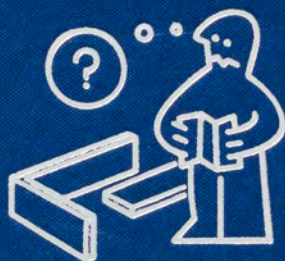


INNOVATION THE SWEDISH WAY

Henrik Berggren Eva Krutmeijer



MAX STRÖM

Governed equality

PARENTAL LEAVE FOR BOTH PARENTS

Throughout history, women have looked after babies and small children while also doing jobs to enable their families to survive. With industrialisation came a differentiation between people's home and work, and the role of the housewife arose. It was taken for granted that a woman would leave her job when she became a mother.

After the First World War, working women campaigned for paid leave to look after their infant children. The right to maternity leave was also part of the platform formulated by the International Labour Organization (ILO), established in 1919 as part of the Treaty of Versailles. Many countries introduced legislation that entitled women to unpaid leave, which was not much help to poor working-class families.

After the Second World War, paid maternity leave of some sort for new mothers became common in many industrialised countries. In Sweden, maternity benefit was replaced by maternity insurance in the 1950s, which entitled new mothers to 90 days' paid leave.

Maternity benefit was both radical and conservative. It enabled women with children to remain in the labour market. But at the same time, it cemented the man's role as the main breadwinner and the woman's responsibility for children and the home.

In Sweden, this model started to come into question in the 1970s. The notion that women and men had equal responsibilities in a marriage had gained ground for a number of reasons. Partly it was a matter of economics: there was a labour shortage, and 300,000 housewives would be a welcome addition to the workforce. But criticism of the traditional patriarchal family had also increased since the 1960s. The growing feminist movement demanded equality between men and women both in the workplace and at home. The birth control pill had ushered in a new sexual freedom, while the introduction of individual taxation for married couples in 1969 eliminated their previous advantage of joint taxation.

In the spring of 1974, the Swedish parliament passed a historic law. Sweden became the first country in the world to introduce paid parental leave for both men and women. All the political parties agreed on the bill, but the liberal People's Party (Folkpartiet) disagreed with the

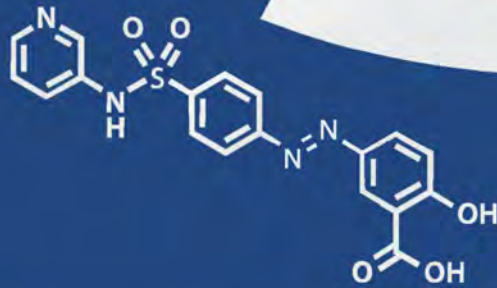
In 1974, Sweden was the first country in the world to introduce paid parental leave for both parents. Today, Swedish fathers take a third of the nation's total parental leave.



provision that stated parents could decide who would use the leave. They were worried that the new parental leave would become a trap for women, tying them down to housework and childcare. They wanted a system in which paid leave was divided equally between parents.

Their concern was justified, as it turned out. In 1995 – two decades after the introduction of shared parental leave – fathers accounted for just 9 per cent of all parental leave. In order to accelerate the pace of change, a 'fatherhood month' was introduced. If a father did not take that month of leave, it was lost. In the early 2000s, the quota was increased to two months. It seemed to have an effect. The share of parental leave taken by men has increased steadily since then, from 16 per cent in 2005 to 19 per cent in 2011 and 30 per cent in 2020.

Whether the glass is half full or half empty is in the eye of the beholder. But if you look at things in the longer term, shared parental leave is still a historic transformation.



No other country has produced as many revolutionary innovations per capita as Sweden. This is the story of 50 of these Swedish ideas, discoveries and inventions that have changed the world.

