

## Should we all work a four-day week?

**Level:** Upper-intermediate+

**Time:** 90 minutes +

**Summary:** This lesson is about the introduction of a four-day working week. In this lesson, students:

1. read one of two articles, each written by an expert, on whether a four-day working week should be universally introduced and how this would affect our jobs and home lives;
2. share information with a partner about the text they didn't read;
3. discuss how a four-day week would affect various employment sectors;
4. explore whether a four-day week would be viable or desirable in their job or sector.

**Materials:** One copy of the worksheet per student; one copy of Article A for half the class and one copy of Article B for the other half

**Group size:** Two or more

**Note:** This lesson plan is for both pre-experience and in-work business students based on an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* issue 3/2018.

### Warmer

Hand out the worksheet. The warmer introduces the topic and checks the students' understanding of what is meant by a four-day week. Don't offer any answers at this stage.

### Key words

Divide the students into two groups, A and B. Give group A the 'Yes!' article and give group B the 'No!' article. Each group should read their article and find their key words in task 2. Note that the definitions are given in the order that the words appear in the articles.

**Key:**

**Article A**

- |               |              |
|---------------|--------------|
| 1. workforce  | 4. potential |
| 2. stagnating | 5. consume   |
| 3. bottleneck | 6. commuting |

**Article B**

- |              |                |
|--------------|----------------|
| 1. efficient | 4. compress    |
| 2. enact     | 5. revenues    |
| 3. benchmark | 6. perspective |

### Expressions

Students find the expressions in their article, read them in context and match them with the meanings.

**Key:**

**Group A:** 1. b; 2. c; 3. a

**Group B:** 1. c; 2. a; 3. b

### Understanding the article

Working with two or three others who read the same text, students answer four questions with information from their article.

**Key:**

**Group A**

1. Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and the rest of Scandinavia
2. the Kellogg and Ford companies
3. The workload can be shared out more equally between those who are overworked and those who are underworked.
4. They want to buy something that brings them instant happiness.

**Group B**

1. They can work a 40-hour week: eight hours a day, five days a week.
2. Utah from 2008 to 2011
3. at the beginning and end of the day
4. retail, healthcare, the military

### Information sharing

Students first work with someone who read the same article as them. Together, they should make a note of all the arguments the author makes. Then, they pair up with someone who read the other article (or sit together in small groups of four to six), sharing the information in their texts by explaining to their partner(s) the points that their author makes.

Then, they should say which author's opinion they most agree with and, lastly, they discuss which of the two authors they think presents the most convincing argument and how the author does this.

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### Work and contract models

Students find and circle the different models of working or types of contract, discuss what each one means and talk about them in connection with their own personal work experiences and preferences.

#### Key:

1. an employment agreement in which a person only works when the employer needs them and so has no regular or guaranteed amount of work or working hours
2. when you work for only some of the day or the week
3. when you work four days a week, have three days off
4. when you work for a total of 40 hours a week
5. extra hours that someone works at their job

### Work sectors

Students find the sectors in the article, write examples of jobs in each of the sectors and talk about how a four-day week might affect employees and employers in these sectors.

#### Key (possible answers):

**retail:** shop assistant, store detective, warehouse supervisor

**public services:** police officer, school teacher, social worker

**healthcare:** doctor, ambulance driver, anaesthetist

**military:** soldier, mechanic, pilot

### Discussion

Students talk about whether they would like to work a four-day week and whether it would be a viable working model in their job or area of work.

### Related topics on onestopenglish

The following Business Spotlight lesson explores whether Americans work too much.

[www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/do-americans-work-too-much/551926.article](http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/do-americans-work-too-much/551926.article)

## Should we all work a four-day week?

### 1 Warmer

When people talk about working a four-day week, which do you think they mean, a or b?

- a. Working the same number of hours as they would in a five-day week but over four days, e.g. working 4 x 10-hour days so that overall they still work 40 hours a week.
- b. Working the same number of hours per day as in a five-day week so that the total hours worked per week is one fifth less than usual, e.g. working 4 x 8-hour days so that overall they work 32 hours a week instead of 40.

### 2 Key words

Write the key words next to the definitions. Then find them in your text to read them in context.

**Group A**

bottleneck    commuting    consume    potential    stagnating    workforce

- 1. used in general about people who work \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. staying the same without growing or developing \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. a specific problem in a situation, that delays any improvement \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. the possibility to develop or achieve something in the future \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. purchase products and services \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. travelling regularly to and from work \_\_\_\_\_

**Group B**

benchmark    compress    efficient    enact    perspective    revenues

- 1. in a way that uses the least energy and time needed to get the best results  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2. make a proposal into a law \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. an amount, level, standard, etc that you can use for judging how good or bad other things are  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 4. make a process or activity last for a shorter period of time than usual  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 5. income from business activities or taxes \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. a way of thinking about something \_\_\_\_\_



## Should we all work a four-day week?

Yes!

Article A



**Long working hours do not necessarily lead to higher productivity and often lead to health problems. Could a four-day week be the solution? Julian Earwaker listened to the arguments for and against a four-day week.**

**“There is a crisis in work”  
– Aidan Harper**

There is a crisis in work at the moment, both paid and unpaid. Productivity in the UK is low, we have an unhappy workforce and the number of mental-health problems is rising. The biggest cause of sick leave is stress, mainly from overwork. Reducing working hours will improve the well-being of the workforce and reduce staff turnover, especially in overworked professions, such as those in public services and jobs like call-centre agent. In the past, businessmen such as John Kellogg and Henry Ford reduced working hours and had a happier, more productive workforce, with increased profits and better wages for workers.

