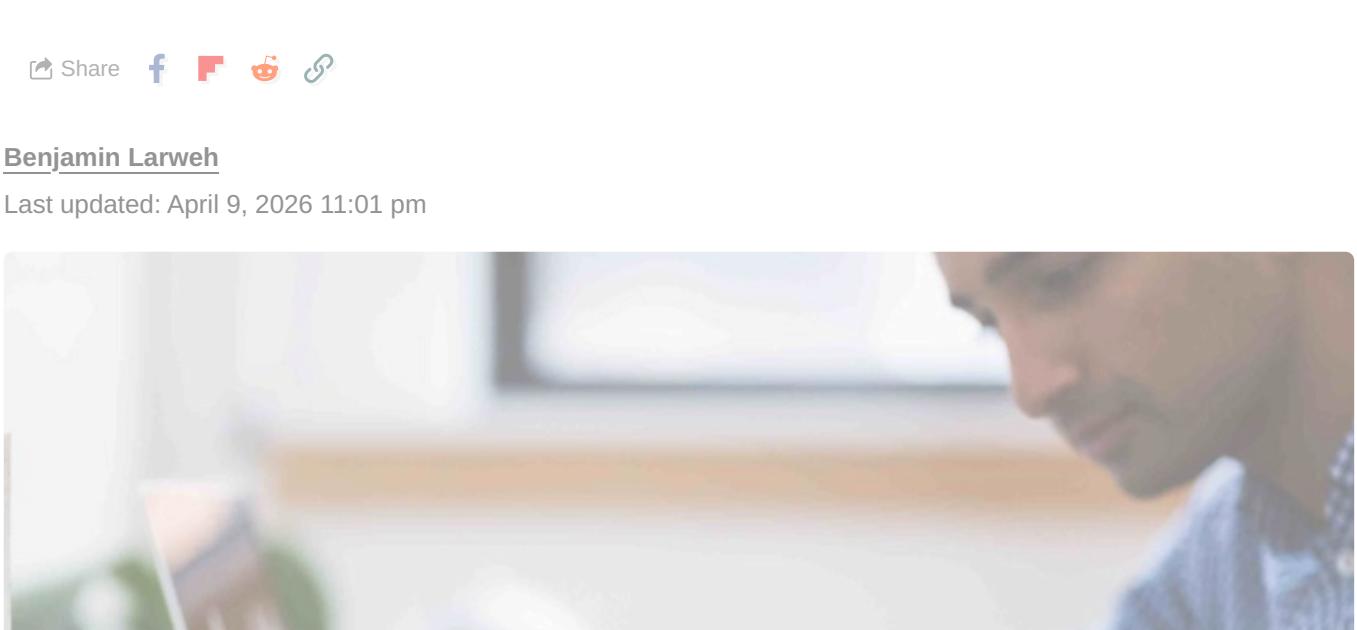
SCIENCE

4-day workweek advocates gain momentum as new study reveals 5th day is basically useless

Share

Benjamin Larweh
Last updated: April 9, 2026 11:01 pm



SHARE

Most people who work a five-day week have quietly suspected it for years.

Friday afternoon emails go unanswered.

Monday mornings are spent recovering from the previous week.

And a large portion of the time in between is consumed by meetings that, as the old saying goes, could have been an email.

* * *

Now the largest long-term study of its kind has put numbers to the suspicion, and the results are hard to argue with.

A report from nonprofit advocacy group 4 Day Week Global, which followed workers across the US, Canada, Britain, and Ireland over 18 months, found that employees can accomplish exactly as much in a 33-hour week as in a 38-hour week.

Those five missing hours are not being spent on productive work.

It is being spent on procrastination, unnecessary meetings, and the kind of low-grade busyness that fills a calendar without moving anything forward.

What the Research Actually Found

The 18-month trial operated on a principle called the **100:80:100 model**: employees received 100 percent of their pay, worked 80 percent of their previous hours, and were expected to maintain 100 percent of their productivity.

