interviewees into that path. Two themes (attitudes towards the experiment and doubts) were furthermore observed. At the beginning of each interview the participants generally expressed a positive attitude towards the experiments but at the end of the interviews some doubts were often aired.

4.1   Case background

This study covers three organizations, two in Iceland and one in Sweden, all of which were participating in an experiment at the time of the study. All experiments involved the shortening of the working week, but to a various degree and in different forms.

Organization A is a division within Reykjavik Municipality dealing with a particular part of social services, i.e. child protection. The division is made up of approximately 35 employees; e.g. social workers, psychologists, lawyers, and customer service agents. The employees work 8 hours a day, 5 days a week. Many of them have fixed overtime (10 hours) that they have to work each month. Furthermore, the division always has to have an employee on standby duty. The experiment in Organization A was arranged in such a way that regular working hours were scheduled until noon on Fridays, thereby shortening the working week from 40 hours to 36. As a part of our research, we interviewed the executive manager in Organization A as well as three middle managers. The respondents' age ranged from 38 to 54, three females and one male. Their period of employment within the organization ranged from 12-25 years but the period of employment in their current position ranged from less than a year to 13 years. The timespan of the experiment was 9 months.

Organization B is also a division within Reykjavik Municipality and is one of six divisions that arrange and distribute social assistance for the citizens. The division is made up of around 25 employees; e.g. social workers and customer service agents. They work regular hours, 40 hours a week while the specialists usually work a fixed amount of overtime (10 hours). During the experiment, each working day was reduced by one hour. The office hence closed at 15:00 instead of 16:00 before, shortening the working week from 40 hours to 35. We interviewed the executive manager as well as two middle managers, two females and one male. Two respondents were around 60 years of age while one respondent's age remained undisclosed. Their period of employment within the organization ranged from 9-25 years but the period of employment in their current position ranged from 9-10 years. The timespan of the experiment was 9 months.

Organization C is an elderly home in Gothenburg, Sweden. The three divisions at the elderly home partake in the experiment employing about 60 people, mainly assistant nurses. What distinguishes Organization C from A and B is that the employees that are a part of the experiment all work shifts. Furthermore, the reduction in working hours is more extensive than in the Icelandic organizations as all shifts are shortened to 6 hours. Consequently, the participants' working week is cut from between 37-38 hours down to 30 hours. We interviewed two managers in Organization C in one session, an executive manager who oversees several units and a middle manager in one of the three units. The managers we interviewed did not participate in the experiment themselves but only the employees working shifts. The timespan of the experiment was 12 months.

All three organization were handpicked, by officials, to run the experiments and had therefore limited say on the matter. For Organizations A and B, no reimbursement of funding came with the experiment whereas Organization C had a fixed amount of money assigned to the experiment. This funding was then used to hire additional employees to compensate for the reduction of working hours.

We now proceed by accounting for the findings of the interviews, categorized according to the themes we identified.

4.2   Attitudes towards the experiment

All through the interviews we had a strong feeling that all the managers were more than happy to participate in the experiments of a shorter working week. They all hoped that the outcome of the experiment would be positive. A positive outcome, for the managers in Iceland, meant that productivity would not decline and that they would keep the service level as high as before. A positive outcome for the managers in Sweden, meant that the staff would become more rested and less stressed:

*This will be fun, not easy, but it feels good to be a part of it (the experiment)
... I think this is the future and we are participating in an important
research (Organization B)*

*We want this to work out, because we can see the effects it has already had
(Organization C)*

*To begin with, I go into this with an optimistic and positive mind-set
(Organization A)*

When we asked about the managers' subordinates reactions towards the experiment, all nine managers agreed that their subordinates were happy and excited about participating and some even claimed that they felt a bit honoured to have been chosen for the experiment:

*Most people are happy and honoured to have been chosen ... the young
people at our office are especially happy with the experiment (Organization
B)*

*Participating in the experiment is desirable ... People want this to work out
and become the norm (Organisation A)*

They (the employees) are proud to be a part of the project (Organization C)

4.3   Work performance

In this chapter, efficiency, job satisfaction, and stress are addressed.

4.3.1   Efficiency

All the managers in Iceland agreed that they had, due to the experiment, to be more organized themselves and more alert; that they would have to make their work more compact and make better use of their time. This view stretched throughout the organizations and everyone was aware that reorganization was needed. One manager in Organization A claimed e.g. that the people at the office were constantly thinking about efficiency and another one, in the same organization, declared that they were always trying to make things run more smoothly. A manager in Organization B said:

*Everyone realized that we could not behave as we did before. We needed to
reorganize and make better use of our time (Organization B).*

When asked about how the managers in Organizations A and B had managed to take care of their own tasks in shorter hours than before, most of them claimed that they were indeed able to fulfil their tasks even though they now needed to run faster.

*I feel I can manage my tasks in this shorter working week. Still, tasks tend
to pile up. But then I have to prioritize my time. I choose not to attend*

(certain) meetings or certain tasks. I think the experiment only sacrifices things that are dismissible (Organization B).

Yes, so far this works out (completing tasks) on a weekly basis. I manage to complete my tasks but the last couple of weeks I have come to work on Saturdays to finish what was necessary. That, however, is done as a part of my fixed 10-hour overtime that I have to work. So yes, I manage (Organization A).

Meanwhile, for some reason, the managers in Organizations A and B were not able to shorten their working hours as much as the experiment intended and struggled a bit in that sense:

I am trying to leave earlier, it's difficult because of my subordinates and because of meetings in other organizations (Organization B).

I have attended (the workplace) to do some paper-work on Sundays, tasks that I otherwise would have taken care of on Fridays (Organization A).

Meanwhile, even though the managers in organization C do not work shorter hours themselves, they expressed similar thoughts on the issue:

This is a project, and in this project we did not predict how much more there would be for us (the managers) to do (Organization C).

The extra tasks that the managers at Organization C were faced with were a direct result of the structural changes required by the experiment:

We had the possibility from the beginning to hire someone to work with us, but we were a bit naïve and said that it wasn't necessary. We couldn't figure what a helper could do. ... That was a huge mistake. But now, last week, we hired someone to help us (Organization C).