We don't have to look far to find countries that have higher levels of productivity and work fewer hours than the UK: Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and the rest of Scandinavia. These are countries with stronger economies and shorter working weeks. In the UK, wages are stagnating and few people can afford to take a cut in paid

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hours to work a four-day week. We argue for an increase in wages and an increase in the share of wealth created by the economy to support a shorter working week. This becomes more urgent when looking at the impact of automation, which is replacing everyday tasks in many sectors.

A large number of women are unable to find work for which they are qualified. Few highly paid, well-respected British jobs offer part-time roles. This forms a bottleneck in the economy, whereby women, especially mothers, are held back and the economy misses out on their potential. Women are more likely to suffer from work-related stress as a result of the additional duties they perform when they get home. With less time in waged work, men can better help to share that labour.

We have a large number of overworked people in this country but also underemployed workers, many on zero-hours contracts. There's an argument to be made for taking work from the overworked and giving it to the underworked. For the future of the planet, we need to consume less. Our most carbon-intensive activities are travel and eating. A four-day week means one less day spent commuting and more time to shop, cook and eat healthily instead of buying carbon-intensive food products. Countries with longer working hours often consume more, with workers often buying something for that little bit of instant happiness.

*AIDAN HARPER is a research assistant with the New Economics Foundation, London.*

## Should we all work a four-day week?

No!

Article B



**Long working hours do not necessarily lead to higher productivity and often lead to health problems. Could a four-day week be the solution? Julian Earwaker listened to the arguments for and against a four-day week.**

**“The work needs to get done” – Allard Dembe**

The work needs to get done, but safely. Longer hours should never be at the expense of somebody's health. You can try job-sharing but that's not necessarily an efficient way to work. The state of Utah enacted a four-day workweek from 2008 to 2011 but ended it after finding that expected savings never happened.

In the US, a 40-hour workweek is the benchmark. Five days a week, eight hours a day: that's how much people can work without getting too stressed. What happens if you compress those 40 hours, or more, into four consecutive working days? Suppose, in order to maximize free time, you work ten hours a day or even 12? Is that safe? Studies show that if you work really long hours and overtime, you have an increased risk of insomnia, fatigue, illness and injuries, as well as chronic disease. That risk is even greater for women because of their multiple roles in society.

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The idea of having a three-day weekend sounds great. But then reality sets in. What kind of lifestyle do you want? What kind of wages? What if you actually want to work more hours and make more money? Be more productive, get promotions? Most people don't want to work part-time because you need to have an income, earn your wages and feed your family. It's important to go out and earn a living but it's hard to do it working four days a week. Just how hard would you have to work to get everything done? You could end up exhausted.

It's not just maths we're talking about. Compressed work schedules can mean an inferior home life. You lose those valuable hours at the front and back end of the day in which to do the important things in life: greet your family, get the kids off to school, relax before dinner, do something together in the evening. Working a four-day week can also mean less flexibility in the working day. Less time to deal with routine preventative healthcare, leave early to pick up your kids or attend a social event.

All of these activities become more difficult with a busier four-day week. Without even considering the potential impact on tax revenues, and the services provided by them, working hours are a personal choice. From an employer's perspective, for example in the area of retail, healthcare or military, to name a few, changing over to a four-day workweek probably won't work.

*ALLARD DEMBE is professor of public health at Ohio State University.*

## Should we all work a four-day week?

### 3 Expressions

Find these expressions in your text and match them with their meanings.

#### Group A

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 1. take a cut | a. lose an opportunity to do or have something |
| 2. hold back  | b. accept a reduction                          |
| 3. miss out   | c. stop from being successful                  |

#### Group B

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| 1. at the expense of | a. the truth of a situation becomes clear                                 |
| 2. reality sets in   | b. make enough money to pay for everything you need                       |
| 3. earn a living     | c. when a second thing suffers or is not done properly because of a first |

### 4 Understanding the article

Answer the questions using information from the article.

#### Group A

- Which countries or regions does the author hold up as positive examples?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What historical examples does the author refer to?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Why does he think that a four-day week will help unemployed and underemployed people?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What reason does he give for people buying themselves little treats?  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Group B

- According to the author, how much can people work without getting stressed?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Which US state introduced a four-day week and how long did the experiment last?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- When does the author say we would lose time if we worked a four-day week?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- According to the author, which work sectors would probably not be able to introduce a four-day week?  
\_\_\_\_\_

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### 5 Information sharing

- Highlight the arguments made by the author of the article you read.
- Talk to someone who read the other article. Say which definition of a four-day working week the author uses when making his arguments (see task 1). Present and explain the arguments made by the author.
- Which points in the two texts do you most agree with? Which did you least agree with?
- Do the authors make any arguments that surprise or annoy you?
- Discuss who makes the strongest case and decide what part of his argument was the most convincing.

### 6 Work and contract models

- In the articles, find and circle these different models of working or types of contract. What does each one mean?

1. zero-hours contract

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2. part-time job

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3. four-day week

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4. 40-hour week

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5. overtime

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- Discuss your answers.

- Which of the five working ways above apply to your current work situation?
- Which of the five working ways above apply to work that you have done in the past?
- Which (if any) of these do you hope to avoid in your career?

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### 7 Work sectors

a. Write three examples of jobs for each of these sectors. The sectors are mentioned in the article.

sector	example jobs
retail	
public services	
healthcare	
military	

b. How might a four-day working week affect employees and employers in these sectors or in the wider community?

### 8 Discussion

- Would a four-day working week be viable in your job?
- What might happen if your company introduced a four-day week?
- Taking the points in the articles into consideration, say whether you would like to work a four-day week or not.