Workers were given a paid day off each week, but their workload stayed identical.

The core question the trial was designed to answer was whether they could get the same amount done in less time. They could.

* * *

The longer people worked a four-day workweek, the shorter their workweeks became, without a hit to output or productivity.

Workers cut out inefficiencies that a longer workweek allowed, such as meetings, to dedicate more time to uninterrupted focus work. Essentially, those of us on a five-day work week are filling up our days with time-wasting activities.

Within the first six months, workers had trimmed their average week by about four hours.

They reported improvements in burnout, general health, and job satisfaction.

Those who continued for a full year shaved another hour off their week and reported further gains in their mental and physical well-being.

* * *

The pattern is striking because it is **self-reinforcing.**

The more time people had to practice working with focus and intention, the better they became at eliminating the habits and obligations that had been quietly draining their productivity for years.

The Meeting Problem Nobody Wants to Fix

At the heart of this research is something most workers know intuitively but rarely say out loud.

Meetings are eating the working day alive.

It is estimated that ineffective meetings cost the US $37 billion per year. The majority of employees, 83 percent, spend up to one-third of their workweek in meetings. And 68% of workers say that, thanks to frequent meetings and communication, they don't have enough uninterrupted focus time during the working day.

Research consistently shows that most of those meetings are not considered productive by the people sitting in them.

More than half of remote workers say the majority of meetings could have been an email.

The four-day week, it turns out, is not really about working four days.

It is about forcing organisations and individuals to be honest about what is actually worth doing, and what is simply filling time.

Before making the shift to reduced hours, each company that opted into the overhaul was given roughly eight weeks to restructure its workflow to maintain productivity at 80% of previous workforce hours, purging time-wasting activities such as unnecessary meetings.

* * *

That preparation period is what separates a genuine productivity model from simply removing a day and hoping for the best.

What It Did for Businesses

Perhaps the most counterintuitive finding in the report is what happened to company revenue.

Revenue increased by 15% over the course of the trial, weighted in accordance with company size.

In the UK's separate six-month trial involving 61 companies and roughly 2,900 employees, the numbers were even more dramatic.

When compared to a similar period from previous years, organisations reported revenue increases of 35% on average. The number of staff leaving participating companies decreased significantly, dropping by 57% over the trial period.

15% of employees said that no amount of money would induce them to accept a five-day schedule over the four-day week to which they were now accustomed.

For employers still skeptical about whether the model translates to their industry or workforce, a research team led by Boston College sociologist Juliet Schor has now studied 245 organisations across multiple countries and three years of data.

Their findings indicate that such schedules can deliver broad benefits across industries and countries. Companies reported steady or improved worker productivity, significant wellbeing improvements for employees, and minimal work-intensity increases.

* * *

The Workers Who Want It Most

A 2025 survey of 2,000 Americans examining attitudes toward work-life balance found that 69% of employed respondents believed they could do their job in 32 hours a week.

The generational breakdown is revealing without being surprising.

Millennials were the most enthusiastic supporters of a four-day week at 75%, with Gen Z and Gen X both sitting at 70%.

The workers who have grown up scheduling video calls from their living rooms, managing hybrid rosters, and questioning the logic of presenteeism as a measure of performance are also the ones most willing to challenge the assumption that five days is the only way the work gets done.

The Case Against, and Why It Matters

The science on the four-day week is genuinely promising.

It is also, by the honest assessment of the researchers themselves, still accumulating.

Some critics point to what they call the **honeymoon effect**, the possibility that early enthusiasm and novelty might explain some of the productivity gains, and that those gains could soften over time as the new schedule becomes routine.

A 2023 systematic review of the literature on four-day workweeks found support for improvements in morale, job satisfaction, and turnover, but also identified some negative impacts, including scheduling problems, more intense performance measures and monitoring, and a risk of benefits fading over time.

* * *

There are also genuine structural limits to the model.