We did not interview subordinates but asked the managers questions related to their work performance, trying to get an insight into how the managers perceived their subordinates´ ability to fulfil their duties at work. Most of the managers in Organization A and B felt like their subordinates could complete their tasks in shorter hours but were, however, concerned that it might differ between people. One manager (Organization B) claimed that people managed to cope with shorter hours to various degrees and that some people were more organized than others. Another manager in Organization B stated that the subordinates had managed to fulfil their duties but speculated if they were postponing some tasks. She, however, emphasized that there had been no complaints about the subordinates not taking care of tasks. Most of the managers agreed that their subordinates were scrupulous in general but at the same time they were conscious that they had to be more organized due to the experiment.

One manager articulated how the experiment's goal, in her mind, was not only to maintain the same level of productivity as before:

When the managers were discussing efficiency, some mentioned that coffee breaks had been shortened. According to one manager in Organization B, the coffee break people used to have in the afternoon was absent and people used to have coffee and sit down when they showed up in the morning, but that had diminished as well. Two managers in Organization B claimed that everyone at the office had discussed how they could reduce chit-chatting and relaxation time but that they did not control how long coffee breaks employees take. They further argued that there is often a blurred line between breaks and work because people discuss work during breaks. A manager in Organization A stated that the employees were constantly thinking about efficiency and took therefore fewer breaks.

It was evident in Organization A and B that employees had reduced running personal errands and exercising during working hours. In Organization A it had, before the experiment, been acceptable for employees to go twice a week to the gym during lunch time. That leverage diminished after the experiment started. In addition, people were now more aware of running their own errands, i.e. going to the hairdresser and to physiotherapy after work. In general this was respected and as one manager stated: "People take the experiment seriously".

4.3.2   Job satisfaction

There was a unanimous agreement between the managers that the working morale was higher after the experiment started, except for one manager that had not observed any change in the working morale. One manager in Organization A described the experiment as being "a vitamin injection for the workforce" while another claimed the morale being high due to the experiment and that people were thankful for it. Furthermore, one manager claimed that the working morale was high, but this would become even more evident over the summer. One manager in Organization A had noticed that the people in the team seemed happier on Fridays and added that the increased happiness was not only restricted to Fridays. The managers in Organization C stated that the working morale was definitely higher and went even so far as to saying that some people were afraid what would happen after the experiment ended.

4.3.3   Stress

The managers in Organizations A and B gave contradicting answers when asked whether the stress level had changed after the experiment started. The managers in organization A claimed that due to the experiment more stress occurred, both for themselves and for the employees:

I sense increased stress but a strong willingness to let this work out (Organization A)

The experiment has been a bit stress inducing for me. I can feel the stress particularly on Fridays knowing I have to quit by noon (Organization A)

I sense more stress. It could be seasonal though, not related to the experiment (Organization A)

Indeed, the level of stress has been continuous in the organization, or as one manager put it:

We have had a full glass before, now it's overflowing. We try to walk cautiously so that we don't spill (Organization A)

However, the managers in organization B were more positive about the employees' stress level.

I think this is positive for stress. People believe they will enjoy the summer more fully (Organization B)

People don't seem to be more stressed than they were before (Organization B)

Conversely, the answers from Organization C were more decisive:

It's less stressful now. Now it's more calm. ... The clients are more relaxed as well ... They (the employees) have more energy during work and more energy when they come home (Organization C).

She furthermore emphasized how unique their field is, where calmness is more important than measurable productivity.

In this work you have to be calm, then you perform well and the elderly people are then also calm. If you are not calm, then you have to do more because they are stressed.

4.3.4   Meetings and technology

Since shorter working days, at least in Organizations A and B, imply that people need to be more efficient and make better use of their time, we asked questions related to meetings and whether they were perhaps excessive or too long. Most of the managers in Organizations A and B agreed that some meetings could be shortened, and that in general they were aiming for shorter meetings. Some meetings were stated to be necessary but in some instances, meetings were reduced, from weekly meetings on a particular subject to bi-weekly. The managers have tried to become more to the point and one manager (Organization A) claimed that there had been a scope for improvement, and now, less chit-chat remained at meetings. A manager in Organization B claimed that certain meetings had been moved, e.g. meetings that used to be held between one o'clock and two now started at half past eleven, and lasted only 30 minutes. By doing that, he claimed, that people were utilizing time that was previously unused and therefore gaining almost an hour. The same manager continued by claiming that meetings used to be too long and inefficient, often run on cruise-control and unfortunately, people were

often not prepared well enough for the meetings. Another manager at the same organization claimed that now, people tried to be more efficient in the meetings. One manager said:

We are trying to shorten meetings and I think it's realistic. I think a one hour meeting can be shortened by 15 minutes (Organization B).

Managers at Organization A agreed and one claimed that long meetings were perhaps neither necessary nor effective.

However, when we asked the managers in Organization C the same question the answer was quite different. They claimed that they had no intentions to shorten or reduce meetings because they wanted to keep the quality as high as before. Nonetheless, they admitted that almost one working day was taking away for their regular job having meetings related to the experiment.

When the managers in Organizations A and B discussed the possibility of shorter and fewer meetings, the topic of utilizing technology further in meetings popped up. Most managers agreed that technology, such as Skype, should be utilized to a greater extent in meetings:

I don't know why Skype isn't used more, nor why it´s not possible to organize meetings like that ... I wish our meeting room was equipped with telecommunication equipment so we only needed to push one button in order to participate in a meeting ... ... if teenagers can do it (use the technology), why can't we? I think this has been looked upon as being second class ... this doesn't have to be all or nothing, e.g. deep meetings can´t be on Skype but inferior meetings can (Organization A).

We go back and forth between organizations by car and gather in a meeting for an hour. An extreme amount of time goes to waste. This could be solved by using Skype more often. It´s difficult to break those habits and there is no one that takes the responsibility and initiative to do something about this. The experiment encourages you to become more critical (Organization B)

One manager mentioned a policy in Reykjavík Municipality regarding a reduction of pollution and sustainability. She therefore claimed it to be contradictory to go here, there and everywhere to attend a meeting. People should rather contemplate the use of technology when holding meetings.

4.4   Leadership styles

One of the topics that we raised in the interviews regarded the manager´s leadership styles. We asked the managers to describe themselves as managers and the methods they use when leading and motivating their subordinates. The question was open ended and we allowed the managers to discuss this topic freely. In general, the managers described themselves as being democratic and inclusive, and that they were among peers rather than being above their subordinates.

