

Should Australia introduce a four-day workweek?

What they said...

'It gives so many benefits to workers, to business and to the environment.'

Alyssa Shaw, campaign co-director for 4 Day Week Australia

'If it just means a faster assembly line and people getting really stressed and being put under a lot of pressure, I don't think that they would like that.'

Ben Friedrich, a professor of strategy at Northwestern University, Illinois

The issue at a glance

On January 9, 2024, it was reported that the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) is about to establish a working group to plan the trial of a four-day workweek in sections of the ACT public service. <https://ia.acs.org.au/article/2024/act-government-to-trial-4-day-work-week.html>

On October 23, 2023, it was announced that Medibank would begin a six-month trial of the four-day workweek among its workforce from the end of October 2023.

<https://www.9news.com.au/national/medibank-to-trial-fourday-work-week/3f837476-af85-41e5-849b-4d2bad2be32b>

On March 23, 2023, Oxfam became the first Australian employer to announce a six-month trial of the four-day week with its 104 Australian employees.

https://www.asu.org.au/ASUVIC/News/Media_Statement_Oxfam_4-day-workweek.aspx

Despite high levels of support within sections of the Australian workforce and some employers <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-09-11/four-day-week-expansion-with-union-agreements-locking-in-spread-/102681412> ; there have been signs of opposition to the four-day workweek trials.

In July 2023, it was reported that the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) had rejected a proposed trial. <https://publicspectrum.co/apsc-rejects-four-day-work-week/>

Public debate about the issue continues.

Background

The information below was abbreviated from a Wikipedia entry titled 'Four-day workweek'. The full entry can be accessed at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four-day_workweek

A four-day workweek is an arrangement where a workplace has its employees work over the course of four days per week rather than the more customary five. This arrangement can be part of flexible working hours and is sometimes used to cut costs.

The four-day week movement has grown rapidly in recent years, with increasing numbers of businesses and organisations around the world trialling and many moving permanently to a four-day working week of around 32 hours, with no loss of pay for workers. Most of these businesses and organisations have involved white collar work and found that a four-day week benefits both employees and employers, as trials have indicated that it leads to a better work-

life balance, lower stress-levels, and increased productivity, mainly by eliminating wasted work time.

An overwhelming majority of studies report that a four-day week leads to increased productivity and decreased stress, though experts question whether this arrangement is possible in blue collar work, where there may be little wasted time. Critics have wondered whether workers would be required to work faster to maintain the same productivity, potentially increasing stress levels and reducing safety.

Variations in the model

Most advocates for a four-day working week argue for a fixed work schedule, resulting in shorter weeks (e.g., four 8-hour workdays for a total of 32 hours). This follows the 100-80-100 model: 100 percent pay for 80 percent of the time, in exchange for a commitment to maintain at least 100 percent productivity.

However, some companies have introduced a four-day week based on a compressed work schedule: in the so-called '4/10 work week,' the 40 weekly workhours are distributed across four days instead of five, resulting in 10-hour-long workdays.

4 Day Week Global trials

In 2022, the not-for-profit advocacy group 4 Day Week Global launched a series of six-month trials for companies in the following countries:

Ireland (17 companies, February 2022 to August 2023);

the United States and Canada (38 companies, April 2022 to October 2023);

the United Kingdom (UK) (61 companies with around 2,900 employees, June 2022 to December 2023);

Australia and New Zealand (20 companies, August 2022 to February 2023).

Government-initiated trials

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, several governments have proposed and launched four-day working week trials:

Scotland announced it is putting £10 million towards a trial, as part of its promise to pursue a wellbeing economy.

Spain announced a voluntary, nationwide, three-year trial of a 32-hour workweek.

The Japanese government's 2021 annual economic policy guidelines recommended that companies allow their workers to opt for a four-day work week, as part of an initiative aimed at improving work-life balance in the country.

Belgium allowed employees the ability to request a four-day work week through the compression of their 38-hour week.

Internet information

On January 12, 2024, The Hill published a comment by Jose Maria Barrero and Steven J Davis titled 'There's no magic in a 4-day workweek'. The article reveals the low uptake of different working arrangements in the United States and claims little employer interest in the 100-80-100 four-day workweek model which it describes as the 'magic' version.

The full text can be accessed at <https://thehill.com/opinion/finance/4405349-theres-no-magic-in-a-four-day-workweek/>

On January 8, 2024, The Globe and Mail published an analysis titled 'Will AI enable a three-day workweek? Certain billionaires think so, but some experts disagree.' The analysis looks

at the potential for AI to either reduce working hours or boost company profits by allowing workers to be laid off.

The full text can be accessed at <http://tinyurl.com/va37rtt9>

On January 1, 2024, The Advertiser published a report titled ‘Will 2024 be the year of the four-day work week? Research suggests yes.’ The report indicates that over a third of Australian companies expect a transition to a four-day workweek within the next five years. The full text can be accessed at <http://tinyurl.com/yszczb7dy>

On December 27, 2023, Awna (a company that represents employees making claims against unfair dismissal) published an article titled ‘Four-day work week: The pros and cons’ The article details recent developments in Australia that indicate interest in the four-day week and considers advantages and disadvantages of the proposal.

The full text can be accessed at <https://awna.com.au/four-day-work-week-the-pros-and-cons/>

On November 12, 2023, TRIB Live published a comment by Julie Y Cal, economist on the domestic team at the Centre for Economic Policy Research (CEPR). The article is titled ‘A 4-day workweek is a win-win for all’. Cal argues that a four-day workweek could offer major advantages for workers, companies, and the environment.

The full text can be accessed at <https://triblive.com/opinion/viewpoint-2-a-4-day-workweek-is-a-win-win-for-all/>

On November 6, 2023, The Conversation published a comment and analysis by Nataliya Ilyushina, Research Fellow, Blockchain Innovation Hub, RMIT University, titled ‘A 4-day week might not work in health care. But adapting this model could reduce burnout among staff’. The piece argues that a modified version of the four-day workweek might help prevent burnout and resignations among health workers.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/a-4-day-week-might-not-work-in-health-care-but-adapting-this-model-could-reduce-burnout-among-staff-213554>

On October 26, 2023, The Daily Telegraph published a report titled ‘More Australians offered four-day work week as small businesses struggle with worker shortages’. The article looks at the incentives that some small businesses are offering to attract employees.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/business/work/more-australians-offered-four-day-work-week-as-small-businesses-struggle-with-worker-shortages/news-story/029572fa1884b5979f855b8c487aac89>

On October 24, 2023, The Advertiser published a report titled ‘Australian Services Union backs Medibank’s 4-day work week trial’. The article details that the Australian Services Union is seeking a four-day workweek for its members.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/south-australia/australian-services-union-backs-medibanks-4day-work-week-trial/news-story/8edf66d07b0f28cdcb217708631f6456>

On October 8, 2023, The Financial Times published a comment by editor Roula Khalaf titled ‘Working week: four days is flawed for most’. The opinion piece examines the limited range of businesses that participated in British four-day workweek trials and argues the initiative is not suited to many workplaces.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.ft.com/content/f65a837c-8c6e-4583-afb9-dfa97b65b9ff>

On October 4, 2023, The Hill published a comment by Liberty Vittert, a professor of data science at Washington University in St. Louis, titled ‘A four-day workweek would destroy everything that made America great’. The article argues that many of the claims for the success of the four-day workweek are misleading and that adopting it would harm the American economy.

