

Dialogue about fair wages

How can we talk about
wages and wage equality?

A set of materials
for shop stewards
seeking to secure
a fair wage.

Foreword

It's almost a taboo to talk about wages - therefore it can be difficult to do anything about unfair wages and unequal wages.

Broadly speaking, all salaried employees are of the opinion that wages should be fair and based on objective impartiality, and also that there should be wage equality between men and women.

Repeatedly, SFI - the Danish National Centre for Social Research - has pointed out that in Denmark there is a 17-18% wage gap between men and women¹, in the sense that on average women earn 17-18% less than men when adjustments are made for length of service, level of professional training, whether work is full-time or part-time, etc.

We can only do something in real terms about the anomalies if we start talking more openly about wages. There is good reason for us to do this, starting now - because we now have new legislation giving us better opportunities to produce statistics and to talk about specific wage differences between men and women.

This booklet points to means of starting to talk more openly about wages. When we can talk about this and find out facts – facts that may surprise us - we can begin to calculate, produce statistics and document anomalies. And THEN we can put things right. Wishing you all good luck in achieving wage equality!

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Background

Often it can be hard for people to see wage-related injustice and wage-equality-related problems at their own workplace, even if they are part of the advance guard fighting for equal wages.

Stories, traditions, and unconscious and inappropriate routines result in us perhaps overlooking the problems relating to wage equality, and how they arise. Because we are so used to "that's the way things are" and "in fact, there is a good explanation" when discussing wages. But is there really an explanation, as a matter of fact? Is gender the basis for the difference? And is the logic behind the wage differences at all visible?

This little booklet focuses on an opening way of talking about (equal) wages, with the result that individuals become aware of the invisible barriers present in wage-equality issues themselves, among the managers and other colleagues, and in the culture of the workplace.

The booklet will help you as a shop steward in providing

- the colleagues with an opportunity to **direct their attention to the factors that advance and obstruct wage equality respectively** at your own workplace
- you and your colleagues with the tools for engaging constructively with problem issues that can give rise to unequal wages.

The booklet sources its inspiration from the project "Relations at Work and equal pay m/f – become an Agent of Good Relations at Work", conducted in 2013 by Jo Krøjer, (Roskilde University), and Annelise Rasmussen, 3F (United Federation of Danish Workers). Another source of inspiration is the experiences gained from the Rejsescenen's dialogue-based theatre production: "Du får mere i løn end mig!" (You're being paid more than I am!), performed and discussed with about 350 shop stewards in the autumn of 2014.



Meeting for dialogue about wage equality

The dialogue meeting is a special way of meeting up, one that opens up the process of talking about fair and equal wages. What this is about is to observe and then to debate what is at stake when someone talks about (equal) wages at their workplace - as is done for example in the interview (Option A) or in the dialogue from the theatre production (Option B). Observing others' conversations provides an opportunity to be surprised, to notice what other people's "blind spots" are in relation to wage-equality issues, or where they are firmly rooted in stereotyped ways of seeing the division of labour and other issues.

The dialogue can either be arranged as a meeting in facilities used for colleagues' discussions, as a shop stewards' meeting in the department, or as a topic-specific meeting among a network of shop stewards and others active in safeguarding workers' rights.

Option A: Interview discussions about wage equality and division of labour

TIME REQUIRED: 2 HOURS.

As a shop steward or another individual with knowledge and understanding of (equal) wage issues, you chair the discussion. The chairperson must have an in-depth understanding of the interacting factors at a workplace, favouring and inhibiting wage equality respectively, the way that wages are decided upon, and the division of labour. You as the chairperson also needs to be open to the fact that at work there may be issues that you are "blind" to, and that the way that you operate (as a shop steward) perhaps has to be adjusted.

The participants are divided in two teams, and the participants in the first team are being interviewed by the chairperson one after another about wage (in)equality issues at the workplace and the division of labour, while the other team listens and takes notes. The team listening is NOT allowed to interrupt, comment or attract attention but must only listen to what speakers say about division of labour and the logic behind the wage structures and how they are established.

After each interview, the team that listened shares its questions and comments - and perhaps its surprise - with the team interviewed. The interviewed team listens to all questions/commentaries in silence. After this, they discuss for about five minutes why it is specifically these questions and commentaries that emerged or failed to emerge, as well as what the answers can be.

After this the two teams swap roles.

The chairperson rounds off by highlighting specific things that may be incomprehensible when the topic is wage equality and wage fairness. Anything that surprised participants, and other things that were not understood etc.. Something that those involved can move forward with.