> *Democratic. Include people in decision making ... I am in line with my employees, not above ... I want to be a part of the team and know what is going on on the floor (Organization A).*

Another manager in Organization A emphasized diversity and the benefit of conflicts in decision making:

> *I emphasize diversity in teams and utilize each individual's strengths. Try not to force everyone to be the same. ... I am not afraid of conflicts. Not everyone has to agree, sometimes it's beneficial to have a progress through arguments ... This job is creative. We have to allow all opinions to be heard, even the "stupid" ones. Once all opinions are established we can have an open discussion and make the most reasonable decision.*

This manager also mentioned that when her team has to work overtime due to an urgent case, she tends to stay with them and thereby being a role model. Another manager in the same organization described herself quite differently. She acknowledged that she sometimes tends to take too much of the burden on herself but that she is working on letting go of this habit. She furthermore described her reliance on formal procedures and how some colleagues took that for granted:

> *I'm very organized and want to have formal processes that employees follow ... It is a little frustrating when people come and seek my guidance on some formal processes that are readily available to them already.*

A recurring theme amongst the managers interviewed was that they took their work home with them. One manager in Organization B explained how that went hand-in-hand with the experiment:

> *I try to be a role model in the sense that I don't spend too much time in the office. However, I often take some paperwork home with me, but the employees don't see that.*

Another manager in Organization B, described himself as a task distributer:

> *I distribute tasks. The employees have then a lot of autonomy. I try to assign cases according to each employee's strengths and speciality. ... I am a coordinator. I'm not above people but try to have surveillance. ... I help when they seek my advice. I don't micro-manage. ... I want there to be a clear division of labour so that everyone knows their duties.*

This manager mentioned the autonomy he reserves for his subordinates. Others held similar views on their subordinates' independence:

> *Decentralization, people have some autonomy over their work (Organization A).*

One manager in Organization B claimed to practice Servant Leadership:

> *I follow the idea of "Servant Leadership". The leader describes him/herself as a servant and works with the people. He/she is not giving orders. ... I*

The executive manager in Organization C was on similar terms with the managers in Organizations A and B when talking about autonomy of her employees. She said that she gives her middle managers independence in their work. The middle manager that we interviewed on the other hand told us that she tried to learn as much as she could from colleagues in order to see how they do things and that she tries to recognize her employees' strengths and weaknesses. Once she spots them she tries to build on these strengths. She also noted that the experiment impeded her from working closely with her staff.

4.5   Work-life balance

In one of our research questions we ask how managers perceive the effects a shorter working week has on the work-life balance. We therefore asked about work-life balance in our semi-structured interviews. Everyone declared that a shorter working week was positive for themselves and their employees´ work-life balance, but answers differed, especially in relation to the managers´ age and domesticity. One manager (Organization A), with two young children, claimed that leaving work earlier on Fridays was really good for his family life:

> *This (a shorter working week) has had a positive impact (on the work-life balance). We have a 14 months old baby boy, who is in day-care which closes at 3 o´clock. This is a puzzle for us, especially for my wife, until he gets into kindergarten next fall. She always needs to leave work earlier but now, I can pick him up on Fridays. I go home and clean the house, we have two small children so we don't have much spare time at our disposal. It is really positive to be able to quit earlier (on Fridays) and take a breather … this makes things a bit easier at home.*

"Young women with kids see changes in this (a shorter working week)", one manager in Organization B claimed and another manager in the same organization agreed and stated that this had a positive effect for the women with young children at the office. She added that this arrangement was especially positive for the employees in customer service who are not required to work overtime. She added that people felt like they were gaining a lot by shortening the working day by one hour. According to her, each day gets longer, and is perceived as even longer than the one additional hour given. Another manager in the same organization agreed and stated that the extra hour people gain is a really active hour and people can make very good use of it. He added that people saw the reduction as a way to spend more time with their families. A manager in Organization A thought that shorter working week would make a lot of difference for families with children because then they could take better care of their families, but suggested that maybe it would have been more feasible to shorten each day by an hour, instead of leaving earlier on Fridays. She, however, didn't think the change made much of a difference for herself:

I don't have young kids so this change doesn't make much of a difference for me personally. I wanted to use the extra time to do something fun but as it turns out I just go home and clean the house. I guess that´s good to get that over with before the weekend … I don´t speculate so much whether I go home at 4, 4:30 or 5, but I would have loved to go home earlier when my kids were younger.

Another manager (Organization B) admitted that leaving early was a bit of a challenge and the habit of working long hours was strong. He used to go home from work at 5 o'clock but now he needed to be conscious about leaving earlier. He added that he had to be conscious when implementing this new routine into his life. He also admitted that the extra hours he gained were not used towards his personal life, because of his domesticity at the moment, but rather towards his extra job. However, he concluded by stating that he was probably spending more time now with his children and grandchildren, than before the experiment started.

In general managers claimed that a shorter working week was a luxury. One of them stated:

This (shorter working week) is a luxury. It elongates the weekend and adds quality to my spare time. Even though it's just going to the gym, to a store or home to clean the house. Whatever you choose to spend your time on, on Sunday evenings you feel that your weekend has been longer. This is very evident (Organization A).

Since the managers in Organization C do not participate in the experiment they could not answer questions related to work-life balance for themselves but were certain that there was a better work-life balance for their subordinates now. They added that this had a positive impact on their well-being:

They (the subordinates) work shorter days. They have more energy during the day and after work, for themselves, for their family and more balance. They come more rested to the job and go more rested home. They have more time (Organization C).

4.6   Culture and norms

Since both Iceland and Sweden are conducting experiments on a shorter working week we were curious about the working culture in both countries and if there were, perhaps, any differences between countries. Therefore, this emerged as one of our topics in the interviews.

The managers in Organizations A and B all agreed that in Iceland, it is considered to be a virtue to work long hours. However, most of the managers were starting to see a change in this regard:

I feel that it has been viewed as a virtue to work long hours. This however, is declining. Maybe it's because of the discussion about a shorter working week, but this change has been going on for a while (Organization A).

