

Is a Four-Day Workweek Good for my Business?

10 min read



The mainstream buzz around the concept of a four-day workweek first gained steam in 2019 when Microsoft Japan reported experiencing a 40% increase in productivity, 23% reduction in electricity costs, and an effective halving of the average 60-minute meeting cut down to 30 minutes – all after cutting their employees' workweek down to four eight-hour days and continuing to pay them as if they were working five eight-hour days [1].

Key Takeaways

- **Why Shift to a Shorter Workweek? The Benefits of 4-Day Workweeks:** 23% of the businesses they surveyed had implemented a true four-day workweek with no operations or reduced operations during a full 72 hours of the week...
- **The Drawbacks: How Does the 4-Day Workweek Fall Short?:** A SHRM study mentioned above found that 39% of respondents reported disfavoring the four-day workweek due to fears about not being able to maintain...
- **Important Questions to Consider Before Deciding to Implement a 4-Day Workweek:** Will You Keep Working 40 Hours or Cut It to a 32-Hour Workweek?

These numbers were shocking enough to effectively gain the collective attention of the business world (and that of workers around the world, too).

Just a few months after this news broke, the pandemic hit and forced the world into the biggest alternative office experiment ever. Today, as we reemerge, employees have gained a new perspective on their priorities in life and their expectations of the businesses they work for, flexibility in their jobs, and their demands for a better work-life balance have changed significantly.

Amid the changing desires of the workforce and the unprecedented turnover rates of the Great Resignation, business leaders are attempting to find their footing within the new normal of our post-pandemic era, assessing alternative office structures, remote work opportunities, and the possibility of introducing a shorter workweek.

Why Shift to a Shorter Workweek? The Benefits of 4-Day Workweeks

A nonprofit organization associated with Oxford University, 4 Day Week Global has launched a worldwide program during which they assist companies around the world with the implementation of an experimental shift to a four-day workweek. Thirty-eight companies in the U.S. and Canada are participating in the six-month program this year. Throughout the period, most businesses reduce their workweeks to 32 hours (rather than having employees work four 10-hour days). Each business is matched with a mentor

company that has already participated in the experiment, business leaders attend workshops where they learn and strategize about more efficient ways of working, and each business works with researchers at either Boston College or Oxford University to measure the impact on employee well-being and productivity [2].

4 Day Week Global encourages businesses to implement their 100-80-100 model (meaning workers receive 100% of their pay and work 80% of the time while being expected to maintain at least 100% of previous productivity). According to 4 Day Week Global, this offers benefits such as [3]:

- Shifting the basis of productivity measurements from hours worked to results
- Increased productivity across several industries
- Improved work-life balance for employees
- Improved physical and mental health of employees
- Reduced worker burnout, stress, and absenteeism
- Happier employees
- Increased job satisfaction
- Higher quality employee engagement (Employees focus on achieving targets rather than the amount of time spent at work.)
- Competitive hiring advantages
- Reduced employee turnover
- Increased sustainability through reduced energy use and less commuting
- Reduced childcare costs for employees
- Facilitates more equal distribution of household and childcare responsibilities for employees
- An innovative, forward-thinking approach

4 Week Global offers a long list of potential benefits, but what do the actual numbers say?

We mentioned Microsoft Japan's numbers above, but they are far from the only company to try out a shorter workweek and experience positive results. Another notable example, Perpetual Guardian (a New Zealand trust management company) reported a 20% increase in productivity, 45% improvement in work-life balance, and 27% reduction in stress at work [4].

According to data from SHRM [5]:

- 23% of the businesses they surveyed had implemented a true four-day workweek with no operations or reduced operations during a full 72 hours of the week.

- 60% reported the need for fewer meetings as a result of increased employee satisfaction and productivity.

A Qualtrics survey of 1,000 workers found [6]:

- 92% of employees would be in favor of their workplace implementing a four-day workweek
- 88% thought their work-life balance would improve
- 79% thought their mental health would improve
- 82% thought they would be more productive

Additionally, 81% said they would be more loyal to an employer with a four-day work week, and 82% anticipated a four-day workweek would help their employers hire new talent.

Read More: [Your Meetings Are Costing You More Than You Think: Lessons to Increase Productivity and Profitability](#)

According to FlexJobs 2019 Annual Survey that looked specifically at flexible work, 80% of employees surveyed said that they would be loyal to their employers if they offered more flexible options for work schedules, 74% said that work-life balance is one of the top factors they consider when assessing job opportunities, 30% said they would leave a job if it wasn't flexible enough, and 45% reported being interested in trying out an alternative work schedule [7].

It can also be argued that, due to having an extra day off each week, a four-day workweek offers some additional flexibility over a five-day workweek. There are, however, other types of flexibility to consider, such as remote work, hybrid offices, which part of the day employees can do their work, and paid time off benefits.

In fact, the survey from Qualtrics did not equate flexibility with a four-day workweek and found that 50% of respondents said they would rather have more flexibility compared to 47% who preferred to have a four-day workweek.

The Drawbacks: How Does the 4-Day Workweek Fall Short?