Nurses cannot leave a ward unattended on Friday because the week has been compressed.

Emergency services, manufacturing floors, hospitality, and logistics all involve obligations to customers or the public that do not simply disappear because a policy has changed.

The four-day week works most cleanly in knowledge work and professional services, where output can be measured by results rather than hours, and where the person doing the job has meaningful control over how their time is structured.

That is a large and growing segment of the modern economy.

It is not the entire economy.

The Deeper Argument

The five-day, 40-hour workweek was not designed by scientists optimising for human performance.

It was codified in the United States in 1938 as part of the Fair Labor Standards Act, setting maximum weekly hours for factory workers in an economy built around industrial production.

The knowledge economy it now governs looks almost nothing like the world it was designed for.

With AI technology having the potential to displace so much labour, maintaining rigid work schedules doesn't make sense. It just makes it harder to maintain high employment levels as AI-driven productivity growth accelerates.

The phrase researchers heard from employees so much was: "Two days is not enough." That's key to people's sense of not being in control of their lives or having sustainable schedules.

* * *

The four-day week is not, at its core, a lifestyle perk.

It is a structural argument about how we measure work, what we actually expect from it, and whether the calendar we inherited from the industrial era is still the best tool we have for organising human effort.

The evidence from 18 months across four countries, hundreds of organisations, and thousands of workers suggests that, for a significant portion of the workforce, the answer to that last question is no.

The fifth day, it turns out, was often just where the meetings went.

The Countries That Have Already Moved On

While the United States debates the idea, other countries have been quietly getting on with it.

Iceland is the furthest ahead.

Between 2015 and 2019, the Icelandic government and the city of Reykjavik ran trials involving around 2,500 workers, more than one percent of the entire national workforce, reducing their hours from 40 to 35 or 36 per week without any reduction in pay.

The results were so consistently positive that the country did not wait for more data.

Following the successful trials, Icelandic unions negotiated reduced hours across most of the economy. 86% of workers now have the right to negotiate reduced hours. Iceland's success created a blueprint that other nations are now following.

Consent to Cookies & Data Processing

To provide a more personal user experience, we and our 300 partners use technology such as cookies to store and/or access device information.

By clicking "Accept all," you consent to the use of these technologies which will allow us and our partners to process personal data such as IP address, unique ID, and browsing data on this site. Or, you can choose "Reject all" to decline non-essential cookies. You can withdraw or update your consent preferences at any time by clicking the "Update Privacy Settings" link. This link may be found in the footer or on either side of the page.

We use your data to: Store and/or access information on a device, Measurement, Essential, Precise geolocation data, and identification through device scanning, Personalised advertising and content, advertising and content measurement, audience research and services development

Accept all Settings Reject all

Privacy notice

Cookie Banner powered by

Belgian Prime Minister Alexander de Croo said he hoped the change would help make Belgium's notoriously rigid labour market more flexible and make it easier for people to combine their family lives with their careers.

Belgium's model is important to understand clearly.

It does not reduce total hours worked.

It gives employees the legal right to compress their existing hours into four days rather than five.

That distinction matters.

Belgium is giving workers **autonomy over their time**, not necessarily giving them less of it.

Japan has approached the question from a completely different angle entirely.

Starting in April 2025, Tokyo introduced a four-day workweek for government employees. The initiative aims to address declining fertility rates, which stood at 1.2 in 2023, and combat karoshi, the Japanese term for death by overwork.

* * *

The program also seeks to improve gender balance in the workforce, as 55% of women participate in the labour market compared to 72% of men.

In Japan, the four-day week is not primarily a productivity argument.

It is a **demographic intervention**, an attempt to give working parents enough time to actually raise children, and enough space for men to take on domestic roles that cultural expectations have historically denied them.

In mid-2025, Poland's Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy announced a nationwide pilot programme to test shorter working time models, including four-day weeks, reduced daily hours, or additional vacation days, all while keeping salaries and staffing unchanged.