The pressure in recent years has been to lengthen the working day. It came therefore as a surprise when we were offered to participate in this experiment … People see it as a virtue to hand in an impeccable job. To manage that, people often see no other way than to work longer hours. However, people neglect the other side of the coin, that they could prioritize differently. I think that this norm, to work long hours, is on the decline. I think no one considers it a virtue anymore to linger over their work unnecessarily (Organization B).

One manager agreed with the over-emphasis on working long hours and acknowledged the responsibility of the manager to set the tone in the office:

I think there is too much emphasis on working long hours. Working long hours is praised but it depends on the managers. If the manager stays longer, he/she puts pressure on the employees. They are reluctant to leave before the manager leaves (Organization B).

Another manager in Organization B implied that there is a connection between working long hours and collective agreements in Iceland:

You ask if there is an emphasis on working long hours, as a virtue. Yes, that is the case but it is also bound in our collective agreements. People are impelled to work overtime. The basic salary should be higher. That is the case in Norway and perhaps in Sweden too. People there are not working so much overtime. People here (in Iceland) may be getting 40 hours in unworked overtime (in their contract) and you ask yourself if this is some kind of a joke.

Yet, another implied that people who are career minded often succumb to the pitfall of working long hours:

People that want to succeed professionally often do it by working long hours (Organization A)

Interestingly, some managers mentioned the mentality of Icelanders and that they need a change in mind-set. When discussing a shorter working week in relation to culture, one manager said:

We need to work on the Icelandic mentality. People might take on an extra job. There is a lack of family policy in Iceland so that people would indeed be utilizing (a shorter working week) to spend more time with their family (Organization A).

A manager in Organization B agreed and stated that for the future, the Icelandic people needed to have a change in mind-set and refrain from considering long working hours to be a virtue. Another manager in Organization B went even further and claimed that Icelanders were "hillbillies" in this regard and that something was missing in mentality of Icelanders and stated:

I lived in Europe many years ago. Then, people were arguing for a much shorter working week than 40 hours. When I came home (to Iceland) I

started working for my union. It was futile to even advocate for this (a shorter working week). People hadn´t developed this maturity yet.

The manager furthermore claimed:

There are all sorts of cultures ongoing. Before the financial crisis (the collapse of the Icelandic banks in 2008), weren't those who brought sleeping to work considered to be the best? The ones that never slept?

The responses from the managers we interviewed in Organization C were quite different. They did not agree that working long hours was considered to be a virtue and claimed that people wanted to use their spare time doing other things than working. They had experienced a change in attitudes and that people had started to value their spare-time more. One manager referred to young people with this mind-set as "the new generation". She even claimed that people were realizing that they do not even have to work full time and the other manager agreed and added that nowadays, some people had started to see that they do not need to work long hours nor have a prestigious job. Regarding the change of attitudes, the one manager claimed:

When I was young and needed a job, and the employer asked me if I could work throughout the whole summer, I said "Yes, of course" because I needed a job. No, when young people come here they say e.g. "I can't work here and there" and if I don´t accept it they won't take the job ... people are not waiting in line for these jobs.

In conclusion, the managers in Organization C claimed that even though the experiment was somewhat difficult, it is beneficial for the community as a whole.

4.7   Doubts

All of the managers we interviewed were generally happy to participate in the experiments and believed that shorter working hours would benefit the society as a whole. Most of them, however, aired some doubts on the topic; some were worried about the compressed demands on their employees following the experiments, while others were unsure whether the output of the work could remain undamaged.

A common complaint in Organization A was that the sensitivity of their business (child protection services) meant that they were perhaps not the best fit for the experiment. They furthermore were worried that they might not be able to provide the same level of service and, in the long run, the employees might not be able to keep up with the increased pace. On similar terms, three managers in Organization A complained about being short-staffed:

I feel that an extra employee should have been included in this experiment. However, this experiment is so positive that we just accepted it as it was presented.

Managers may have to face the fact that additional staff is needed.

Managers in Organization B were not decisive on this issue but when talking about productivity one manager was far from optimistic:

Productivity must suffer by taking one hour off each day.

That same manager had reservations about the introduction of the experiment:

It would have been best if the idea of the experiment came from us. It was a politically implemented project that was imposed on us.

Some managers were critical about the arrangement of the experiment:

I think it would have been better to shorten every day by an hour instead of only Fridays (Organization A).

Another manager in Organization A argued that a more incremental approach to the reduction would have been easier:

I would have wanted to shorten the working week more incrementally. A 4-hour reduction is quite a lot to take in at once.

In Organization C, we observed different doubts from the managers. Those doubts focused on the difficulties involved in reorganizing shifts:

We actually needed to hire someone only during weekends. But the law says that we must offer people full-time work. Consequently, now we are overstaffed during weekdays. ... They can cover all the shifts but then maybe someone only has 25 hours that particular week.

4.8   Conclusion

We have now accounted for the findings of the interviews that we conducted in our research. These findings were divided according to the themes that we identified after a process of transcribing, coding, and a process of constant comparison. Most of the themes adhere to the themes laid out in the research questions but additional themes were also identified.

Firstly, the findings indicate that for Organizations A and B there is room for efficiency improvements, e.g. by re-organizing and prioritizing work, conducting shorter meetings and utilizing the technology further, minimizing errand-running during working hours and taking shorter breaks. Secondly, the managers experimenting with a shorter working week, in general, seem to be inclusive, engaging and democratic. Thirdly, our results indicate that a shorter working week enhances work-life balance, but to a different degree between individuals. Lastly, our results indicate that implementing a shorter working week might be impeded by culture. In the next chapter these findings will be analysed further, the experiments evaluated and compared and related back to the theoretical review.

5   Analysis and Discussion

This chapter is dedicated to the analysis of our findings and the discussion, where we relate our findings to theory. This chapter is therefore divided into three subchapters. In the first two subchapters we conduct our evaluation and comparison, the two analytical approaches we considered applicable to the research and in the last subchapter we relate our findings back to the theoretical review.

In the evaluation, we examine how managers perceived changes caused by the experiment, with the aim to spot differences in behaviour before and after the experiment started. As noted in the methodology chapter, we did not collect measurable variables, but based our analysis on interpretative data obtained from the managers.

In the second part of our analysis, we compare the three different experimental approaches in Organizations A, B, and C. We recognize similarities and differences between the approaches and speculate whether any assumptions can be drawn from the comparison. In addition we try to spot any inherent differences between the Icelandic and Swedish working cultures.

