

INNOVATIVE AND FLEXIBLE APPROACHES TO WORKING TIME

CASE STUDIES SPAIN



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CASE STUDY. SPAIN

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Spanish regulatory framework on working time stands out in the European context for its notable flexibility, both from a unilateral managerial perspective and within the framework of negotiated arrangements. This flexibility is anchored in the legal provisions of the Workers' Statute (Real Decreto Legislativo 2/2015), particularly Articles 34 and 34 bis, which allow for a wide range of working time arrangements, including irregular distributions, adaptations requested by workers for work-life balance, and the implementation of remote or hybrid work through individual agreements or collective bargaining. Such legal scaffolding enables Spanish companies to explore innovative ways of organising working time while remaining compliant with core guarantees such as maximum daily and weekly hours, rest periods, and the right to disconnect.

The dual pathway for implementing flexibility—through either unilateral management decisions or collectively negotiated agreements—reflects an adaptable approach that accommodates the varying realities of different sectors and company sizes. On the one hand, Article 34.2 WS empowers employers to apply, within limits, irregular working time distribution of up to 10% annually without prior negotiation. On the other hand, the same article fosters collective autonomy by explicitly encouraging collective bargaining agreements or pacts with employee representatives as tools to tailor working time to the specific needs of a workplace or industry. Furthermore, Article 34.8 WS reinforces this capacity for innovation by granting employees the right to request adjustments in the scheduling and mode of work delivery, thereby promoting work-life balance, especially for vulnerable or caregiving groups.

In this context, the Spanish labour law enables a fertile ground for the development of innovative working time arrangements across diverse sectors. This case study presents an in-depth examination of three real-life experiences within companies of varying sizes and from different





economic activities, illustrating how this legal and collective bargaining flexibility is materialised in practice. Importantly, the selection of the three companies—Ephimera, Software El Sol, and Schneider Electric—has been made with the deliberate aim of representing the broad applicability of innovative time management solutions across the Spanish labour market.

Each of these companies operates in markedly different sectors: creative services, digital technologies, and industrial manufacturing. Additionally, they vary in organisational size, from a small team of twenty employees to a multinational workforce of thousands. This diversity allows for a nuanced analysis of how working time innovation can be designed and implemented under both favourable and less evidently conducive conditions. Notably, the companies selected demonstrate different forms of leadership in promoting flexibility: while in some cases the initiative stems from managerial commitment to attract and retain talent, in others the development of innovative measures is the outcome of social dialogue with trade unions, highlighting the role of collective bargaining in the Spanish context.

Without delving into the detailed content of each case at this stage, it is important to underline that these examples illustrate the extent to which Spanish companies—regardless of size or sector—can adapt their working time systems to better respond to economic, organisational, and social challenges. Whether through compressed workweeks, negotiated telework frameworks, or flexible scheduling options, the case studies underscore the multidimensional nature of time management innovation. In doing so, they showcase Spain's capacity not only to accommodate but to encourage transformative practices that support productivity, well-being, and gender-sensitive work organisation.

This case study contributes to the broader INNOVAWORKING project by offering a representative portrait of Spain's legal and institutional tools for working time flexibility, and by highlighting the practical avenues through which companies can implement forward-thinking arrangements in diverse operational contexts.





2 HOW THE CASE STUDY EMERGED

The Spanish case study was designed to explore the diversity of pathways through which flexible working time arrangements are emerging in practice. In doing so, it seeks not only to document success stories but also to identify conditions, challenges and enabling factors that make such practices viable within the Spanish institutional and legal framework. The case study thus aims to offer meaningful insights into the concrete implementation of working time innovations, drawing from a spectrum of company profiles and working environments. For this purpose, three companies were selected: Ephimera, Software El Sol, and Schneider Electric.

The selection process was guided by a set of criteria intended to ensure analytical diversity rather than statistical representativeness. The key variables considered were: company size, sector of activity, degree of unionisation, type of workforce (blue- vs. white-collar), and the form in which flexibility was introduced (unilateral management decision, collective bargaining, or a mix of both). This strategy allows for an exploration of flexible time arrangements not only in companies that would appear naturally inclined towards innovation (such as those in the digital or creative sectors), but also in more traditional industrial settings, where change is often slower and more structurally constrained.

