The Four-Day Workweek

Four days on, but for whom?

SPEAK FIRST | Talk in pairs. There are no right or wrong opinions.

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1. Which would you prefer: four shorter days, five shorter days or more paid holiday?
2. When have you worked harder but achieved less? What was the problem?
3. Who might benefit least from a four-day week, and how could we make it fairer?

1 WORD POWER

Match the six useful expressions to their meanings. Then use two of them in your own sentences.

1. burnout _____
2. workforce _____
3. reorganise _____
4. compress _____
5. coverage _____
6. resentment _____

A. fit something into a smaller period or space

B. the staffing needed to provide a service continuously

C. anger arising from a sense of unfair treatment

D. exhaustion linked to prolonged workplace stress

E. all the employees of an organisation or sector

F. change the arrangement of tasks, people or resources

2 READ THE STORY

Four days on, but for whom?

Imagine finishing work on Thursday without taking a pay cut. Supporters of the four-day week argue that employees could regain time for family, rest and personal interests while employers gain a more motivated workforce. Yet the debate is not simply about replacing Friday with leisure. It raises difficult questions about productivity, customer expectations and who gets access to flexibility.

One influential experiment took place in the United Kingdom in 2022. Sixty-one organisations, employing about 2,900 people, tested a shorter working week over six months. The aim was to reduce working hours without reducing salaries. To make the change possible, some teams cut unnecessary meetings, reconsidered priorities and reorganised shifts. In other words, they tried to redesign work rather than compress the same workload into fewer days.

The results were encouraging: 56 of the 61 organisations said they intended to continue. In surveys, 71% of employees reported lower levels of burnout, while 39% said they felt less stressed than at the

beginning of the trial. These figures suggest improvements in well-being, although they do not establish that every employee benefited equally or that every employer would see the same outcome.

There is a significant difference between jobs whose output can be measured in completed projects and jobs requiring constant physical coverage. An office may be able to replace lengthy meetings with focused work. A hospital cannot cancel Friday's emergencies, and a small retailer may not have the budget for an additional shift. Unless employers redesign staffing carefully, shorter working hours could create extra pressure for those still on duty.

Another question concerns fairness. Knowledge workers may be offered flexibility while care workers, drivers and hospitality staff remain tied to fixed hours. Some employers might respond by offering different forms of flexibility instead of exactly the same schedule. But a policy that benefits only one group could create resentment, especially if the less flexible jobs are also less well paid.

The trial is also worth reading critically. Organisations volunteered to participate and had support while making changes, so the findings should not be treated as proof that every workplace can adopt the model immediately. Even so, they offer a reason to experiment rather than dismiss the idea.

Perhaps the most constructive proposal is a carefully monitored pilot: protect pay, set realistic service standards, involve staff in decisions and agree in advance how success will be measured. The real test is not whether four days sounds appealing; it is whether a shorter week can be effective, sustainable and fair.

3 DID YOU CATCH THAT?

Answer in your own words. Then compare with a partner and find evidence in the text.

1. What distinguishes the trial from simply working four longer days?
2. Why does the article contrast office jobs with hospital work?
3. What qualification does the writer make about the statistics?
4. Which policy would best address the concerns raised?

4 LET'S TALK

Choose the questions that interest your group. Give reasons, ask follow-up questions and respond to different opinions.

1. When have you found that fewer meetings or better planning made a real difference?
2. Would you rather have a three-day weekend or a small pay rise? Why?
3. Does working longer necessarily mean doing better work?
4. When might shorter hours simply create a more stressful workday?
5. Can a policy that helps most employees still be unfair to a few?
6. How can a shop stay open every day without making anyone work extra hours?
7. Would workers be happier if they could choose different days off?
8. How could a hospital make more rest possible without reducing patient care?
9. Should employers give staff more control over their schedules?
10. When does a company benefit from having well-rested staff?
11. Would you support the change if prices rose because extra cover was needed?

12. What would you want to know before believing a headline saying the trial was a success?

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

Try one or two of these expressions when you respond.

- Granted, ..., but ...
- The figures suggest ..., although ...
- A potential drawback is ...
- Provided that ..., we could ...

5 MAKE A CHOICE

A company with office staff and a customer-facing service team wants to test a 32-hour week at full pay. Reach a conditional agreement for a six-week pilot.

ONE LAST THING

What is one opinion you heard today that made you think? Can you explain it fairly, even if you disagree?

YOUR WEEKLY ROTA | NEGOTIATE A FAIR PLAN

In groups, show when each person or service is available. Keep customers, learners or patients covered. Then let someone object: which day or shift would you change, and why?

Team / service	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Person or team A					
Person or team B					
Person or team C					
Open / covered?					

Our strongest reason: _____ A fair objection: _____

ANSWERS & EXAMPLES

OPTIONAL FINAL PAGE | Leave this page out when printing for class. Use it to check any exercises you finish later.

WORD POWER · ANSWER KEY

1. burnout — D. exhaustion linked to prolonged workplace stress
2. workforce — E. all the employees of an organisation or sector
3. reorganise — F. change the arrangement of tasks, people or resources
4. compress — A. fit something into a smaller period or space
5. coverage — B. the staffing needed to provide a service continuously
6. resentment — C. anger arising from a sense of unfair treatment

DID YOU CATCH THAT? · SUGGESTED ANSWERS

These are examples. Your answer can use different words if it matches the reading.

1. What distinguishes the trial from simply working four longer days?

Working hours were reduced without cutting pay. The aim was fewer total hours, not just a new arrangement of the same hours.

2. Why does the article contrast office jobs with hospital work?

To highlight different staffing constraints. Some services need uninterrupted human coverage.

3. What qualification does the writer make about the statistics?

Positive results may not generalise to all workplaces. Voluntary participation and different conditions limit broad claims.

4. Which policy would best address the concerns raised?

A monitored trial with staff input and service safeguards. The conclusion argues for testing, worker participation and agreed measures.

EXAMPLE SPEAKING RESPONSES

Discussion questions don't have a single correct opinion. Here are two ways to approach the topic and respond to another view.

I'd welcome a shorter week if the work did not just get squeezed into four exhausting days. More free time could make a real difference to family life.

Then again, some people would rather earn more money, and jobs such as nursing or retail might need different arrangements.

Try: state your view → give a reason → add an example → consider another opinion.