The full text can be accessed at <https://thehill.com/opinion/finance/4228933-a-four-day-work-week-would-destroy-everything-that-made-america-great/>

On September 13, 2023, ACS Information Age published an article titled ‘4-day work week enshrined in union agreement’. The report details the enterprise bargaining agreement reached between the Australian Services Union (ASU) and Oxfam Australia which allows all its full-time employees to work a shorter week for the same pay.

The full text can be accessed at <https://ia.acs.org.au/article/2023/4-day-work-week-enshrined-in-union-agreement.html>

On September 6, 2023, 4 Day Week published a detailed list of all the countries in which workers have a four-day workweek.

The full document, with links giving greater detail, can be accessed at <https://4dayweek.io/countries>

On May 5, 2023, The Conversation published a comment and analysis by Tony Syme, Senior Lecturer in Economics, Salford Business School, University of Salford and Maria Paola Rana, Lecturer in Economics, University of Salford, titled ‘Why three-day weekends are great for wellbeing – and the economy’. The authors look at the results from recent international trials of the four-day workweek and suggest that the arrangement has benefits for all.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/why-three-day-weekends-are-great-for-wellbeing-and-the-economy-205063>

On March 24, 2023, The Conversation published a comment and analysis by Anthony Veal, Adjunct Professor, Business School, University of Technology Sydney, titled ‘4-day work week trials have been labelled a ‘resounding success’. But 4 big questions need answers’. The article examines the success of recent international trials of the four-day workweek but argues that there are issues which still need to be resolved.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/4-day-work-week-trials-have-been-labelled-a-resounding-success-but-4-big-questions-need-answers-201476>

On March 10, 2023, Yahoo Finance published a report titled ‘Four-day work week trial is coming: “It is time”’. The report detailed some of the recommendations of the Australian Senate Committee on Work and Care. One of the recommendations was a trial of the four-day week spread across sectors and locations and conducted in partnership with an Australian university to measure the impacts.

The full text can be accessed at <https://au.finance.yahoo.com/news/four-day-work-week-trial-is-coming-it-is-time-233349407.html>

On December 2, 2022, The Conversation published a comment and analysis by Jan-Emmanuel De Neve, Director, Wellbeing Research Centre, University of Oxford, titled ‘Four-day week trial confirms working less increases wellbeing and productivity’. The article comments on the recent successful trials of the four-day workweek.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/four-day-week-trial-confirms-working-less-increases-wellbeing-and-productivity-195660>

On August 4, 2022, The Conversation published a comment and analysis by Wim Naudé, Professor of Economics, University College Cork, titled ‘Five reasons why the four-day week won’t work’. The comment argues that many of the supposed advantages of a four-day week will not eventuate.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/five-reasons-why-the-four-day-week-wont-work-188188>

On February 14, 2022, The Conversation published a comment and analysis by John Quiggin, Professor, School of Economics, The University of Queensland, titled ‘There’s never been a better time for Australia to embrace the 4-day week’. The article argues that many of the effects of the COVID epidemic on different sections of the Australian workforce have created favourable circumstances for the introduction of the four-day workweek.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/theres-never-been-a-better-time-for-australia-to-embrace-the-4-day-week-176374>

On September 14, 2021, The Conversation published a comment and analysis by Abigail Marks, Professor of the Future of Work, Newcastle University, titled ‘Why the four-day week is not the solution to modern work stress’. The article argues that the four-day workweek is not feasible for many types of work.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/why-the-four-day-week-is-not-the-solution-to-modern-work-stress-167721>

On July 14, 2021, The Conversation published a comment and analysis by Anthony Veal, Adjunct Professor, Business School, University of Technology Sydney, titled ‘The success of Iceland’s “four-day week” trial has been greatly overstated’.

The article explains that the Iceland trials were based on work reductions of much less than a day and that their positive productivity data may not be representative.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/the-success-of-icelands-four-day-week-trial-has-been-greatly-overstated-164083>

Arguments in favour of a four-day workweek

1. A four-day workweek improves employees’ mental and physical health

Supporters of the four-day workweek argue that it results in significant improvements in employees’ mental and physical health. This can have positive effects across the nation. Its supporters also note that a four-day working week might help address the poor work-life balance many Australians currently experience.

The United Kingdom has conducted the most extensive trials of the four-day workweek to date. The results of these trials suggest significant benefits for workers’ health. 37 percent of employees reported better physical health and 43 percent showed improved mental health. The four-day workweek reduced burnout by 71 percent and stress levels by 39 percent.

<https://4dayweek.medium.com/the-impact-of-the-4-day-workweek-uk-2023-results-c1d0cee3d13b> 40 percent of workers reported sleeping better.

<https://www.theguardian.com/money/2023/feb/21/four-day-week-uk-trial-success-pattern>

These physical and mental health benefits have been noted by both employers and employees. Claire Daniels, CEO of Leeds-based digital marketing agency Trio Media, stressed the mental health benefits for employees, stating, ‘When people enjoy having an

extra day off, that creates better work-life balance which, in turn, makes people happier and less stressed.’ <https://www.indy100.com/news/four-day-work-week-uk> Employees also noted that they experienced the health benefits of a better work-life balance, with an improved opportunity for exercise and recreation. David Alatorre, the chief technology officer at Rivelin Robotics in Sheffield explained, ‘It’s nice to have the flexibility though, which makes the biggest difference to me personally. That Friday, even though I may end up working some of it, I can be at home, walk the dog, go climbing.’ <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2023/feb/21/four-day-week-uk-trial-success-pattern>

The Australian and New Zealand experience has replicated Britain’s in terms of physical and mental health benefits. During 2023, a four-day workweek pilot program was conducted in Australasia, comprising 26 companies and around 750 workers. <https://www.4dayweek.com/anz-full-report-2023> The pilot produced positive health and wellbeing results for employees. Almost two thirds (64 percent) of employees experienced reductions in burnout, while 38 percent felt less stressed on a four-day week. Almost half of workers (49 percent) reported a decline in negative emotions, with positive emotions increasing for 62 percent of employees. Anxiety fell for a third of the sample, with significant increases observed in people’s physical and mental health. 38 percent of employees were less fatigued, and 35 percent had fewer sleep problems. Frequency of exercise rose for more than a third of the sample (36 percent), while exercise duration went up an average of 20 minutes per week. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60b956cbe7bf6f2efd86b04e/t/64654696c03e4c1fab3c25ba/1684358809096/4+Day+Week+ANZ+2023+Results.pdf>

