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direct
scotland

4-DAY WORKING WEEK REPORT

FOUR-DAY WEEK

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In recent years, employers and policy-makers have seen a significant rise in demand for increased flexibility among working practices. Within this category, one proposal gaining particular traction concerns a reduction in working hours via the implementation of a 4-day working week.

Arguments in favour of the 4-day week are typically grounded in worrying statistics pertaining to the negative impacts of long working hours on employee health and productivity.

According to research conducted by Eurostat, the 2019/2020 average for the number of hours worked by full-time UK employees totalled 36.5 per week. This figure was among the highest in Europe, with the European average totalling 36.2 hours per week. Within the same timeframe, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimated that, within the UK, work-related stress, depression, or anxiety accounted for a staggering 55% of all working days lost to work-related ill health in the UK.

This isn't particularly surprising; countless peer-reviewed studies have reported strong evidence in favour of a causal relationship between longer working hours and diminished employee mental health. Several systematic reviews examining the relationship between long working hours and work-related mental health have concluded that long working hours are associated with depressive states, anxiety, and sleep impediments.

These conditions are detrimental to employee wellbeing, of course, but they also have negative impacts on organisational economics and productivity. High levels of work-related stress and mental illness risk correspondingly high rates of staff absence and attrition; both of which carry significant organisational costs.

It is therefore not only employees which bear the brunt of prolonged working hours; employers also experience detriment as a result of it.

The 4-day working week is proposed as an organisational solution to these challenges.

There are thereby two central principles of the 4-day working week:

- (a) employees work four out of five weekdays, and
- (b) employees do not suffer a loss of pay as a result of their reduced working hours.

By carving out time for staff to invest in their personal well-being and cultivate a healthier work-life balance, organisations adopting the 4-day week strive to ameliorate both adverse pressure on full-time employees and the consequent decreases in organisational productivity, efficacy, and finance.

THE BENEFITS



There is compelling research indicative of the fact that the 4-day week is successful in its aim; that the implementation of the 4-day week cultivates a variety of valuable benefits within committed organisations – both for employees and employers.

Most straightforwardly, it has been found that the work-life balance of employees improved by 34% during the first four weeks alone following the transition to the 4-day week. By allowing employees an extra day per week to invest in their personal lives, be it by volunteering, spending time with family, catching up on household work, engaging in physical exercise, or pursuing further education and development, higher levels of staff report that they feel healthier, better-rested, and pursuing well-rounded lives that enable them to take more enjoyment from their work.

Importantly, however, employees are not the only beneficiaries of the 4-day week. Employers stand to gain significantly from the implementation of the shorter week given clear indications of increased employee productivity. Indeed, rather than undergoing a loss of work that would otherwise be carried out on the fifth weekday, organisations have found that employees tend to use their time more efficiently to complete their tasks within the shorter timeframe of their 4-day week. That is, employees – encouraged and empowered by their elevated mental and physical health – are far more likely to be capable of consistently delivering high-quality results when given the extra day to invest in their own wellbeing. Evidence suggests, therefore, that employee and organisational performance do not suffer under the 4-day working week.

ADVICE DIRECT SCOTLAND'S 4-DAY WORKING WEEK

Notably, the above findings closely cohere with our organisational experience at Advice Direct Scotland (ADS).

Increased Staff Retention

The rate of employees leaving the company dropped by a third since 2018. From this, it is clear that adopting the 4-day week has drastically improved the retention of our staff.



In 2018, ADS led the way in innovative working practices by implementing the 4-day working week, and has seen several quantifiable benefits throughout the years since.

Attraction of Quality Employees

The standard of applicants applying for roles across our organisation has increased considerably. Since 2018, almost every new member of staff has stated that our work-life balance offer was a decisive factor in their decision to apply.



Increased Productivity

Staff were tasked with keeping a record of their own and their team's productivity as we moved to a new working model. Across the board, all departments reported a substantial increase in productivity and output.



Improved Customer Service

Since implementing the 4-day week, we've recorded a significant increase in the quality of our customer service and the corresponding satisfaction of our customers.