In the theoretical discussion we examine our findings in relation to our research questions and existing research from the theoretical review.

5.1   Evaluation

As noted in the methodology chapter, we would have opted to utilize the qualities of an evaluation to its fullest. Unfortunately, that was not an option. Therefore when interviewing the managers, we tried to direct the interviewees into comparing behaviours before and during the experiment.

Since the same employer, Reykjavik municipality, conducted the experiments in Organizations A and B, and because of the similarities between the experimental approaches, we decided to evaluate Organizations A and B concurrently. Organization C, on the other hand, had a disparate approach and is therefore evaluated separately.

5.1.1   Organizations A and B

First of all, it was evident that both the managers and their subordinates in Organizations A and B were extremely happy and thankful for having been given the opportunity to participate

in the experiment of a shorter working week. They were all hoping for good results and every employee was eager to pitch in, in order to make the experiment work. In general, the morale at the office was higher due to the experiment and people seemed more cheerful than before. However, the enjoyment and over-excitement accompanying the experiment might lead to complications when evaluating the experiment. If employees' performance is temporarily improved during the course of the experiment one might argue that the enhanced performance is not representative of the average performance over a longer time period.

Secondly, managers in both organizations realized that both their subordinates, and themselves, were forced to alter their behaviour due to the experiment. It was a mutual agreement between the managers we interviewed that everyone at the office needed to be more alert now,, and be conscious about how they could increase their efficiency. In addition, the managers agreed that now, even though their subordinates were scrupulous in general, everyone needed to be more organized and the prioritization of tasks was more important than before.

To increase efficiency, the managers in Organizations A and B discussed several tools. In general, shortening and reducing certain meetings, coffee breaks, and small talk, were tools that both managers and employees used to save time. In addition, after the experiment began, people avoided running personal errands and exercising during working hours. Meetings were a popular subject among the managers we interviewed, and there was a common understanding that technology, e.g. skype meetings, could be utilized further in order to save time. However, the managers agreed that it depended on the topic of the meeting and that it was necessary that some meetings were held in person. It could therefore be concluded, that in both Organizations A and B, there was some room for alterations, and precious time could be saved by reallocating resources and by critically considering the importance of meetings.

In spite of the performance enhancing methods mentioned above, most of the managers agreed that there was a general feeling that, in order to fulfil obligations, employees now needed to run faster. Even though no manager had experienced a situation where a subordinate did not fulfil his/her duties, some managers worried that in the end, the service their organization provided would suffer. Therefore, most managers agreed, that perhaps it would have been fairer if the office had been compensated with additional labour over the course of the experiment. Some managers admitted that now tasks had a tendency to pile up, sometimes even forcing them to work during weekends, more so than before the experiment. Furthermore, most of the managers admitted that they had not been able to cut their working hours as much as they had anticipated. It could therefore be concluded that the outcome of the experiment (e.g. quantifiable measures on productivity) might give a skewed image, i.e. if the managers in fact put in a higher number of hours than the experiment proposes.

Interestingly, managers´ experience of stress levels, before and during the experiment, seemed to differ between the two organizations. In general, managers in Organization A experienced increased stress, but managers in Organization B noticed no significance difference in stress level. This difference could be related to the operational differences between the organizations, and one may speculate whether some organizations are better equipped than

others to participate in this type of an experiment. However, the increased stress in Organization A could also be a symptom of seasonal swings, as some managers declared, but not a consequence of the experience.

All managers interviewed agreed that the experiment had had a positive impact on their work-life balance. They saw it as a luxury to be able to quit work earlier and most of them gave an account on how they had made use of the additional time at their disposal. However, even though the experiment seemed to have a positive effect on all participants' work-life balance, the extent of these effects seemed to differ in relation with the individual's domesticity and work status.

As the aim of the experiment, among other things, is to improve work-life balance, some of the responses to the experiment seem to be counterproductive. Encouraging employees to stop running errands during working hours, for instance, means that they will have to use their own time for that. Removing, or reducing, time allocated for workout during working hours furthermore leads to either less time spent exercising or less time spent with their family. Those perks were partly sacrificed in both Organization A and B in order to cut working hours down by 4-5 hours a week.

5.1.2 Organization C

In Organization C, it seems as the experiment had a very positive impact on both the participating staff and the clients of the elderly home. As much as interviewing two managers can tell us, we learnt that the staff were more relaxed; both when they come to work and when they leave work. This calmness in turn has a major spillover effect; the clients at the elderly home were noticeably more relaxed, the managers claimed. If one were to make early conclusions about the experiment in Organization C, it might be that it significantly improves both the staff's and the clients' well-being. Admittedly, we do not claim that this research allows for much generalization, but the initial findings are nonetheless intriguing.

Meanwhile, the managers in Organization C are not at the receiving end of these improvements. On contrary, the experiment has had a significant impact on their workload. Re-organizing the time schedule had been demanding, combining 6-hour shifts with 8-hour shifts (the extra shifts) had proved troublesome and on top of that, the managers also had to attend excessive amounts of meetings regarding the experiment itself. At the time of the interview, Organization C had just recruited an assistant to help the managers to cope with the additional tasks.

The managers in Organization C argued that the working moral was definitely higher than before but at the same time some employees had expressed their concerns as to what would happen after the experiment. All of the employees were positive towards the experiment but at the same time they expressed their concerns as to what would happen once the experiment had run its course. The uncertainty seemed to affect employees, the managers argued,

indicating that insecurity and fear may accompany imminent changes even though the change is merely to go back to previous working arrangement.

5.2   Comparison

Now that we have evaluated the experiments we will commence by taking a comparative approach to the three cases, in relation to the topics discussed in the theoretical review.

5.2.1   Work performance - productivity, job satisfaction and stress

One of the most obvious similarities between the cases, and previously demonstrated in the evaluation part, is that all participants were happy and honoured to be a part of the experiment and wanted the outcome to be positive. However, despite these positive effects, a majority of our respondents reported that their working schedule was more hectic now than before. For the managers in Organization A and B, this can be explained by the compression of their working hours, while in Organization C, this was caused by the structural changes that the experiment brought upon them.

