

Is it time for the four-day week?

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For some people, the four-day work week is a dream come true: “A long weekend every week? Where do I sign up?”

For others it’s likely to trigger stress or uneasiness: “How on earth will I be able to get all my work done with one less day?”

With a string of countries, including Scotland, Spain, Iceland and most recently Belgium, allowing workers to trial a four-day work week, is Australia next? Is it possible to implement a four-day (32-hour) work week without losing productivity or output quality?

There is some evidence: in 2019 Microsoft Japan trialled working four days a week, with a three-day weekend, but with workers on full pay. The result, the company says, was a productivity boost of more than 40 per cent.

Another example is Iceland. Between 2015 and 2019, a study of 2500 workers was conducted to see if shortened workdays led to more productivity and a happier workforce. The results were positive and led to significant change in Iceland, where people had reported long working hours (on average 44 hours a week). Forbes reported last year that about 86 per cent of the working population now has reduced hours or the right to reduced hours.

Unsurprisingly, worker stress and burnout have lessened, and there has been a great improvement in work-life balance.

So, what tools and strategies can we use to ensure the same output when working eight hours less a week?

The 15 per cent rule

Adaptive capacity is the ability to take advantage of change, respond to disruptive circumstances positively and to cope when the unexpected happens. Exactly how much adaptive capacity should we aim to leave ourselves so we don't end up with wasted capacity? The magic number is 15 per cent. Aiming to work at 85 per cent capacity leaves us a 15 per cent buffer for any unexpected tasks or situations that may occur.

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Most of us are most alert and energetic in the mornings, making it the perfect time to tackle our most complicated or creative work. If you feel as though you're struggling to make headway with important projects, try blocking out the first two hours of every day for deep work and protect this time from emails, pointless meetings and easier administrative tasks.

Limit time spent on emails

If you feel you are constantly spending your working hours answering emails without enough time to get your real work done, it may be time to try a different approach. Perhaps check your inbox only once or twice a day, or for only 10 minutes at the top of every hour, giving you protected time to focus on deep work.

25-minute meeting policy

For every meeting you attend it should be clear what your role or purpose is and what actions you need to take as a result. Having only 25 minutes creates clarity about what's important. It forces us to think about the top two or three things to discuss. Having a sense of urgency drives immediate action.

While many companies are sceptical about allowing workers to clock in for eight fewer hours a week, the results of boosted productivity, happiness and reduced burnout are worth considering. It may be time to drop the "rise and grind" hustle culture and try a new way of working grounded in balance, efficiency and longevity.

Donna McGeorge is a productivity coach and speaker. Her latest book, [The 1 Day Refund](#), is available now.