Numerous broad-based studies have shown that a poor work-life balance compromises physical and mental health. A 2014 study indicated that a poor work-life balance was associated with ill health across 27 European countries. <https://academic.oup.com/eurpub/article/24/3/422/477763> A 2020 study drew similar conclusions. It noted, ‘Poor work-life balance is associated with poor self-reported health among working adults... in Europe... Organizations must create good working atmosphere and flexible working time to deal with issues of jobs strain in order to reduce health problems.’ <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-020-09139-w> A 2016 Finnish study suggested that the damage caused by a poor work-life balance resulted in poor physical health later in life. The study concluded, ‘We found that longer working hours coupled with shorter sleep duration in midlife was associated with poorer physical functioning in old age.’ <https://academic.oup.com/ageing/article/46/1/108/2605686>

Many Australians currently have a poor work-life balance which results in a detrimental experience of work. Australia ranks in the bottom third of OECD countries for work-life balance. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/australias-welfare-2017-in-brief/contents/international-comparison> 13 percent of employees in Australia work very long hours. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-05-22/why-are-so-many-australians-working-overtime-long-hours/102353176> This is well above the OECD average of 10 percent. Australian workers complete an average 5.4 hours of unpaid overtime a week. <http://tinyurl.com/5ax43epn> In the 2022 Microsoft Work Trend Index, 62 percent of Australian workers reported being burnt out at work, compared to 48 percent of workers globally. In 2023, the Australian Work Health and Safety Survey found nearly two-thirds of workers were feeling burnt out. <http://tinyurl.com/mty84xpb> Gallup Australia recently delivered its 2023 State of the Australian and New Zealand Workplace report. The findings in this report included that 50 percent of Australians are experiencing ‘a lot of stress’ at work,

while 67 percent are ‘quiet quitting’ and only 20 percent are thriving. (‘Quiet quitting’ refers to meeting the minimum requirements of one’s job and putting in no more time, effort, or enthusiasm than absolutely necessary.) <http://tinyurl.com/yc6sc4ms> Supporters of a four-day workweek argue it would help to address Australia’s damaging culture of overwork.

2. A four-day workweek improves morale and engagement at work

Supporters of a four-day workweek argue that better work-life balance has positive effects on employee morale and engagement. It is claimed that the new arrangement results in better relations between employers and employees and in staff approaching their work with greater enthusiasm and commitment.

There are a range of factors which improve the work motivation of employees who have a four-day workweek. One of the reasons offered for improved morale and engagement is that workers have a better relationship with their employers, feeling that their needs are being recognised and met. Andy Selway-Woolley, a social media marketing and engagement consultant has noted, ‘Employees who feel that their employer values their work-life balance and wellbeing are more likely to feel satisfied and motivated in their jobs, leading to... improved collaboration and teamwork.’

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/business-reporter/four-day-week-work-b2422387.html> The chief executive officer of Microsoft, Satya Nadella, has noted that forming new work structures such as the four-day week involves developing mutual trust and a strengthened sense of connection between employers and employees. Nadella states, ‘People come to work for other people, not because of some policy’. <https://ethics.org.au/the-ethical-dilemma-of-the-4-day-work-week/>

Having more opportunity to develop the other aspects of their life, such as family and community interests, can create greater energy and motivation while at work. This point has been made by Tasha Williams, writing for the University of Technology Sydney. Williams has explained, ‘Shortening the workweek can have a positive impact on employee engagement and motivation. Knowing they have dedicated time to pursue personal interests or enjoy leisure activities, employees return to work with renewed energy and enthusiasm.’ <http://tinyurl.com/4sshmmt4> Atlassian Corporation, an Australian software company, has commented on the effects of trialling a four-day workweek on its employees’ energy levels. It contrasted energy levels during and before the trial of a four-day workweek. It published its results in its company magazine, stating, ‘Overall, we were more motivated on Monday mornings during the experiment compared to before – both in terms of our energy levels and our confidence in our ability to get everything done by the end of the week. During the experiment our ratings for energy averaged 3.8 out of a possible five points, and 4.2 for confidence, whereas before the experiment, ratings had averaged 3.2 and 3.8, respectively. As one team member said, “It’s easier to start work on Monday knowing that your next weekend is only four days away.”’ <https://www.atlassian.com/blog/teamwork/4-day-workweek-productivity-wellbeing-results> Assessments of the results of both Australian and overseas four-day workweek trials found that workers experienced ‘increasing energy and feelings of strength and vigour at work’. Relatedly, employers noted ‘having more engaged and motivated employees.’ https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-03/c2023-379612-4_day_week_australia.pdf

The four-day working week is also motivating because the reduced working time encourages employees to make the most effective use of the time available. The administration software makers PeopleKeep have noted, ‘Knowing they have a shorter workweek can motivate

employees to prioritize their tasks and work smarter rather than simply working longer hours.’ <https://www.peoplekeep.com/blog/why-are-employers-moving-to-a-four-day-workweek> Early data from live trials in Britain of four-day weeks indicates that 70 percent of employees feel they are working more efficiently and prioritising and managing their time better when working for only four days. <https://en-gb.workplace.com/blog/four-day-week>

Supporters of the new arrangement have also found that the four-day workweek produces more engaged workers because they are less distracted by the demands of their personal lives. Eptura, a global worktech software company, has noted the distracting influences on employees’ working through the conventional five-day week. Its personnel officer notes, ‘Studies show employees are less distracted when working a four-day workweek. Why? They have more hours dedicated to their personal lives. How often do you find your mind wandering at work to something you need to do outside of work? With extra free time, professionals can run their errands and set up necessary appointments without having the anxiety of taking time off.’ <https://eptura.com/discover-more/blog/benefits-of-4-day-work-week/>

3. A four-day workweek will have environmental benefits

Supporters of a four-day workweek claim that by reducing commuter travel and minimizing energy consumption in office spaces, a four-day workweek significantly decreases carbon emissions. Advocates claim that widespread adoption of a four-day workweek will help to combat the impacts of climate change.

Juliet Schor, an economist and sociologist at Boston College and lead researcher at 4 Day Week Global who worked on both the United Kingdom and United States trials of the four-day workweek argues that a shorter working week is key to reducing carbon emissions. Schor states, ‘Although climate benefits are the most challenging thing to measure, we have a lot of research showing that over time, as countries reduce hours of work, their carbon emissions fall.’ <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20230220-is-a-4-day-workweek-good-for-the-climate> One of the primary ways in which four-day workweeks would reduce greenhouse emissions is through the reduction in workers’ commuting time resulting in reduced levels of carbon dioxide caused by motor vehicles. Schor has noted that comparative studies of commuting-generated emissions during and before four-day workweek trials in the United Kingdom and the United States have shown the impressive level of reductions achieved. Data from the United Kingdom trial shows a 10 percent decrease over the pilot period, from 3.5 hours to 3.15 hours per week, for the companies which tracked commuting time. While this is a significant fall, savings could reach 15-20 percent. In the 2022 United States trial the decline was larger, from 3.56 to 2.59 hours a week (a 27 percent decrease).