The case of Ephimera, a small-sized enterprise operating in the event management and creative services sector, provides valuable insight into how managerial leadership can foster flexibility in non-unionised environments. Ephimera's decision to implement a four-day workweek was made unilaterally by the company's management, motivated by a broad conception of employee wellbeing and a desire to facilitate worklife balance. The organisational structure, built on small, self-managed teams, allowed for an informal and consensual internal coordination of time-off. This case demonstrates that even small firms, often presumed to





be less adaptable due to limited staff or operational constraints, can successfully implement innovative models of time organisation.

In contrast, Software El Sol, a medium-sized software company with more than four decades of experience, illustrates a different path. In this case, the proposal for reducing the workweek to four days originated from the company's management, but was later reflected and formalised in the company-level collective agreement. Although it was not a jointly initiated measure, the agreement received the full support of the workers' representatives and introduced a structured and balanced reconfiguration of working hours without reducing salaries. This approach illustrates how business leadership can take the initiative in driving innovation, while respecting the formal negotiation framework and ensuring that the changes are legitimised through collective bargaining. The company also demonstrates how internal differentiation (for example, between rotating and fixed shifts) can be managed within a flexible model, even in departments such as customer service where availability requirements are higher.

The inclusion of Schneider Electric, a multinational company in the metal sector, serves to broaden the scope of the case study and to test the feasibility of flexible working time arrangements in a more rigid institutional environment. The metal industry in Spain is characterised by a strong tradition of sectoral and provincial collective agreements, a predominance of blue-collar roles, and generally less experimentation in working time matters. Nonetheless, Schneider Electric has managed to implement a range of flexibility measures, including remote work and flexible schedules, primarily through internal company policies and, in some cases, through negotiated agreements with trade unions. This case shows the coexistence of unilateral and negotiated approaches, and highlights both the opportunities and the challenges of internal flexibility mechanisms—particularly when such mechanisms are not always equally accessible to all categories of employees.





Taken together, these three cases reflect the diverse strategies through which Spanish companies are implementing working time flexibility in practice. They offer valuable lessons on how legal frameworks, managerial initiative, and collective bargaining can interact—sometimes complementarily, sometimes in tension—to shape new forms of work organisation. The case study thus does not aim to present a uniform model, but rather a set of distinct yet comparable experiences that reflect the real complexity of the Spanish labour market. By deliberately including companies of different sizes, sectors, and governance cultures, the study enhances its relevance and provides a robust basis for policy and practice-oriented conclusions.

3 MEASURES ADOPTED IN MATTER OF WORKING TIME

3.1 Measure 1: Reduction of the working week to 4 days in the company (Firm level)

Software ElSol is a company with over four decades of existence, dedicated to the development and support of software for small business management. In 2021, it was integrated into the Italian company TeamSystem Company.

Until 2017, Software ElSol did not have its own collective agreement. In that year, following negotiations with representatives from two unions (FASGA - Federación de Asociaciones Sindicales, now called Valorian, and IDS), its first collective agreement was approved. This agreement established an annual working hours schedule of 1,726 hours for the years 2018 and 2019. The working hours were structured as follows: during the winter period (from September 16th to June 14th), Monday to Thursday consisted of eight and a half hours of effective work, flexible between 8:00 AM and 7:00 PM, and Fridays had a continuous working day of 6 hours from 8:30 AM to 2:30 PM. The summer schedule, covering June 15th to September 15th, comprised a continuous seven-hour workday from 8:00 AM to 3:00





PM. This collective agreement was initially valid until December 31, 2019, but negotiations for the subsequent agreement commenced on February 3, 2020. It's worth noting that the collective agreement itself provided for the continuity of its effects for one year.

On June 17th of the same year, a new collective agreement was reached with the full support of the employee committee, now composed solely of the FASGA union (with five representatives) and four independent workers. This new collective agreement introduced a revised work schedule without a reduction in salary.

According to the information provided by company personnel, the initiative for this reduction in working hours comes from the company's management and was accepted by the workers' representatives during the negotiation process.

The new annual working hours were set at 1,495, spread across a four-day workweek. This entailed increasing the daily hours during the winter period to nine hours from Monday to Thursday, while maintaining a seven-hour workday on Fridays. Indeed, in the statistical report required by the labour authorities, the weekly working hours were set at 36 hours, representing a reduction of 4 hours from the previous agreement. The system involved shifts, although this first agreement did not establish specific regulations.