Subsequently, the charge for a shorter working week seems to be paid, to a certain degree, by the employees themselves in Organization A. In order to be able to shorten working hours without affecting productivity, there was a consensus among the employees and the managers that previous perks would have to be minimized. Employees had so far had the possibility to take care of some personal errands during working hours as well as working out a couple of times a week but those perks had taken a blow during the experiment, according to our respondents. These issues were also raised by managers in Organization B but the gravity seemed less significant than in Organization A. In Organization C, running personal errands was not addressed as an issue.

While we do not claim to be able to make generalizations from our research, we do allow ourselves to speculate which method of reducing working hours seems to have had the best effect so far. Employees in Organization C seem to benefit from their shorter shifts since they have had to make no sacrifices in order to maintain productivity. They are not expected to work faster but rather to maintain their composure as before. On the contrary, employees in Organization A, where working hours were reduced only on Fridays, seem to have more difficulties coping with a shorter working week. One manager claimed that she felt increased stress on Fridays because she was unsure whether she could take care of all her tasks before the end of the day. Another manager in Organization A gave a contradicting account of Fridays as he claimed to sense increased joy among his subordinates as weekend approached. A more balanced method of the working hour reduction was presented in Organization B where each day was shortened by one hour. Unlike in Organization A, where the whole working hour reduction was gathered on Fridays, managers and subordinates in Organization

B expressed a more balanced effect of the experiment. In addition, the staff in Organization B did not experience increased stress after the experiment began. As described in the Findings chapter, Organization B deals with social services in general whereas Organization A handles child protection. This might indicate, that Organization B is a better candidate for this certain experimental procedure.

5.2.2   Leadership styles

By comparing the answers gathered on leadership styles, only subtle differences were observed. A common theme among the managers in all organizations was the claim that they were democratic and inclusive. Furthermore, all managers claimed that their subordinates were their equals, they avoided making orders and wished to be among their employees but not above them. Most managers had no difficulties in empowering their subordinates by giving them the freedom they needed and responsibilities when working. The differences seemed to be more individual than based on organizations. In Organization B e.g., one manager described himself as a task coordinator but not a micromanager, another one claimed to practice servant leadership, serving instead of ordering. The third manager described herself along the lines of a task distributer but also claimed to be a role model during the experiment. Similarly, one manager in Organization A claimed to act as a role model in the experiment. This manager emphasized the importance of creativity; "stupid" ideas needed to be expressed in order for an open discussion to take place. She also emphasized diversity in the group.. A different view was aired by another manager in Organization B. This manager claimed to rely on formal procedures that she expected her employees to follow. Perhaps a consequence of this, she admitted to take a lot of the burden on herself but said she was working on that habit.

5.2.3   Work-life balance

As noted in the evaluation, all participants reported a positive effect on work-life balance. The extent of the effects seemed to differ between individuals but not as much between organizations. However, as the experiment in Organization C involved a sharper reduction in working hours it is reasonable to believe the effect on employees work-life balance is bigger than in Organizations A and B. This would also mean that for employees in Organization in C, going back to the previous working arrangement could have a bigger negative impact on the employees' work-life balance than in Organizations A and B. The managers in Organization C aired these concerns, arguing that the employees were genuinely anxious of what would take over once the experiment had ended.

5.2.4 Working cultures

When discussing working cultures, all the managers interviewed in Organizations A and B agreed that a prevailing characteristic of the Icelandic mentality was an impediment for reducing working hours. Working long hours has conventionally been the norm, even a virtue, in Iceland. It has therefore been a custom in the Icelandic society to judge employees on the amount of hours they put in rather than focusing on quality of their work or fulfilment of tasks. However, one manager noted that people usually felt the urge to hand in an impeccable work which could force them to work long hours. Another manager mentioned the relationship between collective agreements and working hours, arguing that employees were compelled to work long hours in order to compensate for their relatively low basic salary. Furthermore, many employees have a fixed amount of overtime each month, as is the case in Organizations A and B. Meanwhile, the managers in Organization C said that people were not compelled to work long hours. People there value their private time, even to the point that people are increasingly realizing that they do not even have to work full time or have a prestigious job. Even though this may not be the prevailing attitude in Iceland, the answers gathered there indicate that the working mentality is shifting towards the Swedish mentality and that working long hours is not considered as much of a virtue nowadays as it has conventionally been.

Since Organizations A and B did not receive any reimbursement for running their experiment, while Organization C did, one may ponder whether these experiments can even be compared. If the objective of the experiments is to reduce stress then the arrangement in Organization C might have the winning vote. When employees in Organization C leave their job they are replaced by someone else whereas employees in Organization A and B are not replaced by anyone but rather have to make sure that they have completed their work in shorter hours. If the objective, on the other hand, is to increase efficiency per hour, then the employees in Organizations A and B might have, due to the experiment, come up with useful tools helping them to become more effective in their work.

5.3 Theoretical discussion

This chapter examines our findings in regards to the research questions as well as relating them to the theoretical review.

5.3.1 Preventing productivity losses - priorities, meetings, and breaks

As we uncovered in chapter 2, there is little evidence that a reduction in working hours will automatically lead to higher productivity (Anxo & Bigsten, 1989) even though an increase in working hours can reduce productivity when the initial amount of working hours already was

excessive (Cette, Chang & Conte, 2011; and Shepard and Clifton, 2000). However, shorter working hours can indeed induce higher productivity as long as workers are incentivized to contribute a higher working effort (Huang et al., 2002) and if unauthorized break and engagement in personal affairs during working hours can be kept to a minimum (Golden, 2010).

Answers from all respondents in Organizations A and B verified the importance of the countermeasures and simultaneously provided answers to one of our research questions; how managers maintain efficiency in the workplace when working hours have been reduced. Re-organizing the work proved necessary; work was being compressed, tasks prioritized, and employees and managers tried to make better use of their time. Employees also accepted the fact that less time could be spent on unauthorized breaks and that personal errands would have to be attended off-the-clock.

Most of the managers in Organizations A and B drew attention to the difficulties they encountered when shortening their own working week; they either had not managed to reduce their working hours as much as the experiment intended or had to take care of their tasks at home. Meanwhile, it was suggested that subordinates managed to fulfil their tasks. This was especially true for customer service agents (not working overtime) who most often were able to leave work at the end of scheduled working hours. This corroborates the difference encountered in France when a reduction of working hours was evaluated. There, high skilled employees were less capable of reducing their working hours compared to clerical workers (Lehndorff, 2014).