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20230220-is-a-4-day-workweek-good-for-the-climate> Research by the 4-Day Week Campaign revealed that a shortened work week could reduce the United Kingdom’s carbon footprint by 127 million tonnes per year – the equivalent of taking 27 million cars off the road. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/doing-more-less-green-benefits-four-day-workweek-paul-gosling/> A 2019 Reading University study showed similar dramatic reductions in car emissions resulting from a four-day workweek. The number of miles driven by employees travelling to work was estimated to be reduced by 558 million each week. https://6a142ff6-85bd-4a7b-bb3b-476b07b8f08d.usrfiles.com/ugd/6a142f_5061c06b240e4776bf31dfac2543746b.pdf

Both the United Kingdom and United States trials also found that many people spent the time saved by not commuting or working engaged in low-carbon activities, such as hiking or stay-

at-home hobbies. The United Kingdom data also showed that the shift to a shorter workweek led to an increase in pro-environmental behaviours: participants in the trial spent more time volunteering for environmental causes and were more careful with recycling and buying eco-friendly products. <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20230220-is-a-4-day-workweek-good-for-the-climate>

Reduced working hours would also have significant effects on household emissions. A 2012 study which Schor co-authored highlighted the effect of fewer working hours on the emissions created in the home. The study concluded that households with less time made greater use of high-energy-use transport (cars etc,) and commercially prepared food which is also more energy and therefore emissions expensive. Schor's study noted, 'Households with less time...will choose time-saving activities and products... associated with higher energy costs.' <https://peri.umass.edu/media/k2/attachments/4.2KnightRosaSchor.pdf>) A University of Reading study asked participants how they would spend the day off if given a four-day workweek. Over two thirds of respondents said they would spend more time with their family and friends and over half said they would do more home-cooking. These examples highlight how providing more time to people can enable them to enjoy activities that do not generate high carbon emissions. https://6a142ff6-85bd-4a7b-bb3b-476b07b8f08d.usrfiles.com/ugd/6a142f_5061c06b240e4776bf31dfac2543746b.pdf

Finally, fewer people working in commercial offices will reduce emissions due to less power usage for lighting, air conditioners, and elevators. A large-scale experiment from 2008-2009 conducted in the State of Utah in the United States shifted most public sector state employees to a four-day week, to cut costs, save energy and carbon. The experiment showed that by eliminating Fridays as a workday, huge energy savings could be made. The state found that its compressed workweek resulted in a 13 percent reduction in energy use. <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1919162,00.html>

4. A four-day workweek will cause no loss of productivity

Supporters of a four-day workweek claim that productivity levels can be maintained and that in many instances productivity will increase.

Many studies have found either no change in productivity when employees work a four-day week or an increase in output. In 2023, Swinburne University surveyed ten Australian organisations that have adopted the four-day workweek. It found three of the ten managers reported no loss of productivity despite a 20 percent reduction in hours, while the other seven reported productivity being even higher than when they had adopted a typical workweek. <https://theconversation.com/10-australian-companies-have-embraced-the-4-day-week-heres-what-they-say-about-it-206761> Microsoft in Japan has similarly reported a 40 percent rise in productivity after a four-week trial of the four-day workweek. <https://en-gb.workplace.com/blog/four-day-week> These results replicate those of firms that participated in a six-month trial of the four-day workweek organised by 4 Day Week Global. The trials involved 33 companies and nearly 1,000 employees in a range of countries. 70 percent of the companies involved found that productivity increased, while in 30 percent of cases it remained the same. <https://harpersbazaar.com.au/four-day-working-week-benefits/> The initial 4 Day Week Global data were collected from businesses and organisations in the United States, Ireland, and Australia, tracking 969 employees over a 10-month period. Revenue rose about 8 percent during the trial and was up 38 per cent from a year earlier. <https://www.smh.com.au/business/workplace/want-a-four-day-work-week-show-this-research-to-your-boss-20221130-p5c2nw.html>

There are many features of the four-day workweek which contribute to retaining or improving productivity. The shorter week has been linked to fewer absences and fewer employees quitting. Absenteeism and having to find and train replacement staff are both major drags on productivity. The initial 4 Day Week Global trial data found a drop in the monthly absentee rate and in resignations.

<https://www.smh.com.au/business/workplace/want-a-four-day-work-week-show-this-research-to-your-boss-20221130-p5c2nw.html> Further reductions in absenteeism have been found by firms which have adopted the four-day week permanently. Advice Direct Scotland, a Glasgow-based charity, was one of the first Scottish employers to introduce the four-day week in 2018. In 2021, it analysed its performance indicators and found a 71 percent fall in employee absences since 2017, while the average number of absent days fell by 55 percent. The rate of workers leaving the organisation dropped by around a third. Over the three years all departments reported a substantial increase in output.

<https://www.insider.co.uk/news/four-day-week-report-finds-26463250> British recruitment firm MRL Consulting Group Similar produced similar data when it trailed the four-day workweek for six months in 2019. The group achieved an increase in productivity of 25 percent and a 40 percent reduction in short-term absences. <https://workplaceinsight.net/the-four-day-week-and-a-case-of-less-is-more/>

Another factor that has led to retaining or improving productivity are structural rearrangements maximising worktime. Advocates of the four-day week claim that it frequently results in workplaces having fewer meetings and focusing on ‘deep work’. <https://www.visier.com/blog/radical-practical-4-day-work-week-future-of-work/> (Deep work is a state of concentration that allows for complex skills to be learnt and quality work to be achieved more quickly.) <https://asana.com/resources/what-is-deep-work> Workplaces adopting a four-day week minimise workplace distractions and deliberately create time for priority work to be achieved. The aim is to reduce ‘low value’ tasks and maximise productive ones. Unilever Australia and New Zealand has moved to permanent four-day workweeks for non-manufacturing staff after a successful six-month trial. Anish Singh, the head of HR for Unilever Australia and New Zealand, has explained, ‘[You need] fewer emails, fewer meetings, less time on the phone and other distractions, and [you need to adopt] a practice of deeper work.’ <https://www.afr.com/work-and-careers/workplace/the-company-moving-to-a-four-day-week-by-cutting-meetings-emails-20221031-p5buc9>

Studies of human work patterns have found that more time spent at work does not necessarily equal greater productivity. In a recent United States study, researchers tracked the computer usage metrics of 789 office employees, noting their patterns across different days of the week and times of the day. Lead researcher, Professor Mark Benden, stated, ‘People typed more words and had more mouse movement, mouse clicks and scrolls every day from Monday through Thursday, then less of this activity on Friday.’ The study showed that both the quality and the quantity of work declined over the week. Professor Benden added, ‘This aligns with similar findings that the number of tasks workers complete increases steadily from Monday through Wednesday, then decreases on Thursday and Friday.’

<https://www.bodyandsoul.com.au/health/mental-health/this-is-the-time-of-day-when-youre-least-productive-at-work/news-story/6112755aade6e0d87eac0a6f5b68dee5> Studies such as these indicate the four-day week does not reduce productivity because it recognises non-productive periods as better spent recuperating and seeks to maximise productive periods.

5. A four-day workweek will improve staff recruitment and retention and advance the employment of women

Supporters of the four-day workweek argue that it makes it easier for employers to attract and retain staff. They also argue that it helps to overcome some of the disadvantages that make it difficult for women to enter and remain in the workforce.