Nearly 300 full applications were submitted, with around 1,500 more in progress. The trial is set to officially launch in January 2026.

The momentum is real, and it is global.

The countries making these moves are not fringe experimenters.

They include some of the most economically successful nations in the world, and they are drawing on evidence, not ideology.

What the Friday Actually Costs You

One of the most useful frames for this conversation is the **energy economics of a working week**.

* * *

Most people who work five days have experienced what might be called the Friday effect: the slow drain of cognitive and creative capacity that accumulates across a week of back-to-back obligations, leaving the final day feeling less like productive time and more like an endurance sport.

Research on concentration, decision-making, and cognitive performance consistently shows that human attention is not a renewable resource that resets each morning.

It depletes across hours and days, and tasks that require genuine focus, complex problem-solving, or creative thinking become progressively harder to sustain as fatigue accumulates.

The five-day week, by extending the working cycle to its maximum before the reset of the weekend, may be operating in direct opposition to the biology of how people actually think.

The four-day week, by giving people a mid-week or end-of-week recovery day, allows **cognitive resources to partially replenish** before the most demanding stretches of the working week arrive.

This is not simply about feeling better.

It shows up in output quality.

Microsoft Japan's 2019 pilot, which offered employees a four-day week for a single month, reported a **40% increase in productivity** during the trial period, with electricity consumption dropping by 23% as a side benefit of having the office closed an extra day.

No one compelled employees to work harder.

They simply had fewer hours, more focus, and fewer interruptions.

* * *

The Talent Arms Race Nobody Planned

There is a competitive dimension to this conversation that rarely gets the attention it deserves.

Organisations that have adopted the four-day week are not just running a wellbeing programme.

They are making themselves significantly more attractive to hire from, and significantly harder to leave.

The number of staff leaving participating companies in the UK trial decreased significantly, dropping by 57% over the trial period.

Employee turnover is one of the most expensive and disruptive forces in any organisation.

The direct costs of recruiting, onboarding, and training a replacement for a departing employee typically range from half to twice that employee's annual salary.

When a four-day week is cutting turnover by more than half, the financial case for the change is not just plausible.

It is, in many contexts, overwhelming.

Companies that have not yet moved are already competing for talent against organisations that have.

And the gap will only widen as the four-day week moves from novelty to expectation across professional labour markets.

A 2024 survey by the American Psychological Association found that 22% of employers now offer some form of four-day workweek, up from just 14% in 2022.

* * *

That is a significant shift in two years.

The direction of travel is not ambiguous.

What Workers Are Actually Asking For

Strip away the policy arguments and the productivity data, and what workers are describing in every survey is something simpler and more fundamental.

They want **enough time to be human beings outside of their jobs.**

The phrase researchers heard from employees over and over was: "Two days is not enough." That's key to people's sense of not being in control of their lives or having sustainable schedules. Employers are responding to this because it's the right thing to do, and it hurts the bottom line when people are stressed-out, disengaged, or quitting.

Two days is not enough to recover from a demanding week, maintain meaningful relationships, exercise consistently, attend to family obligations, pursue creative interests, or simply rest in a way that makes Monday feel like a fresh start rather than a continuation of something that never fully stopped.

The five-day week was never designed around how human beings thrive.

It was designed around how many hours a factory could run.

The fact that it persisted through a century of economic transformation, through the shift from industrial to service to knowledge work, through the invention of computers and the internet and smartphones, says less about its fitness for purpose than it does about institutional inertia.

The 18-month research spanning four countries has confirmed what shorter pilots kept suggesting: the fifth day is not necessary.

* * *

The work gets done without it.

The people doing it are healthier without it.

The organisations running it are more profitable without it.

The question is no longer whether a four-day week can work.

The evidence says it can, repeatedly, across industries, countries, and economic conditions.

The question is now something altogether more uncomfortable.