The purpose of the exercise is to highlight "invisible" problems and throw light on options for action with regard to equal wages and fair wages at the workplace, and also to direct attention to factors and circumstances which are we are accustomed to just because they are a tradition. There can be "aha moments" of revelation, regarding things that people have got used to but are in fact unfair or not objectively justifiable. For example, it can become evident that there are wage supplements that, in effect, it is almost impossible for women to get. Another important aspect is for the colleagues to realise that wage inequality develops easily when gender-based division of labour begins. That is to say that wage inequality arises not only in connection with wage negotiations, but already emerges when a gender-based division of labour is applied.



Interview guide for the chairperson

The participants are interviewed one after another, but with different questions (approx. 20-30 min. per group) about circumstances related to wage (in)equality at work. It is good to get some flow in the conversation and for it to remain informal, so that several people contribute on the same subject. At the same time, you must ensure that all get a chance to say something. Do also ensure that you enable the discussion to cover the topics of gender, diversity, objectivity, and the logic behind wage arrangements, etc.

YOU USE A QUESTION TO OPEN UP ON THE MATTER OF DIVISION OF LABOUR:

- Which (gender-based) division of labour is there at the workplace – or are the genders mixed?
- Is there an official and informal division of labour?
- What status and recognition is associated with the different functions?
- How are people allocated to various functions and by whom?
- Which different jobs have the same value?
- What experience and professional training do the various colleagues have in the various posts?
- Which different jobs/job functions can be compared?
- Which tasks/factors are associated with wage supplements?
- Which departments and functions get supplements? Does one of the genders dominate in those particular departments or functions?

NEXT YOU OPEN UP THE DISCUSSION ON HOW WAGES ARE DETERMINED:

- how does the process work when you are all negotiating wages? What division applies between men and women?
- who comes into the negotiations with which bargaining points?
- what are the management like to negotiate wages with?
- how do people get supplements?

Observation guide for the group listening to the interview

Each individual notes down his/her own observations. There will be about 15 minutes available for putting forward observations made.

PAY ATTENTION TO THE FOLLOWING DURING THE INTERVIEW WITH THE OTHER TEAM:

- What surprises you most in the interview?
- Do the other team appear to be open and comfortable discussing wages? How does this express itself?
- Is there something that they are overlooking when talking about wages and how wages are decided upon?
- Do their explanations about how wages are determined appear objective and impartial?
- How are the issues of equal wages and fair wages expressed in what they say in the interviews?
- How do traditions and "history" find expression in what they say in interviews?
- Are they open for the view that there could be a connection between wage and gender, or do they "shut down" and take up a defensive position?
- What is your best piece of advice for this group when they need to work on wage-equality issues from now on?



Option B: Dialogue-stories relating to equality and specifically wage equality

TIME REQUIRED: 2-3 HOURS DEPENDING ON THE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS.

You as a shop steward, or another with competence on wage equality and other equality issues, chair the meeting for a group of colleagues (from four to ten people). So as to be able to speak openly it is a good idea to divide up into a number of teams if there are more than ten of you – in such cases there is a need for more than one person to chair discussions.

Using the two short stories at page 11 and 12, a space is created for dialogue about equal wages and equality in a broader sense. The purpose is for the participants to reflect on and debate any prejudices and taboos concerning wage equality in a non-judgemental atmosphere. The aim is for the participants to notice the barriers hindering wage equality and also the thought-patterns on the topic that are present at the workplace. For example, it could be that someone sees a particular division of labour as being natural.

The two stories are handed out. The colleagues read them and each chooses the story in which they can find something that they can recognise. A participant is asked to read out the text that he/she has chosen. The chairperson asks what it is that the participant recognises in the story. Then the chairperson asks the other participants what they can recognise in the text. Lastly, they can all have a dialogue about whether they all recognise the same aspect/aspects. Why? / Why not? The procedure is repeated with the other participants. But each text is only read aloud once.

Interview guide for the chairperson

AS CHAIRPERSON, YOU CAN INTERJECT THE FOLLOWING INTO THE GROUP:

- How do the individuals in the stories react when they themselves are faced with a possible wage-equality-related problem (their own or someone else's)?
- What is at stake in relation to wage equality in the two stories?
- What can the stories teach us about the causes of wage inequality?
- What can the stories teach us about the connections between the division of labour and wage equality?
- What can the stories teach us about the feelings associated with talking about wage equality?

This method requires the chairperson to have reflected on the stories that are being discussed here.

STORY 1: IN A CLEANING JOB

Charlotte is an assistant cleaner and she is annoyed and saddened because she has just found out that her newly-hired colleague Lars is getting DKK 900 more in monthly wage than she and Helle get. Lars has a professional training as a service assistant but Charlotte has 20 years' experience and has taken part in all the training activities after starting employment that she has had a chance to take. Lars has taken over from Charlotte the task of operating the floor-cleaning machine and gets a supplement for doing so. Charlotte did not get that supplement when it was her task. At the same time, it is always her that knows how to repair the machine when it breaks down. Charlotte discusses the problem with her newly-elected shop steward Füsün; Füsün's view is that the former shop steward overlooked what should not have been overlooked, by not getting her the supplements that she had the right to expect. Füsün is keen to find out whether there is a case to answer here – but Charlotte is sceptical about this – she is afraid to appear too pushy.