Analyzing in detail the distribution of working time, it can be seen that there is a reduction in working hours to transition from a five-day week to a four-day week. However, this is not a 20% reduction (which would simply be achieved by reducing one working day) but rather slightly less than 14%. This result is achieved through a slight extension of the daily working hours and the elimination of additional rest days provided for in previous agreements (such as a day off for birthdays). In this way, the result of improving work-life balance is achieved without losing salary, but with a smaller increase in the cost per hour for the company.





The 2023 collective agreement notably improved in all its sections (related or unrelated to working hours), specifically mentioning a shift work system with three modalities:

Rotating shift: Employees have rotating days off each week from Monday to Friday.

Standby shift: Employees have rotating days off on Mondays or Fridays.

Fixed shift: Employees always have Fridays off.

3.2 Measure 2: reduction in working hours in Ephimera

Ephimera is a small company offering quality spaces for events in Madrid and Barcelona. They work hand in hand with a creative network to offer the best locations for conferences, congresses, meetings, press conferences, pop-ups, showrooms, product launches, etc. Not only do they provide a place, they also develop content in the spaces they manage: they take care of devising the concept, developing the project, positioning it and making its marketing plan. The company has around 20 employees. The demographics of the workforce are young and female dominated. The professional profile of the employees is creative.

The employment relations in the company fall under the National Collective Agreement for Advertising Companies¹, which, regarding working time, establishes that the maximum number of hours of effective work on a weekly basis shall be thirty-seven and a half hours from Monday to Friday. This already entails a reduction compared to what is established by law (40 weekly hours).

In April 2022, the company introduced a 4-day working week. Since then, the employees work 4 days a week instead of 5 days a week. This change

¹ Convenio colectivo del sector de empresas de publicidad: https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2016/02/10/pdfs/BOE-A-2016-1290.pdf





entailed a reduction in weekly working hours. After the introduction of this measure, employees work 32 hours per week, distributed over 4 days. Thus, the measure introduced by the company comprises not only a change in the weekly schedule (from 5 to 4 working days) but also a reduction in the total number of hours worked (from 37.5 to 32 hours).

The measure was introduced unilaterally by the company's management, taking into account that the two owners publicly promote the 4-day week on a general level.

The aim of the measure, according to the company representative interviewed², is to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life. Here, the company's representative accepts a broad conception of work-life balance, understanding that the day off can serve multiple personal purposes, including recreational and educational purposes. The general concept in which the measure is placed is that of employee wellbeing.

The reduction in working hours is completely independent of other possible measures in place aimed at facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life (telework, hybrid work, adaptation of working hours...).

From an organisational standpoint, each week the shifts for the following week are fixed. The day off is not a fixed day in the week, but every employee selects the day she/he wants off. The usual procedure for allocating days off according to workload is by consensus of the employees, not by imposition from above. There are some rules that must be followed by all employees in order to guarantee the functioning of the business: for instance, not all members of a team can select the same day off.

3.3. Measure 3. The consolidated Flex@Work in Schneider Electric

² We interviewed Carmen Fernández Marinas on 22 May 2024. Carmen is a director of Ephimera.





Schneider Electric is a French company which operates in the metal sector. The company is located in different provinces in Spain with a workforce around 6000 employees. From a gender perspective, approximately two-thirds of the workforce is made up of men, although Schneider Electric shows an evident initiative to achieve equal representation of both genders in all job positions [1].

The qualification of the workforce in Schneider Electric differs depending on the workplace. In this regard, there are three kinds of workplace depending on the specific functions carried out: (i) technical offices, (ii) manufacturing plants and (iii) logistics centres. Workforce in technical offices (essentially, the workplaces in Madrid and Sevilla) is constituted basically by white-collar workers, while almost all employees in manufacturing plants and logistics centres are blue-collar ones [1]. Notwithstanding this, the majority of the workforce in Schneider Electric is white-collar [2]. This fact is in contrast with what prevails in the sector, which are blue-collar workers [1].

Concerning union representation, the leading trade union in Schneider Electric is CCOO, followed by UGT, ELA and LAB. These four trade unions are present in a social dialogue roundtable ("Mesa de Diálogo Social") in which different issues are dealt with at company level, although any agreements reached within this roundtable must be endorsed by each workplace's representatives for the purposes of its effective implementation [1].

