

# The Manager's Take on the 4-Day Workweek

By Holly Rosenkrantz

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**W**ith the latest economic data (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/02/01/job-quits-resignations-december-2021/>) showing that the Great Resignation is continuing, companies face ongoing pressure to experiment with workplace changes to make their culture more appealing to employees.

Remote work is a popular change that employers are making, but the four-day ([www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/benefits/pages/ceo-advice-on-adopting-alternating-four-day-workweek.aspx](http://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/benefits/pages/ceo-advice-on-adopting-alternating-four-day-workweek.aspx)) workweek ([www.shrm.org/executive/resources/articles/pages/four-day-work-week-pilot.aspx](http://www.shrm.org/executive/resources/articles/pages/four-day-work-week-pilot.aspx)) is also gaining momentum ([www.shrm.org/executive/resources/articles/pages/executive-view-four-day-work-week.aspx](http://www.shrm.org/executive/resources/articles/pages/executive-view-four-day-work-week.aspx)). Earlier this year, 30 U.K. companies announced (<https://fortune.com/2022/01/20/four-day-workweek-trial-great-resignation/>) they will be participating in a six-month trial of a shorter workweek. Similar trials are being planned in the U.S. and other countries.

For managers, the four-day workweek can be a way to offer employees more personal time while holding on to structured, set work hours.

"Managers like the idea of simplicity and clarity," said Brian Kropp, chief of research for the HR practice at Gartner Inc in Arlington, Va. "A four-day workweek is a lot easier to manage than a lot of the other flexibility ideas that are out there, because even if you change hours to 8:30 to 5:30, Monday through Thursday, or whatever you pick, you're going to be able to e-mail someone or call or message and they should respond pretty quickly. Other flexibility options require a lot more effort on the part of managers to organize, coordinate, figure out who's there and so forth. So, from a manager perspective, they do like it because it's easier to manage that environment [compared with] other options."

As companies explore the concept of a four-day workweek, they are finding buy-in from managers who "have to feel like they have a level of control, because managers have responsibilities for outcomes," said Jackie Reinberg, who heads the absence and disability practice of the consulting firm WTW, formerly Willis Towers Watson.

"They need to have control and consistency," she said. "So, you are not in a situation where employees say, 'I took Wednesday off this week, and next week, I'm going to take off Friday, and the following week, I'm going to take off Thursday.' " Many managers, she said, may prefer to know, from week to week, precisely which days people are working.

Unlike flexible work arrangements that can benefit the employee but not necessarily the entire team, a compressed, four-day workweek has broader benefits for an organization.

"Managers tend to tell me they like the idea in no small part because they benefit as much as everyone in the company," said Ben Jackson, founder of Hear Me Out, an HR strategy company, who noted that managers are talking about the four-day workweek "constantly" in Slack channels and chat groups that he is a part of.

Still, Gartner's Kropp said that while the number of companies offering a four-day workweek is growing, it is "still a relatively very small number." He noted that there is a key reason why managers are hesitant.

Because most companies that are adopting a shorter workweek are not decreasing pay, they tend to expect the same output as before the hours were reduced, Kropp says. Problems could arise in the future if companies hire new people that start by working 32 hours per week. If a 40-hour workweek is implemented again in the future, those employees may then expect more money, he said.

Alex Soojung-Kim Pang, author of *Shorter* (Public Affairs, 2020), noted that "some who offer a four-day week require a salary reduction at the same time, and others might make it four 10-hour days. It's safe to say that that sort of option is more common now, as hybrid work and other kinds of arrangements have become more standard."

"The number of companies, schools and government offices that have standardized around four-day weeks for everyone has grown a lot in the last couple years but is still a relatively small number compared to the total number of companies in the U.S.," he added. "However, the movement is striking for its diversity, both in terms of size or market cap. It includes companies worth billions and employing hundreds of people in a variety of industries—everything from pest control companies and restaurants to software firms to law firms."

Another issue is assessing whether a company has structures in place that can support compressed hours, Pang said. As much as the idea is appealing for managers, "it is feckless to move to a four-day workweek with no idea of how it will affect workflow," he said. "There needs to be a detailed and informed understanding of different people's workflow."

But some managers, he said, tend to avoid setting up tight structures within the company because it forces "difficult conversations" about performance flaws. Ultimately, he said, managers are very interested in the idea because they are worried about burnout.

"The four-day workweek feels like the single best thing managers can do to address a range of issues related to burnout," he said.

WTW's Reinberg agreed.

"It's going to take work, but one of the greatest fears of managers is the Great Resignation," Reinberg said. "If managers can get their people to do this, it may be more enticing than trying to hire and train new workers, like they're doing now. For me, I would much rather have somebody work with a compressed workweek than have them leave when I've invested four or five years in them."

Finally, Reinberg noted that once a schedule is worked out, everyone's roles and responsibilities need to be clearly articulated. Schedules can't be amorphous, she said.

"Making this change requires a level of discipline," she said. "We're not talking about micromanagement; we are talking about communication. Managers have to make sure that their entire team culture hasn't been eroded with the four-day workweek."

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