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Article

Time to ditch the 9 to 5 and embrace the 4-day week?

Smart management of flexible working may ensure productivity and performance aren't reduced if we want to cut the working week

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What a way to make a living

Dolly Parton was on to something when she bemoaned that working 9-5 would drive you crazy if you let it. The way many people work today is changing, and it's not just about going part-time or hot-desking. The shared office space company, WeWork now occupies more office space in Manhattan than any other company as it responds to different demands from workers and companies. And there are increasing calls to reduce the length of the working week, not least in the UK. Recently, the Trades Union Congress claimed that eight out of ten British workers want to reduce working time in the future, with nearly half opting for a four-day working week, without loss of pay, with the TUC suggesting new technology will make work more efficient and profitable.

And while people embrace working from different locations, [behavioural studies](#) suggest remote working won't necessarily stifle innovation and productivity if you manage it correctly. Creativity in how people manage their contributions to organisations is open for continued exploration.

[The TUC calls for new tech to pave way to shorter working week](#)

Want to move ahead?

Trialling four-day weeks is already underway. Results suggest preparation and re-organisation of our ways of working might be key to that extended weekend. While there are no doubt concerns that such a dramatic reduction of office time would reduce performance or impact productivity, these fears were proven wrong in a recent trial in [New Zealand](#). Perpetual Guardian cut workers' hours to 32 from 40. They found that staff productivity didn't change, punctuality improved and people took fewer breaks.

The team implemented productivity measures aimed to ensure the continued performance of the group before freeing up one day per week. These changes were found to have such a positive effect in prompting people to question their ways of working and developing more efficient approaches prior to the trial, that the removal of a whole workday each week did not interfere with overall [performance](#).

And results like these aren't restricted to New Zealand, organisations in many countries have been trailing this type of experiment recently. In Iceland, the city government in Reykjavik found that costs and productivity remained the same with half a work day removed each week while in [Sweden](#)

they are trailing similar ideas across a range of sectors and roles.

[The New York Times: A 4-Day Workweek? A Test Run Shows a Surprising Result](#)

Try to come to life

Research suggests spending large amounts of time in the office can make us unhappier and less productive than we would be otherwise. When we are more productive we are more likely to be happier in our work and save costs associated with employees changing jobs.

Work-life balance is a top priority for many

Work-life balance is a top priority for many and the trend towards increased efficiency isn't new. Back in 1930, the economist John Maynard Keynes predicted that technical progress could lead to a 15-hour work week. We're not there yet, but being able to improve efficiency and reduce work hours isn't so surprising if we look at a 2016 [survey](#) which found that the average office worker in the UK is actually productive for all of 2 hours and 53 minutes out of their 8 hour work day; It seems like we may have some room to play with here.

All taking and no giving?

But while one less day of 'work' per week may be the dream for some not everyone will welcome it. The design of efficiency improvements sparks some interesting questions: How exactly would you reduce your work week by a fifth? Which processes could be automated? Can you really have fewer meetings? Do we just work more hours Monday to Thursday? Would all this cause increased fatigue or even less productivity at times?

While it's a tempting thought and some preliminary trial results are interesting, there's still no firm evidence whether a company or even country would benefit from a reduction in work days. But if new technology does increase productivity and ultimately profit, we could soon see a considerable change to the traditional 9 to 5. Perhaps Dolly Parton will have to rework the lyrics of the song that made her so famous.

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