Working conditions are regulated by the sectoral collective agreements at national and provincial level. The most weight of collective agreements focuses on the provincial level that represent around 62[3]. So far Schneider Electric has not negotiated a collective agreement at enterprise level. At national level it is applicable the IV Convenio colectivo estatal de la industria, las nuevas tecnologías y los servicios del sector del metal[4] that provides a short regulation on remote work and the right to disconnect[5]. Furthermore, Schneider Electric and trade unions have negotiated an agreement on remote work[6]. For its part, Schneider





Electric has approved a policy on flex working (called Flex@Work) and a policy on Global Family Leave.

In the metal sector the maximum working time is regulated by the provincial collective agreements. No differences between professional categories (shift workers and technicians) are established in the matter of working time. The maximum working time is set province by province:

Provincial level	Maximum working time agreed in the collective agreement
Barcelona	1750
Madrid	1754
Navarra	1695
Sevilla	1759
Valencia	1744
Vizcaya	1708

In most of the mentioned provinces the maximum working time agreed is very similar to the average of the metal sector (around 1749,93 hours per year in 2023) [7]. Collective agreements of the metal industry comply partly with the proposal of working time reform at least in 2024 (1759 in 2024 and 1712 in 2025).

Provincial level	Maximum working time agreed in the collective agreement	
Barcelona	1750	80





Madrid	1754	10%
Navarra	1695	48 +80[8]
Sevilla	1759	220
Valencia	1744	135
Vizcaya	1708	100

According to a trade union report, the evolution of the average máximum working time from 2012 (1755) to 2022 (1754) is not very relevant. Negotiators need the support of the legislator to reduce more working time [9].

Schneider Electric applied a consolidated flex working model many years ago. In this connection, Schneider Electric's work culture has been traditionally based on promoting the autonomy of employees (those who are white-collar, in particular) in the development of their duties, which is highly facilitated by this flex working model [1].

It seems that Schneider Electric often implements flexible working measures through company policies rather than by means of agreements reached with the employees' representatives. Although these company policies are focused on the employees' well-being and satisfaction, and are hence welcomed and highly valued by the workforce, according to a union representative they may occasionally not foresee some issues or details that are relevant within their implementation, issue that could be possibly avoided or mitigated if these measures were previously negotiated and agreed with the employees' representatives. In addition, this union representative states that, as subject to internal policies unilaterally decided and applied by the Company, and not as a result of collective negotiation, these measures may not be respected by the managers in some cases [1].





A pilot experience on a compressed work week was tried with around 80 employees (managers, technicians and financial officer) for six months. The experience concentrated the working time in four days per week (usually from Monday to Thursday), which set up a 10-hour workday, and was combined with remote work. From the point of view of employees one of the main negative points was the fact that the measure was a compression of working time and not reduction of working time. The measure was worse for employees with family responsibilities and during periods with more workload. The debate about the reduction of the maximum working time was not raised[10].

In addition to the above, it was stressed out that the mentioned measure was refused by trade unions because a compressed work week implied a modification on the daily working time. According to trade unions, it required previous negotiation and agreement with the employees' representatives, which had not occurred. In this connection, the employees' representatives were concerned about the harmful impact that a 10-hour workday could have on the employees' productivity and health; specially, considering the representatives did not have a proper visibility on the terms that this pilot experience was being implemented and could not monitor it either [1].

Concerning remote work, although it was already applied before the pandemic, the agreement on the same was reached on the occasion of the Covid-19, which highly promoted remote work and the issuing of a law on this matter in Spain (Ley 10/2021, de 9 de julio, de Trabajo a Distancia) [1].

As a general rule, remote work is organised in some of the following alternative options: 1) Full days: between 1 up to 3 days per week. 2) Halfdays: up to 4 mornings or 4 afternoons. Nevertheless, there are some groups of employees who are not offered the possibility of remote-work; basically, those whose work cannot be carried-out remotely, who are mainly blue-collar workers [1].





It should be pointed out that the company offers remote employees the monitoring of psychosocial risks. Furthermore, remote employees should carry out training on risks of his tasks, remote work and the right to disconnect.

Furthermore, all employees with the exception of shift workers have flexible schedules from 7:00 to 10:00 in the morning, and a flexible lunch break of up to 2.5 hours. It is not necessary to request it, inform in advance or justify the measure. These employees (white-collar ones) have full autonomy to organise their own work [1].