Its advocates repeatedly claim that operating on a four-day week basis is appealing to potential employees and will attract them to an employer that offers this. It is also claimed that workers will remain with a company for the benefits that come from a four-day workweek. Following a six-month international trial of the four-day workweek, 4 Day Week Global cofounder, Andrew Barnes, stated, 'Offering a 4-day week enabled [employers] to attract and retain better staff, especially in industries where the employment market is running a little bit hot... This was a key differentiator because the Millennial generation, especially, are looking for businesses where there is meaning and where they can have true engagement.' <https://ia.acs.org.au/article/2023/4-day-weeks-boost-employee-productivity--retention.html> When asked at the end of the six-month trial how much additional pay they would require in their next job to return to a five-day week, more than a third said 26-50 per cent more, about one in ten said more than 50 per cent, and more than one in 10 said no amount of money could lure them back. <https://www.afr.com/work-and-careers/workplace/clearer-heads-why-this-company-is-sticking-to-a-four-day-week-20230514-p5d8av> Similarly, a 2019 study at Henley Business School reported that almost two-thirds (63 percent) of employers said that providing a four-day working week has helped them to attract and retain talent. The same study surveyed employees on how much a four-day workweek would affect their decision on where to work. Responses showed that nearly three quarters (72 percent) agreeing it would be a firm driver when picking an employer. For Gen Z two thirds (67 percent) stated it would help them to decide on who to work for. <https://www.henley.ac.uk/news/2019/four-day-week-pays-off-for-uk-business>

Its supporters have also argued that the four-day workweek might help overcome some of the barriers which prevent many women from entering and remaining in employment. In a recent Shape Talent survey of more than 2,350 women in the United Kingdom, one of the most significant barriers women face was revealed as the double burden of paid and unpaid work. That is, juggling work demands with their family and household responsibilities. This double burden either prevented them from taking up paid employment or led to them having to leave. It was also seen as a major obstacle to women achieving promotion.

<https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1815882/four-day-week-help-organisations-achieve-gender-equality> Supporters of the four-day week claim there are several ways in which it can assist women. According to the Office for National Statistics in 2015, women provided 74 percent of all childcare time in the United Kingdom. A four-day week could allow both partners in a parenting relationship to contribute the extra day to childcare, sharing the responsibilities of home and family more evenly. <https://en-gb.workplace.com/blog/four-day-week> Real world results show that the four-day week can help to even out the excessive load of responsibility women carry for home management and child care. Survey data from evaluative studies done after Australian trials of the four-day workweek found that when comparing behaviour after and before the trial 27 percent of the men in heterosexual relationships increased their share of housework and 17 percent of men in heterosexual relationships increased their share of childcare (compared to 15 percent and 11 percent for women, respectively).

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60b956cbe7bf6f2efd86b04e/t/64654696c03e4c1fab3c25ba/1684358809096/4+Day+Week+ANZ+2023+Results.pdf>

Additionally, its advocates have argued that a four-day workweek might assist women attain and retain promotion positions. It would also benefit companies who would be able to continue profiting from the abilities of female staff. Mansoor Soomro, future-of-work researcher and the Enterprise and Innovation Lead at the Future of Work research unit at the Teesside University International Business School has examined workplaces that adopt flexible working arrangements, including reduced working hours and has seen the greater opportunity this offers women employees. Dr Soomro states, 'Organizations that embrace a four-day workweek send a powerful message: they are committed to gender equality and support the diverse needs of their employees. By empowering women with childcare responsibilities, we are not only creating a more inclusive and equitable workforce but also a better society.' <https://fortune.com/2023/10/24/4-day-workweek-best-way-bridge-gender-pay-gap-companies-living-proof-mansoor-soomro/>

Arguments against a four-day workweek

1. A four-day workweek is difficult to implement in many workplaces

Critics of the four-day workweek claim that it is unsuitable for many types of workplaces.

Opponents claim that the four-day workweek is only suited to some white-collar occupations. Its opponents point out that most companies that have taken part in recent successful trials for this new workday arrangement come from a narrow range of enterprises. Most participants were from the marketing, advertising and professional services industries where working hours are more easily reshuffled. Office-based corporate firms can shape their work hours and typically have a five-day workweek, totalling 35-40 hours. <https://theconversation.com/a-4-day-week-might-not-work-in-health-care-but-adapting-this-model-could-reduce-burnout-among-staff-213554http://tinyurl.com/3kbn6e74> Unlike many other occupations they are not facing an immediate or constant demand for a service.

Critics also argue that four-day workweeks only suit workplaces where non-essential activities can be reduced or eliminated. Tony Veal, an adjunct professor at the University of Technology Sydney, suggests in office workplaces, with more 'slack in the system', a four-day week is easier to implement. <https://www.smh.com.au/business/workplace/a-four-day-work-week-sounds-like-a-pipe-dream-but-can-it-work-just-as-well-as-five-20230517-p5d97s.html> Research from the United Kingdom suggests that the average British office worker is productive (directly on task) for only two hours and 53 minutes out of the working day. <https://www.vouchercloud.com/resources/office-worker-productivity> New Zealand investment and estate planning manager, Andrew Barnes, initiated the four-day week in his own company, and then more broadly, when he discovered his 240 employees were productive for only about a quarter of their average workday. <https://www.smh.com.au/business/workplace/the-four-day-workweek-pathway-to-productivity-or-unpaid-work-20200108-p53psr.html> Office-based jobs with significant downtime make it possible to reduce a day a week from the work schedule, where many other occupations do not.

Jobs that require workers to service an immediate or constant demand are not suited to a four-day week. Health care work, for example, is difficult to accommodate in a four-day workweek model. For many health-care workers, especially nurses, longer hours and shift work are the norm. Nurses are often expected to work on public holidays and may have to work for six or seven consecutive days before having a few days off, instead of the standard five days on, two days off. Also, many health-care services, such as hospitals and aged care

facilities, require staffing seven days a week. Any restructured work arrangements would have to ensure continuous, adequate staffing. Consequently, a direct transition from a five-day to a four-day workweek would not be possible in many health care facilities.

<https://theconversation.com/a-4-day-week-might-not-work-in-health-care-but-adapting-this-model-could-reduce-burnout-among-staff-213554> Karin Sanders, Professor in the School of Management and Governance at University of New South Wales Business School has also noted that for someone in construction, hospitality, education, or care sectors working within a four-day week structure may be much more difficult. For some of these professions (like construction) Professor Sanders says working on Saturday morning is unavoidable. <http://tinyurl.com/yn4m7494> These are all jobs where the worker is tied much more directly to meeting the immediate demand of a client or consumer.