Reduced Employee Absence

Following the transition, our rates of employee absence have been diminishing drastically, decreasing by a total of **71%** between 2017 and 2019, while the employee average number of absent days was reduced by **55%**.



The 4-day working week, then, has cultivated a host of impressive business improvements and growth across our organisation. Our increased capture and retention of expertise, combined with elevated levels of productivity and customer satisfaction, marks an exceptional and positive change for ADS.

Crucially, it is our belief that the above business improvements are a direct result of increases in employee wellbeing brought about by the 4-day week. Following consultation and feedback processes, nearly all of our staff have reported experiencing both a reduction in their work-related stress and a marked increase in their enjoyment of work-related activities. Relatedly, our employees have cited their ability to spend more time with family and loved ones as a significant contributor to their stronger sense of wellbeing and satisfaction, alongside increased financial savings brought about by reductions in their overall commuting costs.

Overall, then, implementing the four-day working week has been a wise investment for our organisation; not only for improving the well-being of employees, but for maximising our professional output and strengthening the organisation as a direct consequence.



As with all substantial developments to working practices, implementation of the 4-day week requires careful planning and coordination across the organisation. Drawing from our institutional experience, ADS recommends the following strategies to ensure a successful transition to reduced working hours:

Staff Engagement and Consultation

A strong foundation of staff support is required for smooth implementation of the 4-day week. In order for the transition to be successful, it is key for everybody in the organisation to be on board and embrace the change.

Ensuring that staff both are engaged in the set-up and review of the trial and have effective means of raising questions and concerns will enable the organisation to adopt new practices in a democratic and efficient manner.

HOW TO SUCCEED IN IMPLEMENTING THE 4-DAY WEEK

Minimising Risk and Disruption

We implemented our new working model without a single drop in service levels for any of our clients. Effective planning is necessary to ensure that your operations and customers are not affected.

Process & Operational Planning

Relatedly, it is essential to plan for factors which influence work patterns for staff (e.g. end-of-year financial reporting, ensuring that departmental operations can be maintained in the absence of particular staff members, etc.).

Continual Review and Adaptation:

Beyond the 4-day week, ADS have also recognised the importance of a commitment to continual investment in and review of current working practices. Adopting the 4-day working week provides an excellent start, but consistent adaptation to the changing needs of our businesses and staff is crucial to ensuring long-term growth and success. On this note, we have implemented a new model of working, 'Two In, Two Out'. Following the return to our offices, our staff now have the option to continue working from home two days out of their 4-day week.

CASE STUDIES

For our staff, the implementation of the 4-day working week has brought immeasurable value. We've compiled some case studies below to illustrate, from a range of perspectives, how the reduction of working hours has positively impacted the lives of our staff.

Colin Mathieson: Media and Marketing Executive

"The 4-Day working week was one of the things that attracted me to the organisation. I was studying for an undergraduate degree full-time, and the 4-Day working week allowed me to complete my studies, whilst earning a full-time wage.

After graduating, it then afforded me the time to take driving lessons on my midweek day off, allowing me to learn another valuable skill whilst working full-time."



Julie Murphy: Team Manager

"Working a 4-day week has provided me with a fantastic work-life balance. I have a young daughter and having 3 days off a week means I can spend more time with her than I expected. It has cost us less in childcare - whilst still earning a full-time salary.

This additional time/money has benefited us greatly and we have managed to renovate our house and enjoy trips around Scotland - neither of which would have been possible whilst working a regular 5-day week."



David Rutherford: Quality and Compliance Manager

“If you take home-working out of the equation completely – so pre-lockdown – I went from 5 days a week to 4 days a week in the office, which meant one less train of train travel to pay.

That would cost me a tenner. We’re not talking thousands of pounds, but that’s a tenner a week saved on train fare and petrol down to the train station. I’m on the same salary and I have a little bonus from less commuting.”



Eilidh Harrison: Contract Executive

“Since joining the organisation, I’ve been able to work full-time alongside completing my Ph.D. – a feat which would have been impossible were I working the full 5 days!

The 4-day working week has thereby allowed me to dedicate sufficient time to my own personal and professional development, engage in meaningful full-time work, and maintain a positive work-life balance throughout.”





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