In all three organizations, the respondents believed the employees to be very happy with the reduction in working hours. If this happiness prevails, which is too soon to tell, it might increase productivity (Zelenski, Murphy & Jenkins, 2008; and Hosie, Willemyns & Sevastos, 2012). However, for Organization A, our respondents disclosed that they sensed an increased stress level during the experiment. This trend was only vague in Organization B as one manager argued that stress affects individuals differently, a claim that conforms with Harzer and Ruch's (2015) research on stress. Meanwhile, respondents in Organization C claimed that the stress level had gone down. Organizational stress has been strongly linked with decreasing productivity and performance (Halkos & Bousinakis, 2010; Ajayi & Abimbola, 2013; Donald et al., 2005 and Gilboa et al., 2008). Findings from Organization C highlight this relationship. One respondent there assumed that as employees stress level decreased, their clients' stress level simultaneously decreased. When less stressed, life becomes easier for the clients, which generates fewer tasks for the employees. This, in turn, leads to better work performance.

When productivity and efficiency were addressed the subject tended to revolve around meetings. Most of the managers acknowledged that some meetings were dismissible and that many meetings could easily be cut shorter. Although face-to-face communication is generally the optimal way of communicating (Pentland, 2012) most of the respondents agreed that a trade-off would be beneficial. Instead of spending time on commuting, precious time could be saved by conducting meetings through the internet.

5.3.2 Inclusive and engaging managers support a shorter working week

Generally speaking, the managers interviewed, claimed to pursue a bottom-up leadership style, a style that is democratic and inclusive. They want to be among their employees rather than above them, and support inclusion in the decision making process. This type of a leadership style corresponds to the mundane manager, described by Sveningsson, Alvehus and Alvesson (2012). Some claimed to practice peer management while one manager claimed to practice servant leadership. When these managers described their leadership style in their own words, little contradiction was to be found when compared with those that did not use these concepts. We therefore suggest that these leadership styles are congruent with the mundane manager.

Several managers uncovered that they tried to make use of each and everyone's strength when managing others, and distribute tasks accordingly. These findings relate to Kuhn and Jackson´s (2008) study on recognizing expertise among the employees. For most of the managers, distributing tasks and assigning responsibility was quite easy. However, none of them drew attention to his/her own strengths and the importance of knowing oneself as Drucker (1999), Watson (2001) and Gosling and Mintzberg (2012) argue is essential in order to become a good manager. The reason could simply be that our discussion with the managers was not deep rooted enough to obtain knowledge on the matter.

In line with their claim of being democratic, all of the managers that we interviewed expressed their openness to subordinates' ideas. Affirming Eisenhardt, Kahwajy and Bourgeois (1999) exposition, some of the respondents even pointed out the benefits of conflicts and claimed not to avoid conflicts. By allowing all voices to be heard, employees feel included and more likely to accept the final outcome of a debate. A feeling of inclusion is imperative to get beyond mere empowerment and into commitment (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2003).

5.3.3 Work-life balance - domesticity and status matter

One research question in our study aimed to answer how managers perceive the effects a shorter working week has on work-life balance. In all three organizations, respondents supported Crompton and Lyonette's (2006) findings, indicating that shorter working hours had a positive effect on work-life balance. However, the answers suggested that the experiment affected employees to various degrees. Many of the respondents thus argued that the experiments had a noticeable impact on the lives of employees with young children. This gives some support to studies that have emphasized the impact shorter working hours have on parents (Hill et al., 2006) but at the same time it contradicts Anttila, Nätti and Väisänen's (2005) findings. Their study in Finland concluded, surprisingly, that shorter working hours affected work-family conflict, but only for people with children. Our findings, in contrast, indicate that shorter working hours positively affect employees of all domesticity even though the impact, admittedly, seems to be strongest for employees with children.

Anttila, Nätti and Väisänen (2005) argued that shorter working hours did not affect work-family conflict for upper-level white collar workers. This argument was not supported by our findings as the managers we interviewed all declared shorter working hours to affect them positively. Nevertheless, most of the managers in organizations A and B claimed to work regularly from home and that they were not able to reduce their working hours as much as anticipated. These findings concur with Allard, Haas and Hwang (2007) who found other factors than working hours to be more important to managers when evaluating work-family conflict. According to them, domestic responsibilities and flexible working hours were more important to managers. By working from home, our respondents are in a sense exploiting some sort of flexibility which relates with Allard, Haas and Hwang's (2007) claim.

5.3.4   Shorter working week impeded by culture

For any initiative aiming to reduce working hours, participants' intrinsic perception on work is a determining factor as to whether the initiative succeeds. Lehndorff (2014) concluded his study on France' and Germany's implementation of the 35-hour working week by suggesting that neither legislations nor collective agreements are enough for a shorter working week to become a normality.

Our findings suggest that the working culture in Iceland is strong; working long hours has hitherto been considered a virtue. This mind-set may become a hindrance should the 35-hour working week become statutory. Moreover, relatively low salary encourages people to work excessive overtime. Revisiting the introductory chapter, even though annual hours worked in Iceland are higher than in Sweden, productivity remains lower. This excessive use of overtime seems thus to impair productivity. In contrast, implementing a shorter working week in Sweden is easier to envisage. According to the managers we interviewed, people are disinclined to work long hours and often people pursue a career that allows part-time work. In fact, one of our respondents in Organization C explicitly said that she did not want people to work too much.

Lehndorff's (2014) findings do not induce optimism for turning a shorter working week into reality. However, Hofstede's five dimensions of national culture suggests that vast cultural differences exist between France and Germany, on the one hand, and the Nordic countries, on the other hand (The Hofstede Centre, 2015). Sweden and Iceland are both very feminine countries, suggesting that good work-life balance is extremely important as well as quality of life and sexual equality (Hofstede, 1994 and Maude, 2011). In contrast, Germany and France score high in masculinity where competition, achievement, success, and performance is highly valued (Hofstede, 1994). These differences might indicate that the implementation process of a shorter working week would require less effort in Sweden and Iceland than in Germany and France.

This chapter has analysed the main findings of our study and related them back to the theoretical review. In the next chapter we summarize these findings, consider the weaknesses of our study, and propose practical implications and future research.