Critics also note that, in manual jobs, workers could be put under unreasonable strain to produce five days' output in four. Kristin Schwab, writing for The Workplace in September 2023, noted, 'Physical work has physical limitations. You can only assemble so many cars in a day.' <https://www.marketplace.org/2023/09/19/is-a-four-day-workweek-possible-for-blue-collar-workers/> Ben Friedrich, a professor of strategy at Northwestern University, Illinois, is similarly concerned that a four-day workweek would create an excessive workload in jobs with little surplus capacity. Professor Friedrich stated, 'If it just means a faster assembly line and people getting really stressed and being put under a lot of pressure, I don't think that they would like that.' <https://www.marketplace.org/2023/09/19/is-a-four-day-workweek-possible-for-blue-collar-workers/>

Jobs where the employee is paid according to an hourly rate or performs short-term casual work are also not suited to a four-day workweek. Social commentators are concerned that the introduction of a four-day workweek might benefit those in secure, well-regulated employment but would discriminate further against other workers. They worry that if market forces are allowed to determine what happens, some companies will opt for a four-day week while Uber drivers and Amazon factory workers will continue to work longer and more unpredictable hours just to survive. <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/four-day-work-week-analysis>

Critics claim a four-day week is not viable for many or even most workers. Abigail Marks, Professor of the Future of Work at Newcastle University, has argued, 'Many workers will say it's unworkable for them due to the volume of work (bank debt collectors, university staff); or because they already work crippling 12-hour shifts and can't cram more into a day (delivery drivers, many self-employed workers); or don't earn enough to have the luxury of having three days off each week (care workers, gig-economy workers).' Marks also notes, 'Others will say it's impossible due to the nature of the work (emergency services, medical work and hospitality).' <https://theconversation.com/why-the-four-day-week-is-not-the-solution-to-modern-work-stress-167721>

2. A four-day workweek has a negative impact on customer service

Those with major reservations about the four-day workweek are concerned that it will result in poorer customer service.

Some critics of the four-day workweek believe that it will cause a reduction in the quality of products and services offered to customers as workers struggle to meet consumer demands in less time. According to research conducted by Steven Rydin, chief executive officer at B2Breviews.com there is concern among some businesses that the four-day week will have a

negative impact on customer service and satisfaction and will go against industry standards. Rydin found that this worry was shared by employees who were apprehensive about reduced availability of services or products and about longer response times creating frustrations among clients. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2023/05/05/study-reveals-5-top-reasons-business-owners-overwhelmingly-support-4-day-workweek/?sh=4da558123e13> Jo Ayoub, chief executive officer of Track Surveys, noted, 'If you're offering a four-day week, but it's actually a five-day week squashed into four long days, then customer service and experience will suffer. Tired, overworked employees don't offer a great customer experience!' <http://tinyurl.com/nhzj4fbs>

Reduced service availability is a significant problem undermining what can be offered to customers. Iain Fisher, director at global technology research and advisory firm ISG, has observed, 'An organisation that deploys a...four-day week may struggle to compete in customer experience and customer service against one that doesn't, simply due to availability of contact staff.' <http://tinyurl.com/nhzj4fbs> The same point was made by Kelly Tucker, the founder and managing director of the HR Star. Tucker wrote, 'A significant drawback of the 4-day workweek is that it may lead to decreased customer service availability during off-hours. With fewer employees on duty each day, companies could have difficulty maintaining the customer service level their customers anticipate.' <https://www.lanteria.com/news/4-day-work-week-pros-and-cons-comprehensive-guide> This can either lead to goods arriving late or to some services being available on fewer days, as with a restaurant or a hairdresser that opens only four days a week.

Reduced availability is highly problematic when an essential service is affected. A 2011 study conducted in Utah found that customers expressed dissatisfaction due to the closure of state government offices on Fridays, which restricted their access to services over a two-and-a-half-year period. After the Utah experiment, a Republican state representative, Mike Noel, warned, 'The biggest concerns came from people who had to access services on Friday. The business community didn't like it, and the court system didn't like it at all. ... The whole idea, it just didn't work very well... I think there is a place for flexible schedules, but you've got to be very, very careful and make sure the public's needs are met.' https://www.huffpost.com/entry/jon-huntsman-four-day-week_n_873877

Reduced availability to customers can be a critical factor determining whether businesses begin or continue a four-day workweek. Recent research has found that among United States companies that decided not to adopt the four-day week, 75 percent indicated not being available to customers was the biggest barrier. Michelle Hawley writing for Reworked in February 2023, noted, 'Many businesses today rely on 24/7 customer-business relationships. They want customer service agents and other staff available to source information, answer questions and keep customers satisfied. But switching to a new schedule could complicate things.' <https://www.reworked.co/employee-experience/the-4-day-workweek-is-it-worth-it/>

Availability to customers is a critical issue for small businesses supplying a local market. They may not have sufficient staff to be able to roster them across five days and so their access to customers will be reduced by a fifth. Small Business Organisations Australia has noted, 'Not every business can produce 38 hours of outcome in 30 hours. For instance, when customers expect a shop to be open and it is not, the customer will shop elsewhere. So many businesses are consumer driven, not process alone... The proposal to reduce hours means a further reduction in a business' ability to earn income.' <https://www.cosboa.org.au/post/four-day-work-week-requires-caution-and-impact-assessment-for-australian-small-business>

3. The four-day workweek will increase costs for employers and consumers

Opponents of the four-day week claim that it comes with significant financial costs for both the employer and the employee.

The four-day workweek reduces profit-making opportunities for some businesses. This is particularly costly for businesses described as ‘customer-facing’, that is, businesses that provide a service for customers that come to the business premises or that are performed in the client’s home. These face-to-face interactions mean that the service must be supplied when the customer is there to receive it. Small Business Organisation Australia has noted, ‘Not every business can produce 38 hours of outcome in 30 hours. For instance, when customers expect a shop to be open and it is not, the customer will shop elsewhere...The proposal to reduce hours means a further reduction in a business’ ability to earn income.’ <https://www.cosboa.org.au/post/four-day-work-week-requires-caution-and-impact-assessment-for-australian-small-business> Research by the Henley Business School in 2019, called Four Better or Four Worse found that the biggest barrier to implementing a four-day week for businesses was concerns about being unavailable for the customer (82 percent). The businesses are concerned that if they are not open and not providing a service, they will not make a profit. <https://www.business-live.co.uk/enterprise/four-day-week-good-arent-24463484>

Labour costs have also been a particular problem for companies trialling the four-day week. To overcome making a loss through closing one day in five, many companies have taken on more staff. Critics claim that this additional labour cost is also seriously cutting into profits. <https://www.business-live.co.uk/enterprise/four-day-week-good-arent-24463484> Liberty Vittert, professor of data science at Washington University in St. Louis, has explained the impact that these additional staffing costs can have. He states, ‘For any customer-facing business, a four-day week would be a nightmare. If your company is open only four days a week, or if it has significantly reduced operations one day each week, then how do people reach your staff? The result is that companies have to hire more staff, which in turn raises costs.’ <https://thehill.com/opinion/finance/4228933-a-four-day-work-week-would-destroy-everything-that-made-america-great/>

Overtime and increased staff payments are also an issue for employers. In France, employees working on a reduced day schedule are often required to work additional hours. This has been difficult for business owners as these employees must be paid overtime for work that would previously have fallen within their normal workweek.

