



Danes want more part-time work and less stress

The increase in the number of Danes choosing to work part-time could have an impact on how a company needs to innovate to remain an attractive place of work.

By Kristine Seest

In just two years – from 2022 to 2024 – the number of Danes aged 25-64 working part-time has increased from 440,000 to 506,000. This corresponds to a 15 percent increase, according to figures from Statistics Denmark. This development is relevant for companies working to prevent sickness absence and strengthen employees' sense of belonging to their place of work.

»The figures show that part-time work is popular among Danes, and this can be seen as a sign that Danes have changed the balance between how much time they spend at work and how much time they spend on other things in life,« says Practice Lead Søren Egens Petersen from WTW Corporate Health & Wellbeing, that provides companies with advice on wellbeing and sickness absence prevention.

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Søren Egens Petersen | Practice Lead

A study from the National Research Centre for the Working Environment from November 2023 shows that stress costs Danish organizations DKK 16.4 billion every year. It is therefore relevant for companies to assess what they can achieve by adjusting their employment practices, such as offering new job functions, responsibilities and working hours.

»Right now, unemployment is low and companies are competing for skilled labour. Therefore, workers have more say and are more able to challenge some of the well-established structures in the company and in society in general. The fact that part-time work has become so popular can be seen as a sign that

employees are making an effort to combat stress, and I believe that companies should consider this when deciding on strategic initiatives to ensure that the company is an attractive workplace in the long term,« says Søren Egens Petersen.

Less work for a more whole person

To provide insight and an understanding of why Danes are moving towards more part-time work, PhD student at Roskilde University Sofie Marie Billekop was invited to give a presentation at WTW's latest network meeting on strategic health. Sofie Marie Billekop researches the topic of 'Less work', and she has investigated what lies behind knowledge workers' desire to work less.

»The public debate on reduced working hours doesn't go very far in understanding the trend behind more Danes working part-time. My research shows that there are two main reasons why people choose to work less. One is a longing for relational contribution. You want to create meaning for others and have a clear audience for whom you make a difference. The other reason is basically about wanting the space to be a whole person,« says Sofie Marie Billekop.

In her presentation, Sofie Marie Billekop referred to nature's journey through the four seasons and talked about regeneration, which is about creating conditions for life to continuously renew itself. She talked about how people also need regeneration as one of the underlying reasons why Danes focus on working less.

»As working people, we also have a body and a whole life, and we all have periods in our lives where we're not on as much as during other periods. For organizations, it's about creating space for different

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Sofie Marie Billekop | PhD Student

ways of being in the world and daring to challenge the usual structures and expectations of constant efficiency and productivity. It's about recognizing that talented employees need to develop personally and professionally for a period of time, and it's about creating space for employees who are in a phase of life with a special need and therefore want to reduce their hours. For example, an employee who needs more time with his or her family for a shorter or longer period of time. I think it would be profitable for companies to think along these lines,« says Sofie Marie Billekop.

Half are ready to get a new job

46 percent of Danish employees are open to changing jobs if a good offer presents itself.

Especially the male and younger part of the population is ready to shop away from their workplace if they experience poor conditions. This is according to the Candidate Survey 2024 from ballisager Consultancy.

»An important step in increasing employees' sense of belonging and preventing stress is to do away with the notion that all employees need the same things throughout their working life. As a company, you need to recognize that employees have different needs depending on where they are in life. And if there's a myth that full-time work – and maybe even overtime – is the only sign that employees are dedicated and successful in their jobs, you need to dispel it,« says Søren Egens Petersen.

Remember the employee's pension and insurance

Companies that want to meet the demand for part-time work – either permanently or for a limited period of time – should be aware of ways to mitigate the financial consequences. Reduced working hours not only affect the employee's salary, but also his or her retirement savings and insurance coverage.

»Part-time employees not only have to consider whether they can manage on a lower salary, because when income drops, it also has consequences for their retirement savings and how they are positioned if they become seriously ill. You risk being worse off than expected if you become seriously ill or have an accident as a part-time employee,« says Søren Egens Petersen.

WTW's Corporate Health & Wellbeing department provides counselling and facilitates internal processes to help companies implement strategic initiatives to improve working conditions and reduce employee

sickness absence. Their recommendation to companies looking to address the need for part-time work is that they pay attention to:

- The special needs of employees in different stages of life and life situations
- What the company culture is like in terms of accepting flexible working hours
- How the company is structurally organized in terms of planning working hours and work tasks
- What initiatives can help your part-time employees avoid being financially disadvantaged during serious illness and when they retire

Find out more

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An inclusive workplace for pregnant women

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Myths about age and lack of dialogue hinder late-career wellbeing

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