

## A four, five, or six-day working week?

**Level:** Advanced (C1-C2)

**Time:** Approximately 90 minutes (plus possible extra time for writing and discussion)

**Business topics:** working hours, production, efficiency, work-life balance, motivation

**Business language:** business vocabulary, language for explaining and justifying changes and employee well-being

**Activities:** discussing changes to working hours, key words, understanding the text, business language, discussion, writing an informative and motivational email

**Groups:** Whole class, one-to-one, small groups

**Overview:** This article discusses how, where and why a 4-day working week could be successfully implemented, and it looks briefly at the history of working hours for blue collared workers.

### 1. Warmer

- a. Students answer the questions and compare and talk about their answers.
- b. Students discuss the question. Encourage them to define what they think work-life balance is.

### 2. Key words

a.

**Key:**

- |                          |                             |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. <i>philanthropy</i>   | 7. <i>tentative</i>         |
| 2. <i>mills</i>          | 8. <i>efficiencies</i>      |
| 3. <i>pressure</i>       | 9. <i>default</i>           |
| 4. <i>proposition</i>    | 10. <i>enforce</i>          |
| 5. <i>Given</i>          | 11. <i>unpredictability</i> |
| 6. <i>practicalities</i> | 12. <i>notice</i>           |

### 3. Understanding the article

- a. Students find key information in the article and answer the questions with as much detail as possible.

**Key:**

1. *In the UK, in the 1840s, they worked 12-hour days. A campaign to reduce the length of the working day to 10 hours caused people to predict disasters for industry and families. In 1846, results of an experiment of implementing a shorter working day at mills in the north of England showed that production volume remained, and the quality of work improved.*
2. *In 1926, Henry Ford reduced the working week from six to five days with no loss of income. He believed that the pressure of working fewer days would increase the level of production.*
3. *Iceland with a reduction from 40 hours to 35 or 36 per week.*
4. *People worry whether the business might suffer, whether people will take more work home with them resulting in even less leisure time, and how the reduction in hours might affect people who work part-time or are on zero-hour contracts.*
5. *Creative and tech industries. Ones that produce a physical product such as cars.*
6. *Low-paid sectors such as retail, hospitality and care.*

### 4. Business language

- a. Students find the phrases in the article.

**Key:**

1. *under the radar*
2. *sign up for (something)*
3. *common thread*
4. *in the long run*

- b. Then students use the phrases to complete the sentences.

**Key:**

1. *in the long run*
2. *common thread*
3. *under the radar*
4. *sign up for (something)*

- c. Finally, they use the phrases in sentences of their own. Encourage them to make the sentences relevant for their jobs.

## 5. Business quotes

- a. Without looking back at the article, students try to remember which words are needed to complete the quotes as well as who said them. After they have attempted the task, they can look back to check their answers, and then, in part b, discuss how they feel about the quotes.

**Key:**

1. *There is more bad work made [in] the last one or two hours, than the whole of the first nine or 10 hours:*  
*an owner of large mills in Manchester and Preston in 1846*
2. *We can get at least as great production in five days as we can in six, and we shall probably get a greater, for the pressure will bring better methods:*  
*Henry Ford in 1926*
3. *Work in creative industries always expands to fill the time available:*  
*Shaun Rutland, chief executive of gaming company Hutch (a contemporary quote)*
4. *The harder we crowd business for time, the more efficient it becomes:*  
*Henry Ford (date unknown)*

- b. Students find three business quotes from Henry Ford that appeal to them, write them on the worksheet, and share their quotes.

## 6. Discussion

- a. Put the students in pairs or small groups and ask them to discuss the questions. When students have covered all the questions, bring the whole class back together so that they can share their answers and any interesting information that arose from their discussions.

## 7. Wider business theme – employee communication

- a. Students work through the task as laid out on the worksheet in groups of two to three people and share their final work with the rest of the group, talking through and explaining what they have found out by doing the task. Discuss which emails are most likely to incur a positive response from the employees and why.