<https://www.peoplehum.com/blog/cons-of-a-4-day-workweek> Where businesses currently have large numbers of part-time staff, transferring to a four-day week can be very costly, as workers paid for part-time employment might become eligible for full-time remuneration. Recruitment agency Head Resourcing have noted that for their business, shifting to a four-day week would have been too expensive. The company’s head has stated, ‘From a business leader’s perspective, the costs of implementing a four-day week for small to medium-sized businesses are disproportionate to the commercial benefits it may bring. In companies such as ours, where at least a fifth of our staff already work part-time hours, the cost of boosting their wage alone would be material.’ <https://www.headresourcing.com/blog/2022/07/the-hidden-cost-of-the-four-day-working-week?source=google.com>

Employers must also manage legal and compliance issues related to working hours, overtime, and labour laws when transitioning to a four-day work week. Getting the legal and

administrative advice to manage this correctly is another associated cost for the business owner. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/impact-employers-financial-considerations-4-day/>

Critics have argued that prices will rise for consumers as well. If business owners' costs have increased, these expenses are likely to be passed on to the customer. Peter Strong, the former chief executive of the Council of Small Business Organisations Australia, has stated. 'The four-day week would increase prices... This means the people working four days and getting paid for five will likely have to get a second job to pay for the price increases.'

<https://www.smartcompany.com.au/opinion/opinion-peter-strong-four-day-work-week-increase-prices-taxes/> Professor Adrian Palmer of the Henley Business School at the

University of Reading, has warned, 'Customers would need to accept rising costs of labour-intensive services where hourly wage rates are effectively increased by 20 percent. Some personal services – like a haircut or food delivery – may become a luxury to be enjoyed by groups benefiting from the four-day work week. Meanwhile, an underclass would work harder, only to afford automated versions of these services.'

<https://www.henley.ac.uk/news/2023/the-four-day-work-week-has-proved-a-success-but-are-customers-ready-for-it>

4. The four-day workweek will worsen many workers' conditions

Those who oppose the four-day workweek claim that it may make workers' lives more difficult rather than better. They argue that the trade-offs that will be required for a four-day workweek, with retained productivity, are likely to worsen employees' conditions.

Critics of the four-day workweek note that there is a disturbing tendency for employees to accept reductions in their conditions to gain the apparent benefit of a four-day week. A July 2023 Bankrate Economic Indicator poll conducted among United States workers found 89 percent of full-time workers who support a four-day workweek would sacrifice something at work in exchange. 54 percent indicated they would work longer hours and 16 percent said they would accept shorter holidays. 23 percent were prepared to work 'off-peak' hours (working evenings or weekends) and 10 percent were prepared to receive a pay cut.

<http://tinyurl.com/53sutw62> Opponents of the new development are concerned that it will result in workers being willing to accept an overall erosion of their working conditions.

Those who object to the four-day workweek argue that the continuous concentration workers must maintain over a four-day workweek, without extended hours, is not sustainable.

<https://www.uts.edu.au/news/business-law/challenging-hype-4-day-work-week> They claim that retaining the same level of productivity in a 20 percent shorter period means each of the four days at work becomes more demanding. Krystal, a British Internet services company which trialled the four-day workweek in 2023, reverted to the five-day week because employees found the new arrangement too onerous. The company's chief executive officer, Simon Blackler, said that members of his team tried 'admirably' to stay on top of their workloads and ensure that a normal service was maintained, but found that this led to a more stressful four days at work overall. <https://tech.co/news/4-day-week-stressful> In a recent British study completed for the Labour Party, economist Robert Skidelsky warned against increasing exhaustion as contracted employees crammed their work into four days.

<https://www.wired.co.uk/article/four-day-work-week-analysis> Marian Baird, professor of gender and employment relations at the University of Sydney, has warned that those unable to complete their work onsite in the time available may simply take it home and so undo the supposed benefit of increased leisure time. <https://www.smh.com.au/business/workplace/the-four-day-workweek-pathway-to-productivity-or-unpaid-work-20200108-p53psr.html>

The issue of increased stress may be an even greater problem for people who are working part-time when their employer adopts the four-day week. Employees already working reduced hours must complete their assigned tasks in even less time. Sydney aged care software company, Mirus Australia, trialled the four-day week in 2021 but changed back after six months. Mirus chief personnel officer, Mandy Lipschitz, stated, 'We found that part-timers squeezing their workweek, which was already really short, into less hours, was actually creating more stress.' <https://www.smh.com.au/business/workplace/a-four-day-work-week-sounds-like-a-pipe-dream-but-can-it-work-just-as-well-as-five-20230517-p5d97s.html> Research from the University of Queensland, which is part of the 4 Day Week Global joint study, has found several stress-related difficulties with the four-day workweek. These include, 'Condensing workloads into four days...[putting] a lot of pressure on workers and potentially increased monitoring, surveillance, and micro-managing of employees to ensure they complete workloads.' <https://business.uq.edu.au/momentum/4-day-work-week>

Critics note that many businesses have introduced a four-day workweek but not reduced the total number of hours their employees are required to work. They have retained a 36- or 40-hour workweek by lengthening the workdays to nine or ten hours. PerformHR has warned of the increased pressure that can result from longer working days. They note, 'Compressed working hours mean that the four days within a 4-day work week may become increasingly stressful. Monday to Thursday workdays will grow 90 minutes longer, meaning many employees will be working between 8am to 5pm (or 9am to 6pm), with only a half an hour lunch break in the middle.' <https://performhr.com.au/four-day-work-week/#:~:text=Compressed%20working%20hours%20mean%20that,lunch%20break%20in%20the%20middle>. Studies looking at the effect regular overtime have shown some of the negative consequences that come with increasing the length of the workday. A 2008 United States study found that long working hours are linked with higher anxiety and depression levels. It also found sleep problems were common after long working days, noting 'There is a negative association between number of hours of sleep during weekdays and extended workhours.' <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5312376> Working Overtime is Associated With Anxiety and Depression The Hordaland Health Study Additionally, it has been claimed that longer working days are associated with increased risk of injury at work, especially in manual occupations. This is because fatigue reduces concentration and increases the likelihood of accidents. <http://tinyurl.com/3h37taxk> Critics note that longer working days serve to undermine the supposed advantages of the four-day workweek.

5. The four-day workweek will reduce collaboration and teamwork

Critics of the four-day workweek argue that it can harm businesses by reducing the opportunity for workers to collaborate and function as a team.

Commentators have observed that collaboration and teamwork can be impeded by the four-day workweek. Business coach, Rachel Daphne, has warned, 'A shorter workweek may hinder teamwork and collaboration, as employees have fewer days to meet and discuss projects. This in turn could slow down decision-making processes and potentially harm project outcomes, especially in industries where teamwork is crucial.' https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/four-day-work-week-case-against-business-life-coach/?trk=public_post_main-feed-card_feed-article-content

Critics claim that the four-day week's dampening effect on collaboration is a significant problem because collaboration is so important to business success. Business psychologists and corporate leaders have stressed the value of teamwork in the workplace. British business and corporate hardware consultants, BrightHR, have noted, 'Multiple minds working on difficult tasks or projects will achieve better results and offer different solutions than individuals working alone... Collaboration fuels creativity by combining differing perspectives and experiences to generate innovative solutions.'