A group of flexible measures are applied to all employees. In particular: 1) Floating days: possibility to work on a holy day and move the rest day to another day that the employee decides. 2) Possibility to buy extra holidays. Each employee is entitled to achieve up to five extra days for holidays. It means a reduction of the wage. 3) Non-paid leave. Employees can request a non-paid leave from fifteen days to two months. Company pays for the social security contribution for the mentioned leave.

With regard to the aforementioned, there were some concerns pointedout by a union representative [1]. By way of example, regarding the "floating days" measure, it was remarked that, although it should be voluntary for the concerned employee to request it, it could be eventually misused by a manager by suggesting one of his/her subordinates to request it for the purposes of adapting his/her working time to whatever productive needs could arise.

Another highlighted concern was that the possibility to buy extra holidays could eventually lead to a delay and increase in workload, resulting in work-related stress and a reduction in productivity.

In addition, Schneider Electric applies a Global Family Leave policy which offers, among others, a Paid leave to care for the family (employees can request leave to care for their family for up to two weeks) and a Paid leave for the birth of a child (employees can request leave for the birth of a child





up to a week). Those measures have been approved into the company policy.

- [1] Interview with trade union representative from CCOO on 15 October 2024.
- [2] Análisis Económico, Ambiental y Social, Grupo Schneider 2015-2018, CCOO, p. 18.
- [3] La negociación colectiva en la industria del metal en 2023, Fundación Confemetal, 2024, p. 23.
- [4] IV Convenio colectivo estatal de la industria, las nuevas tecnologías y los servicios del sector del metal, BOE 12.1.2022, nº 10. See https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2022-479
- [5] Article 49 establishes that enterprises shall not impose disciplinary measures against employees who effectively make use of their rights to disconnect. Furthermore, collective agreements at provincial and enterprise level may increase the guarantees and limits against the monitoring measures of digital rights.
- [6] The agreement was signed on 20 September of 2021 by four trade unions (UGT, CCOO, ELA and LAB) and the company.
- [7] La negociación colectiva en la industria del metal en 2023, Fundación Confemetal, 2024.
- [8] The extra 48 hours is to facilitate competitiveness of enterprises. The extra 80 hours is to face the variations in the production programs.
- [9] Nuevas formas de trabajo y distribución de la jornada en el sector metal, UGT FICA 2023, pp. 173-174.
- [10] Interview with trade union representative from UGT on 20 May 2024.





4 IMPACT OF THE MEASURES

Software ElSol

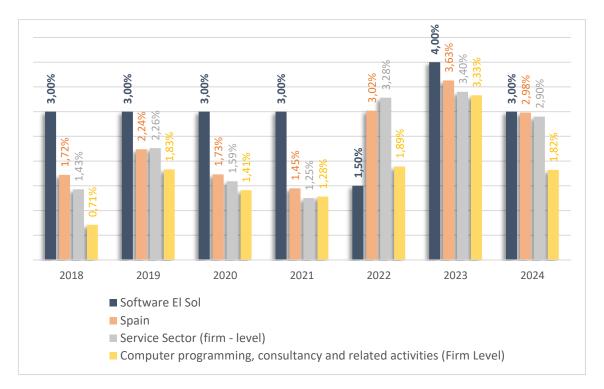
From an economic perspective, it should be noted that the salaries stipulated in the 2017 collective agreement, while similar to those under the state collective agreement applicable at the time, were based on a shorter work schedule (the state collective agreement for consultancy firms and market research and public opinion companies, in fact, established a 1,800 annual hours work schedule. This equates to approximately a four percent higher number of hours compared to the analysed company's agreement.

The reduction in working hours did not lead to a reduction in agreed salaries for Software El Sol; on the contrary, a 3% increase over the previous year's salary was agreed upon for 2020. This actually represents an 18.9% increase in hourly wages.

Examining the evolution of agreed salaries across successive company collective agreements, it is evident that except for 2022, they have consistently exceeded those stipulated in official statistics for other sectors. This trend is illustrated in the graph, showing increases in all years except that one, surpassing both national collective agreements in Spain and sector-specific agreements within the "Computer programming, consultancy, and related activities" sector (NACE rev. 2, code 62) to which the analyzed company belongs. In fact, for the entire period from 2019 to 2024 (spanning the transition from a five-day workweek to the most recent arrangement), the agreed-upon increase has been 15.3% at Software El Sol, compared to 10.1% for its sector as classified under NACE rev. 2 at the two-digit level.