6   Conclusion

6.1   Background and research aims

Scholars and journalists alike have discussed the possibility of shortening the working week. Among arguments for a shorter working week is that working long hours impedes productivity, that shorter working hours improves individuals' work-life balance, and even that it improves environmental and economic sustainability for future generations. Our research aimed to gain insight into managers' perception of a shorter working week since we found no literature on the subject from that viewpoint. With that aim, we interviewed managers in three public organizations on the municipality level, two in Iceland (Organizations A and B) and one in Sweden (Organization C), all experimenting with a shorter working week. Four hours were cut off the regular working week on Fridays in Organization A (36 hour working week), in Organization B each working day was reduced to seven hours (35 hour working week) and in Organization C, all shifts were cut down to 6 hours (30 hour working week). By addressing four main research questions, we sought answers on how managers meet the challenges and benefits of a shorter working week.

First of all, our findings indicate that working shorter hours does not automatically increase productivity but also suggests that there is wiggle-room for efficiency improvements in Organizations A and B. Due to the experiment, both the employees and the managers needed to re-organize, prioritize, and run a bit faster to be able to complete their tasks in shorter hours. Meetings were cut shorter, engagement in personal affairs minimized during working hours, and employees had become more attentive to the use of unauthorized breaks. These countermeasures serve to minimize any negative effects on productivity that the working hour reduction might have. Secondly, we found all the managers participating in the experiments to be inclusive, engaging and democratic. Their characteristics therefore resemble the mundane manager. The managers claimed to be dedicated to the experiments and strived to be a role model for other employees. Thirdly, having a shorter working week enhances work-life balance. However, the degree of the enhancement depends on domesticity and professional status. Our results indicate that people with young children benefit the most from a shorter working week, whereas it makes less of a difference for people at other stages in their life. The professional status matters as well. According to our results, people in higher positions tend to work more from home and therefore benefit less from having a shorter working week. Lastly, our results indicate that implementing a shorter working week might be impeded by culture. The working culture is strong in Iceland and working long hours has hitherto been considered a virtue. However, the working attitude might be changing, and becoming more

similar to the Swedish culture. In Sweden, according to our results, working long hours is not considered to be a virtue and many people pursue a career that allows part-time work.

6.2   Project weaknesses

Apart from the usual complaints of thesis writing; too little time and limited resources, looking back we now assume that we could have been more selective when choosing our cases and that we should perhaps have included some quantifiable variables to measure.

The fact that we chose cases from two countries may have given the impression that we were comparing cases on the national level. While that is true for one part of the study, culture and norms, the national level is irrelevant in other parts. The differences between the experiments' approaches in Iceland, on one hand, and Sweden, on the other, furthermore made the comparison difficult. Some of our findings apply thus only to the cases in Iceland and some only to the Swedish case. Since our comparison intended to focus on the organizational level, rather than the national level, it may therefore have been more logical to limit our research to cases in one country. Alternatively, conducting the research in two organizations in each country might have strengthened the comparison and emphasized differences between the two countries. In addition, the organizations in Iceland and Sweden, are quite different in nature. The Swedish organization is an elderly home, which facilitates shift-work, but the organizations in Iceland are a part of social services. In retrospect, it would have been more feasible to compare more similar organizations.

Lastly, since most people may be expected to want to work less, interviewing managers on an experiment involving a reduction in working hours may have produced biased answers. To minimize any bias in our findings, it would have been preferable to combine the answers with quantifiable variables on the actual effects the experiments have on employees. Surveying employees on the effects of the experiments could e.g. have added depth to the research.

6.3   Practical implications and future research

In general, reducing working hours may be a positive-sum game; i.e., total gains are likely to offset potential reduction in productivity, especially when useful countermeasures are exerted. However, our findings suggest that for organizations that provide care around the clock (e.g. elderly homes) and require shift work, a reduction in working hours may have a stronger impact on employees' well-being as the employees are not expected to heighten their work pace.

By comparing the three organizations, our findings indicate that reducing working hours by one hour each day impacts employees' work-life balance more than piling the whole

reduction on one day. Many of our respondents felt an extra employee might have helped Organizations A and B to cope with the reduction of working hours. In Organization C, unlike A and B, the experiment came with additional funding. Consequently the managers were capable of hiring additional employees and thus did not require their employees to heighten their pace of work. The experiment seemed to lower employees stress level in Organization C, according to our respondents. Meanwhile, none of the managers we interviewed in Organizations A and B reported a lower stress level, neither for themselves nor for their employees.

Given the multitude of variables related to our topic, the potential effects of a shorter working week can be researched from many angles. A valuable input to the debate would be gained by measuring productivity gains/losses for employees who work fewer hours. The true effects on individuals' work-life balance furthermore need to be addressed. Even though our respondents declared a positive impact on their work-life balance this impact needs to be further assessed to get an unbiased estimation on the true effects of a shorter working week. In addition, it would be informative to study employees participating in an experiment regarding shorter working weeks.

Even though the scale of this research is small and lacks generalizability it gives an insight into the minds of managers facing a reduction in working hours. The lesson we have learned is that less work may in fact be better work.

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Appendix A

Interview structure

Semi-structured interview

Background questions
   a. Your position
   b. Period of employment
   c. Subordinates
   d. Marital status / children

1. *Topic* **The experiment**:
   a. Personal description of the experiment, open discussion.
   b. General comparison (before and after the change)
   c. Did you get new employees because of the experiment?
   d. Do the employees get paid overtime?

2. *Topic* **The manager**:
   a. Can you fulfil your work in fewer hours?
   b. Difference in behaviour before and after the experiment started
   c. Potential reduction in working hours (do you work as much as before?) Change in overtime?
   d. Do you do anything differently now?

3. *Topic* **The subordinates**:
   a. How do they fulfil their tasks working fewer hours?
   b. Are they more/less stressed?
   c. How is the working moral?

4. *Topic* **Leadership styles**:
   a. How would you describe your leadership styles?
   b. Can you describe a typical workday?

5. Topic **(work/life balance):**
   a. Has the change had any influence on your personal life, such as happiness/health?
   b. How do you/your employees spend the extra hours gained due to the experiment?

6. Additional topic that emerged
   a. How do you perceive the working culture in (your country)?
   b. Is it considered to be a virtue to work long hours?