Despite its benefits, the shorter workweek is not without potential drawbacks. Some of which the employees surveyed by Qualtrics weren't afraid to voice themselves:

- Split almost evenly, 46% think a shorter week would negatively impact sales and revenue compared to 47% who think it wouldn't.
- 55% think customers would be frustrated by a four-day workweek

Additionally, the SHRM study mentioned above found that 39% of respondents reported disfavoring the four-day workweek due to fears about not being able to maintain social connections associated with work, concerns about distractions from work, and worries about potentially limited productivity.

Read More: [Are Employees More Productive at Home?](#)

Research from scientists at Gallup, also actually suggests that a four-day workweek might actually lower employee engagement. Their data seems to suggest that the trouble with employee engagement, happiness, productivity, and burnout is not necessarily a result of the amount of time or the number of days spent at work but the actual quality of the workplace, the work being done, and the workplace culture.

As Jim Harter, Ph.D., and Chief Scientist for Gallup's Workplace Management, puts it, "While four day work weeks may be a good idea for some individuals or organizations, policies that seek to control work-life "balance" are based on two dubious assumptions: 1) that work is inevitably a bad thing that should be reduced or avoided and 2) that we know what will work effectively for *all* people." [8]

Important Questions to Consider Before Deciding to Implement a 4-Day Workweek

Despite its drawbacks, the four-day workweek does offer attractive advantages – especially in today's world amidst the challenging hiring and employee retention climate of the Great Resignation in which workers' expectations and desires in a workplace have changed significantly. However, if you believe the advantages of a four-day workweek outweigh the disadvantages for your business, consider the following key questions before you actually make any changes.

What Are Your Goals or Why Do You Want to Change Your Workweek?

Before making a major change to your company's standard schedule, it's important to understand exactly why you want to do it and what results you want to see. Consider whether you're making the change because you want to attract more applicants, reduce your time to hire, retain staff, improve productivity, increase worker happiness, or to give your employees more flexibility?

Before making the switch, be sure that you have clearly defined goals and a plan for how reducing a workweek could directly lead to accomplishing those goals.

How Will You Measure Success?

In addition to establishing goals for the switch, you also need a strategy for measuring results and determining success. While productivity and hiring metrics are fairly straightforward, it can be more difficult to assess employee happiness, satisfaction, and engagement. Be sure you measure these metrics before you make any changes so that you have a baseline against which you can evaluate changes and determine if the changes represent improvements or setbacks.

[Are you measuring how your people drive profit?](#)

[You can't manage what you don't measure.](#)

[This guide has the top 6 KPI charts you should have at your fingertips to help you drive performance and profitability in your business...](#)

Will You Keep Working 40 Hours or Cut It to a 32-Hour Workweek?

The 4 Day Week Global Program touts a 100-80-100 model of the four-day workweek, with which workers only work 32 hours each week but receive the same pay and are expected to accomplish the same amount of work.

Other companies that shift to a four-day workweek decide to continue requiring employees to work 40 hours per week with four 10-hour days. They, of course, receive the same pay and are expected to complete the same amount of work.

While the extra day off in a 40-hour week provides workers with more flexibility, this model does not necessarily do anything to reduce wasted time or increase efficiency as a result of the time constraints that a 32-hour week poses. It remains to be seen whether or not adding an extra day off while not eliminating inefficiencies and not reducing time at the office is a better or worse model than the 32-hour workweek in terms of productivity, worker happiness, and employee engagement.

Will This Change Apply to Everyone?

Before making a change to your workweek schedule, you need to sit down and think about how it will logistically work for all of your different levels and positions of employees.

For example, when you shift to a four-day workweek, will everyone be constrained to the same schedule? Will managers still be required to work five days a week in order to continue managing various shifts of employees or will you reduce your days of operation to enable everyone to have a true 3-day weekend?

How Will It Affect Your Customers?

You also need to consider how a change like this might affect your customers and clients who are accustomed to dealing with your business or a specific contact at your company five days a week. Will a reduced workweek be detrimental to your ability to provide high-quality service? How will you effectively communicate the changes to your customers? What adjustments will you need to make to continue providing the same quality of products and services without falling short of your clients' expectations?

Read More: [More Than You Think: The Cost Of Employee Turnover](#)

How Will You Make a 4-Day Workweek Possible in Your Industry?

In some industries, a four-day workweek is more challenging than in others. While it is fairly straightforward to implement in certain service-based businesses such as finance, marketing, consulting, etc. It is more difficult to implement in businesses in which productivity strongly correlates with manufacturing timelines or customers coming through the door. It's also difficult to maintain in businesses where your business model is based on your availability, such as in the hospitality industry.

In these industries and types of businesses, shifting to a four-day workweek might mean hiring additional employees and juggling more complicated employee schedules to ensure that you maintain adequate worker coverage while shifts change seamlessly throughout the seven-day week.

Implementing Successful Human Capital Management Strategies to Grow Your Business

Whether you hope to improve the quality of your employees' lives, attract more employees and improve with a great culture, or increase productivity by implementing a better system of benchmark-setting, recognition, and rewards, you need to be able to measure the progress you make toward your human capital management goals.

Having a solid back office that's equipped with the right tools, technology, and people can help ensure you're able to gather financial data while accurately tracking employee time and productivity in order to measure the progress you make on your path to success – no matter if you choose to walk it Monday through Friday or Monday through Thursday.