Additionally, it should be noted that the company asserts that this change has helped attract talent and has sustained revenue growth (22% in 2022). These results, however, should be viewed within the framework of a broader human resources policy aimed at employee well-being.

Nevertheless, these outcomes should be approached with caution, as being a pioneering company has significantly enhanced its corporate image, benefiting from media attention. Apart from the specifics of its fundamentally technological work (which also facilitates concentrated work schedules), it should be highlighted that if this practice were to become widespread across all businesses, its impact on talent attraction would diminish as it would lose its "distinctive" nature.

The aforementioned statistical sheet also indicates that the size of the workforce has not been affected; in fact, while the 2017 agreement stated it covered 155 people, the 2023 agreement records it as having grown to 189. Simultaneously over this period, without conclusive evidence of causality, there has been a notable advancement in gender





parity: the percentage of women in the workforce has increased from 44.5% six years ago to 49.2%.

From a work-life balance perspective, while it will always have a positive impact, this impact will be greater for employees with fixed or standby shifts due to their increased ability to plan their personal lives, compared to those on rotating shifts.

From the perspective of human resources management, turnover—which was already very low—remained at these levels. Although it is true that the workforce composition has become more gender-balanced in recent years, the reduction in working days does not appear to be the cause; rather, it is the feminization of activities related to technological development. In terms of attracting talent, the company did notice a significant increase in job applications following the implementation of the four-day workweek.

Ephimera:

The result of applying the measure has been satisfactory and has not caused any significant problems, according to the company representative interviewed. Staff are happy with the measure. The remuneration has not been affected by the measure.

Schneider Flectric

In Schneider Electric the assessment of the measures is very positive according to the survey and the interview with the trade unions (CCOO and UGT).

Remote work does not mean a risk for the quality of the productive process. The productive process is remotely controlled. In addition, according to the union representative from CCOO, remote work has implied an important reduction of costs for the Company, while it constitutes a relevant incentive for the employees.

There is consensus between trade unions to conclude that neither remote work nor the possibility to enjoy flexible schedules have affected work





performance; in fact, they facilitate the employees to self-manage their work and carry out their tasks in an autonomous way (which is, as abovesaid, typically seek by the work culture in Schneider Electric), successfully fulfilling their duties.

However, the experience of trade unions shows that when there is a flexible policy of working time it is relevant to enhance the health and safety of employees. Employees voluntarily may work more than the maximum working time and suffer psychological risk if they do not respect the minimum statutory resting periods.

In short, these two relevant flex working measures implemented in the Company, which are remote work and flexible schedules, imply both benefits and inconveniences: they contribute to the employees' well-being, operating as an important incentive for them without hindering work performance; but, being the Company's culture focused on the autonomous working of the employees and the self-assumption of responsibility of their own duties, these measures may to end up leading to the performance of excessive working hours which is self-inflicted by the employees themselves.

5 GENERAL EVALUATION AND CONCLUSIONS

As mentioned at the beginning, Ephimera implemented the measure of working 4 days a week as a management commitment to attract and retain human capital in a highly competitive industry. The result has been very good to date, with no negative impact on productivity or the organization of resources. The fact that it is a small company means that organizational problems are solved to a large extent by the self-management of the teams.

The reduction of the workweek to four days has proven to be a viable experience in medium-sized companies; even when there is a need to maintain activity over five (or seven) days a week, services can be





provided through shifts. For this, it is essential to design the work time distribution system with flexibility so that, according to the personal needs of each group within the workforce, they can choose fixed shifts (Monday-Thursday or Tuesday-Friday) or shifts with varying days off. Moreover, without undermining the importance of negotiation, the experience of Software El Sol shows that with adequate business leadership, an initiative from the company's management is sufficient, which is unlikely to be rejected by the workers' representatives. Although the experience can be extrapolated to other companies, it is evident that the model will present more complications in small-sized companies, where the distribution of time will be shared among fewer workers.

The example of innovative flexible working time arrangements in the sector metal shows the collaboration between collective agreements (at sectoral and provincial level) and company policies. It seems relevant that the sectoral level (national level) sets some general rules on this issue to promote flexible working time arrangements which may be completed at provincial level or company level.

The role of trade unions in the metal sector to address the way of flexible working time arrangements was very effective. First, to refuse the pilot project on a compressed work week when it may cause worse working conditions for employees. Second, to negotiate with the company the agreement on remote work.