STORY 2: TABOO

Three colleagues, Camilla, Thomas and Katrine are sitting in the canteen. Camilla is talking about a radio programme that she heard, discussing about it being a taboo for people to talk about what they are earning. In the radio programme the male radio hosts decide, live and on-air, to tell people what they earn. A discussion develops among the colleagues about the radio programme:

C: It's fantastic that two young men like that take up a subject like that one

K: What's fantastic about it? There would be much more point to it if they talked about wage differences between men and women

T: Now we're talking about a taboo

C: Yes, I also think that it's about wages "generally", looking at the overall picture

K: You're right, it's generally the case that we don't talk out loud about what we earn, because women generally earn much less than men do.

T: Katrine, shouldn't we just gather up our things and get back to work?

C: Well, I raised this because I think we should follow their inspiration, take out our wage slips and put them out there on the table

K: Let's do it!

C: OK, I'll start (she takes out her wage slip)

K: Come on!

T: No, I think it's more fun if you guess. Can you guess what I earn?

These stories come from the Rejsescenen theatre production "Du får mere i løn end mig!" (You're being paid more than I am!) – a play that can also be ordered by contacting Rejsescenen as follows: <http://www.rejsescenen.dk/kontakt.html>.

Coaching discussions with colleagues or management about division of labour, wage equality, and equality in a broader sense

The purpose in coaching is to get the person being coached started on thinking new thoughts. It is about challenging the individual's existing ways of understanding or looking at things; it is about creating clarity and a readiness to take action. This can be done by asking curious and challenging questions.

As a shop steward, you can find it advantageous to use coaching-type questions when working on wage-equality issues at the workplace; this is because often wage-equality problems are "hidden" inside traditions and a closed way of dealing with things.

Your questions can contribute to the process of the colleague that you are talking with becoming conscious of his/her way of viewing equality issues and wage-equality matters. It can give him/her the opportunity to reflect on other ways of relating to wage equality. It can be the colleague's own wages or the logic applied to the wage system used at the workplace.

Asking in a way that shows respectful recognition can contribute to your colleague having a new awareness, enabling them to open up so that they are keen to examine other ways of relating to equal wages and fairness at the workplace. You can also open up an awareness of what actions can create development in this regard.

Coaching is not something that you can simply do - just like that. It requires training. If you are to get really good at it, you can take a course or a training programme run by FIU. At next page, you can find examples of questions that could mean that a colleague has a new competence for action.



EXAMPLE 1

Possible questions for a colleague uncertain as to whether their current wage is fair:

- What are your colleagues doing to get a higher wage?
- What are you doing to get the wage that you think is fair?
- Which qualifications and functions are particularly rewarded at the workplace?
- Do you have these qualifications or how would you be able to get them?
- Could it be of interest to you to try out functions other than the one that you have now?
- What do you personally think that you in particular contribute to the workplace?
- If there were to be a fairer wage arrangement at your workplace, what three factors would you prioritise for change?
- How can you make any of this happen?

EXAMPLE 2

If a colleague does not herself have the necessary belief that she can get a higher wage, saying for example "the others are much better and smarter than me", you can challenge the colleague's way of looking at things by asking how, in her opinion and in specific terms, those people are better than others. In that way, you and your colleague can jointly look at whether there are some gaps to be found in that perhaps rather black-and-white image of reality that she has built up. This is important because that perception of reality can be a barrier to achieving wage equality.

Questions to that colleague can be:

- What aspect of your job do you yourself think that you are good at?
- What do you think that your boss thinks you are good at?
- What do your colleagues think is the contribution that you make?
- As you see it, how do your colleagues contribute?
- What is important in order to ensure that the workplace can function as a totality – and how do you contribute to that?

- If you were to do three things to ensure that you genuinely feel secure in relation to how fair the workplace's wage system is, what would they be?

Coaching can help to clarify whether there are unconscious patterns or connections helping to create wage inequality at the workplace, among the colleagues and the management. At the same time, coaching can help in developing ideas for initiatives and plans of action that can affect the way in which the division of labour is handled and wages are determined within the company / the organisation.

Other ways of talking about wages and wage equality

Of course, the exercises stated above are not the only way of opening up a discussion on wages and wage equality at a workplace.

There are certainly ways that we have not addressed here and it should also be noted that, as a shop steward, you have a possibility to

- take up courses and conferences about wage equality, together with other shop stewards, exchanging your knowledge and experience with them
- find knowledge and inspiration from our organisation's website and its booklets
- get involved in the shop stewards' network

See more about FIU-Ligestilling's (FIU Equality's) offers with regard to courses and networks at www.fiu-ligestilling.dk.



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