<https://www.brighthr.com/articles/culture-and-performance/teamwork/the-importance-of-teamwork-in-the-workplace/> Research has indicated that in a commercial environment where remote and hybrid (onsite-offsite) work is becoming more common, collaboration in the workplace has become even more important. American financial market analyst, John J Murphy has stressed that teamwork and collaboration are central to corporations' success. He has stated, 'Each individual has unique gifts, and talents and skills. When we bring them to the table and share them for a common purpose, it can give companies a real competitive advantage.' <https://www.atlassian.com/blog/teamwork/the-importance-of-teamwork>

Organisational psychologist, Constance Hadley, of Boston University, has noted that there will be structural impediments to collaborative work as part of the four-day week. Firstly, there is the obvious difficulty of reduced opportunities to meet during the shorter week; however, difficulties may be compounded where staff do not all have the same workdays, and the coordination of their respective rosters affects any decision to collaborate. Hadley sees as a significant element in the success of any reduced working week 'how much work is dependent upon collaborative work that requires coordinating schedules across individuals on one less day a week.' <https://www.bu.edu/articles/2022/pros-and-cons-of-the-four-day-workweek/> In businesses where collaboration is crucial, the four-day week may not be a viable option.

The four-day workweek could also reduce social cohesion between people working for the same company. American consulting and investment firm, Mercer, has considered the advantages and disadvantages of various workplace structures. One of its observations about the four-day week is 'Less time in the workplace could mean that employees have less chance to socialize and collaborate with colleagues, which could have a negative impact on their social well-being.' <https://www.mercer.com/en-be/insights/people-strategy/future-of-work/the-four-day-week-a-win-win-for-both-employers-and-employees/> Employers have been warned against seeing social interactions between workers as a distraction and a waste of time. Harvard University's MIT Management School's employer toolkit states, 'The quality of social relationships in the workplace matters for employee health and well-being. The evidence shows that positive social connections at work—supportive interactions, a sense of belonging, and effective teamwork—improve worker well-being and can protect against harmful effects of workplace stress. Positive relationships at work are also good for the bottom line. Research shows that these connections can increase productivity by improving how employees work together to get the job done.'

<https://workwellbeinginitiative.org/module-4-moderating-work-demands>

During the 2022-2023 British trial of the four-day week several downsides were noted due to a lack of social interaction between staff. A common strategy employed by these companies during the trial was interruption-free 'focus periods'. Sociologist Professor Brendan Burchell, who led the University of Cambridge research on the trial noted, 'Workers were much less inclined to kill time, and actively sought out technologies that improved their productivity.' However, the Oxford research found that not all companies involved found this intense focus

desirable. Some creative companies expressed disquiet over reduced worktime conviviality due to 'focus time' and argued that unstructured chat often generates new ideas.
<https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/fourdayweek>

Further implications

The increasing expansion of automation and AI in virtually all areas of human occupation is both a boon and a threat. On the one hand it offers release from the boring and onerous jobs that many people still perform, as well as promising the far more rapid and accurate completion of tasks currently regarded as requiring skilled human input. A downside of this is the displacement of human employees. Different patterns of work, including the four-day working week, are one way of ensuring continuing occupations for what may well be hundreds of millions of people. <https://seo.ai/blog/ai-replacing-jobs-statistics#:~:text=With%20projections%20that%20AI%20could,trillion%20by%20the%20same%20year.>

A 2017 study of 46 countries and 800 occupations by the McKinsey Global Institute estimated that up to 800 million global workers are likely to lose their jobs by 2030. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-42170100> The study found that one-fifth of the global work force will be affected and suggested that a third of the workforce in richer nations like Germany and the United States may need to retrain for other jobs. Machine operators and food workers will be hit hardest; however, the study suggests tasks carried out by mortgage brokers, paralegals, accountants, and some back-office staff are especially vulnerable to automation. The authors forecast that in the United States 39 to 73 million jobs may be eliminated, while in the United Kingdom, 20 percent of jobs could be automated over the same period. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-42170100>

However, some commentators have suggested that if AI is used in a people-centric manner, rather than as simply a means of improving efficiency and maximising profit, then human beings could enjoy vastly improved lives. Rather than operating in competition with human workers, AI could be integrated into workplaces where technology and human beings interact productively. Jonathan Sears, of EY Global People Advisory Services Global Technology, has argued, 'It's crucial to blend operational gains with a people-first mindset.'
https://www.ey.com/en_id/workforce/how-artificial-intelligence-can-augment-a-people-centered-workforce

Sears suggests that rather than AI superseding human employees, AI technology should be utilised where it performs best and be used to assist human workers in developing those skills that are unique to them. He suggests that AI built-for-purpose tools be used to automate the gathering and interpretation of data, summarising findings and offering recommendations from it. However, he notes, people would make adjustments and the final assessments of the work. https://www.ey.com/en_id/workforce/how-artificial-intelligence-can-augment-a-people-centered-workforce He also suggests that AI could play a part in helping people train for the functions they would perform. He suggests that generative AI's ability to identify training opportunities for employees could help to create a 'career development track' that will let employees gain the additional interpersonal and creative skills that are most needed by the companies for which they work. <http://tinyurl.com/2wedux97>

These workplaces where human employees and AI interact in the performance of sophisticated tasks may be difficult to imagine. However, one thing that does seem apparent is that even in future workplaces where human beings occupy central roles, the number of

tasks they are required to perform will be far fewer than in current occupations. Reduced working hours is an obvious response to these changed circumstances. In research published in November 2023, it was forecast that AI-led productivity gains could enable 8.8 million United Kingdom workers to have a four-day workweek by 2033, while just under 28 million could have their working hours reduced by 10 percent at the same time.

<http://tinyurl.com/5eervyej> Will Stronge, the research director of Autonomy, an international enterprise software company, has stated, 'A shorter working week is the most tangible way of ensuring that AI delivers benefits to workers as well as companies. If AI is to be implemented fairly across the economy, it should usher in a new era of four-day working weeks for all.'

<http://tinyurl.com/5eervyej>

For this world of improved work and greater leisure to occur, employers will need to place their human workforces and the overall benefit of society ahead of increased profit. Stronge noted there is often a sense of pessimism around AI-driven productivity gains, with most conversations emphasising the potential for job losses and degraded working conditions; however, such gains could also deliver shorter working weeks for many while maintaining their pay and performance. He argues, 'Such a policy offers the possibility of avoiding mass unemployment (and all the social and political ill effects of this), reducing widespread mental health illnesses as well as physical ailments associated with overwork and creating significant additional free time for democracy, leisure consumption, and social cohesion in general.'

<http://tinyurl.com/5eervyej>

Governments and corporations at all levels must act for the good of the total society, rather than the very wealthiest elements within it. A thoughtfully implemented four-day workweek should be part of this action.