If we have known for years that the fifth day is mostly wasted, why are most of us still sitting at our desks on Friday afternoon, waiting for five o'clock so we can finally go home?

Sources: 4 Day Week Global Long-Term Results Report | Fortune | Autonomy Institute UK Pilot Results | Scientific American | MIT Sloan Management Review | American Psychological Association | My Hours Meeting Statistics

- Spatial Gene Hubs Reveal Hidden Drivers of Brain Cancer
- The Nasal Spray that targets Alzheimer's before it starts
- Scientists Block Protein That Stops Pancreatic Cancer Before It Starts
- Can fasting reverse the effects of aging?
- Neuroscientists can now predict dementia from the way you breathe in your sleep

Share This Article Facebook

‹ PREVIOUS ARTICLE
Man unexpectedly cured of HIV after stem cell transplant

Leave a Comment

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Leave a Comment

Your name
Your email
Your website

☐ Save my name, email, and website in this browser for the next time I comment.

Post Comment

/ You Might also Like /

SCIENCE
Earth Could Have Billions More People Than We Ever Realized
6 Min Read

SCIENCE
22 Organizing Hacks To Make Your Bedroom The Perfect Relaxing Space
14 Min Read

SCIENCE
This Might Be The Fastest Way To Improve Your Brain Health. Here's What Scientists Suggest Doing Every Single Day
20 Min Read

SCIENCE
WATCH: What's New in Archaeology?
10 Min Read

SCIENCE
Brain Scans Show Fasting Literally Rewires Your Brain
36 Min Read

SCIENCE
Dysautonomia: the invisible illness affecting millions around the world
17 Min Read

SCIENCE
Brain scans helped spot hidden forms of dementia in people with Alzheimer's
9 Min Read

SCIENCE
New ALS-Causing Gene Discovered
18 Min Read

SCIENCE
Morning Sickness Sucks, But Could Actually Be a Good Sign
6 Min Read

SCIENCE
Here's How One Man Faked One of The Biggest Archaeological Discoveries in History
5 Min Read

SCIENCE
A man in his 40s made 3 changes to his diet and workouts to build muscle, burn fat, and reboot his energy
14 Min Read

SCIENCE
The 1922 Discovery that Saved Millions from Diabetes
5 Min Read

SCIENCE
When anglerfish mate, the male and female merge into a single entity, sharing their bodies forever
4 Min Read

SCIENCE
Study: regular consumption of processed meat increased the relative risk of all dementias by 44% and Alzheimer's by 52%
8 Min Read

SCIENCE
Common sleep aid blocks brain inflammation and tau buildup in Alzheimer's model
5 Min Read

SCIENCE
Researchers discover gut bacteria 'weapon' and redirect it toward cancer
13 Min Read

SCIENCE
Your Vision Can Predict Dementia 12 Years Before Diagnosis, Study Discovers
7 Min Read

SCIENCE
Strange Visual Symptoms Could Indicate Early Alzheimer's
13 Min Read

SCIENCE
Silence Is More Restorative to the Brain Than Relaxing Music. Two Minutes of Quiet Beats Any Playlist
13 Min Read

SCIENCE
Rebooting the Brain After Trauma With Sound and Light
12 Min Read

© 2025 Tech Pinoled. All Rights Reserved.

Consent to Cookies & Data Processing

To provide a more personal user experience, we and our 300 partners use technology such as cookies to store and/or access device information.

By clicking "Accept all," you consent to the use of these technologies which will allow us and our partners to process personal data such as IP address, unique ID, and browsing data on this site. Or, you can choose "Reject all" to decline non-essential cookies. You can withdraw or update your consent preferences at any time by clicking the "Update Privacy Settings" link. This link may be found in the footer or on either side of the page.

We use your data to: Store and/or access information on a device, Measurement, Essential, Precise geolocation data, and identification through device scanning, Personalised advertising and content, advertising and content measurement, audience research and services development

Accept all

Settings

Reject all

Privacy notice

Cookie Banner powered by