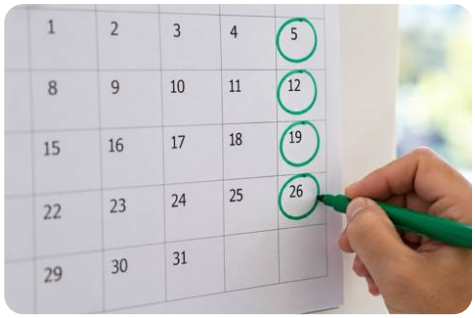
NEWS LESSON

Who Really Gets to Enjoy a Four-Day Week?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Would you choose a free Friday or shorter days all week?
2. What task at work takes more time than it deserves?
3. Could a team finish the same work with fewer meetings?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**intervention**	☐	A	working together with others to achieve something
2	**collaboration**	☐	B	the order in which tasks are done in a job
3	**mechanism**	☐	C	a fixed rule or plan about what should be done
4	**workflows**	☐	D	a special advantage that only some people have
5	**intensification**	☐	E	an action taken to change a situation
6	**prescription**	☐	F	the main, eye-catching claim about something
7	**privilege**	☐	G	the way something works or produces a result
8	**headline**	☐	H	the process of becoming stronger or more extreme

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

In a 2025 trial, 141 organisations reorganised meetings and tasks before cutting hours without cutting pay. Staff reported less burnout, but the participants were willing volunteers.

1 A free Friday sounds simple. Making it work is harder: meetings, shifts and customer needs still have to fit somewhere. Four-day-week trials ask whether teams can change how they work, rather than merely rush five days of tasks into four. The answer matters as much as the longer weekend.

2 In July 2025, a study published in Nature Human Behaviour examined a six-month reduction in working hours across 141 organisations and 2,896 employees in six countries. Participants retained their pay while workplaces first reorganised tasks and collaboration. Compared with twelve control companies, the participating organisations reported improvements in burnout, job satisfaction and measures of mental and physical wellbeing.

3 The detail of the intervention matters. This was not simply an instruction to deliver a conventional week's workload in four compressed days. Organisations examined their processes, often doing away with unnecessary meetings or changing workflows. Individuals who reduced their hours more substantially tended to experience greater wellbeing gains, suggesting that time recovered outside work is an important part of the mechanism. A four-day arrangement also depends on what actually changes. Compressing forty hours into four exhausting shifts is a fundamentally different proposition from reducing weekly hours without cutting pay.

4 Nevertheless, enthusiasm should be tempered by limitations. Participating organisations were willing to experiment, and their experiences may not translate directly to every sector. Productivity outcomes are also more complicated to establish than reported job satisfaction. A successful software company's approach cannot automatically be applied to emergency services, hospitality or a small retailer operating seven days a week.

5 There are questions about inequality. Professional employees may have greater flexibility than people providing continuous public-facing services. Unless additional staffing and costs are addressed, a four-day week could offer generous benefits to some workers while leaving others with intensified responsibilities. A sensible assessment must therefore look beyond enthusiastic testimonials. It should examine service coverage, staffing costs, the distribution of benefits and whether improvements persist once the trial has ended.

6 The potential consequences extend beyond company performance. Additional non-working time could affect unpaid care, education, volunteering and the division of domestic responsibilities. Those possibilities are important because a reduction in formal working hours does not automatically produce leisure for everybody. People with caring duties may simply undertake more unpaid labour, while staff on precarious contracts may worry that fewer hours mean lower income.

7 The design of a four-day week therefore matters at least as much as its headline promise. Preserving pay, ensuring predictable schedules and preventing workload intensification would be central to judging whether the model represents genuine progress. Research on early adopters provides a valuable starting point, but rolling the model out more widely would require attention to sectors and workers whose circumstances differ substantially from those in voluntary trials.

8 The research is therefore neither a universal prescription nor an excuse to write off shorter working hours as unrealistic. It demonstrates that a different arrangement can work under particular conditions. The challenge now is identifying which aspects are transferable, who bears the costs and whether reduced working time can become a broadly shared benefit rather than an employment privilege.

Sources: Nature Human Behaviour. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The sample may not represent employers in general. T F NG
2. The biggest wellbeing gains were found among people who cut their hours the most. T F NG
3. The writer treats the trial as proof that shorter weeks suit every sector. T F NG
4. The control companies later moved to shorter weeks themselves. T F NG
5. The trial asked staff to fit a full week's workload into fewer days. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

lucrative	obsolete	persist	precarious	retained	tempered	testimonials	undertake

1. Her excitement about the promotion was _____ by the realisation that she would have to relocate.
2. Many gig workers lead a _____ existence, never sure of next month's income.
3. The brochure relied on glowing _____ from satisfied customers rather than hard data.
4. Despite the merger, the company _____ most of its key staff.
5. Volunteers will _____ a rigorous training programme before deployment.
6. Critics doubt whether the benefits will _____ once the novelty has worn off.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. The _____ of the findings to emergency services is doubtful. (APPLICABLE)
2. The authors acknowledge several _____ in their design. (LIMIT)
3. Staff on short contracts often feel a deep sense of _____ about their income. (SECURE)
4. Early adopters spoke _____ about the change. (ENTHUSIASTIC)
5. The _____ of the improvements is still unknown once the trial has ended. (SUSTAIN)

7 Language focus: linking words

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Some linkers join clauses, some sit at the start of a sentence, and some are formal. Check the punctuation and the logic.

albeit	conversely	hence	namely	notwithstanding	provided	whereby

1. _____ the encouraging headlines, the sample was self-selected.
2. Staff reported feeling better, _____ not necessarily producing more.
3. Office staff often gain flexibility. _____ , shift workers frequently gain none.
4. Pay was protected; _____ , many workers backed the scheme.
5. The model could succeed, _____ the savings are reinvested in staffing.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What would have to change before a shorter week felt genuinely easier?
2. Would you accept longer days in exchange for a three-day weekend?
3. Who might find a four-day week harder to arrange?

9 Role-play: a four-day week for our team

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the manager

Your shop is open seven days a week. An employee wants to try a four-day week with the same pay. Ask at least two questions before you decide. You can say yes, no, or yes with a condition.

Student B · the employee

You'd like a four-day week with the same pay. Explain why it would help you and how the work will still get done. Suggest a trial.

Useful phrases

I'd like to ask about a four-day week.
I'd still finish all my tasks.
Who'd look after the customers on that day?
We're open seven days a week, so that's a problem.
Could we try it for three months?
I'm happy to say yes if the results are good.

Afterwards, tell the class: did the manager agree, and was the plan fair for the rest of the team?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 E · 2 A · 3 G · 4 B · 5 H · 6 C · 7 D · 8 F

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 T · 3 F · 4 NG · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 tempered · 2 precarious · 3 testimonials · 4 retained · 5 undertake · 6 persist

6 Word forms

1 applicability · 2 limitations · 3 insecurity · 4 enthusiastically · 5 sustainability

7 Language focus

1 Notwithstanding · 2 albeit · 3 Conversely · 4 hence · 5 provided

---

This lesson is free. If it saved you time, you can support johnplusnews at **ko-fi.com/johnplusenglish**