

EXPERT COMMENT



Early reports positive from biggest four-day work week trial

40% of Brits believe working in a traditional office environment with 9-5 hours hinders their performance. Chris Biggs, CEO and founder of Theta Global Advisors, discusses the importance of providing employees with a healthy work-life balance

Chris Biggs

The world's largest trial of a four-day work week began in the UK last month involving 3,300 workers across 70 UK companies, and is based on the 100:80:100 model - 100% of the pay for 80% of the time, in exchange for a commitment to maintain 100% of the productivity. Although the trial still has around five months left to run, a number of companies involved have already publicly reported that productivity has increased and the mental health of their employees has improved.

This comes amidst landmark research from Theta Global Advisors, which has unveiled that more than half (57%) of Brits do not want to work in a traditional office environment, five days a week and putting in regular hours.

One company taking part in the trial is construction and recruitment firm, Girling Jones, that implemented a four-day week in January before the trial began in an effort to become more attractive to prospective employees.

The business has reported a staggering 29% increase in profitability since last June, even though all members of staff are now working one day less each week. Not only this, but they have also reported that staff are happier and getting more work done than they were in a five-day week. Helping Hands, which installs equipment such as grab rails and key safes for adults at risk, is another participant in the experiment and has reported similar findings to Girling Jones.

The four-day week is particularly relevant in the current job market, with vacancies at their highest point ever and redundancies at their lowest since the 90s, meaning there is a critical need for companies to retain staff. One key way of achieving this is by offering flexible and forward-thinking working arrangements, with Theta Global Advisors' research showing that 40% of Brits believe working traditional hours in an office environment would hinder their performance. Not only that, but a staggering 41% of respondents stated they are likely to consider leaving their jobs in the next year - clearly illustrating the retention challenges companies are facing. Despite the dire need to recruit and retain talent in the current climate, the study also found that 24% of employers haven't explored any flexible working options.

Chris Biggs, partner at consultancy and accounting disruptor Theta Global Advisors comments:

"The decision to trial the four-day week marks the biggest shift we've ever seen in the efforts towards achieving a better work-life balance across the country. It will be incredibly interesting to see what the results of the pilot are - but it seems from early reports that they will be positive."

"However, on a practical level, I think it could be really difficult for some companies to implement. If the workforce can be 100% productive - equivalent to their five-day week - then that's fine, but if productivity drops, then from the company's perspective you're getting four days' work for a salary intended for five days."

"I also think we have to raise another potential issue which may come as a surprise, but that's burnout. If people are being asked to consistently squeeze five days of work into four, then it may actually end up having the total opposite effect that it was designed to have."

"One positive aspect of this trial is that as conversation spreads around the scheme, it will also put pressure on employers to go further in their flexible working offerings. The spotlight is already on this topic with companies now facing real issues in terms of recruiting and retaining staff as a result of there being more job vacancies in the market than ever before."

"The option of having a flexible work schedule has become fundamental for post-pandemic workers. But the big companies have only just begun to offer these benefits to their employees, holding off for so long because of the fear of decreased productivity and therefore a loss in profits."

"At Theta Global Advisors we realise the importance of a reasonable work-life balance and how important flexibility is for workers. We find that this can increase productivity and provide workers with a working environment which they are happy with. The big companies are in a dangerous position where they need to change or could face a mass exodus of talent."

