

## Working Less or Working Smarter and Better?

Work less, earn more. That is the plan for most people. Barring the rare cases of people actually loving their work, for most of us a job is simply a means to survive. If you haven't won the genetic lottery to be born into outrageous wealth, just staying alive requires you to perform certain activities in order to get remunerated for them or simply put, you have to work for a living. Since the birth of civilization, individuals have exchanged their labor for resources, which might have been products of other people's labor, or later in more advanced civilizations, money in one way or another.

Specialization of labor has made it possible for us to choose certain areas and concentrate on those alone, so that we do not have to build our own houses, grow our own crops or produce everything we want to consume. Instead, we go to work, perform the activities required from us and get compensated on the basis of the value we provide. The basic principle has been the same for millennia. What has changed are the terms and conditions of our work.

One of those constantly changing attributes of work is the working week itself. Last month, more than [3000 people across 70 companies](#) in the UK became part of the world's biggest experiment on 4-day workweeks. The underlying idea is colloquially known as the 100:80:100 principle, designating 100% of the pay for 80% of the time with the condition of maintaining 100% of the productivity from before. So 4 days of work per week instead of 5 with the same 8-hour workdays, and, consequently 3 days instead of 2 to get rest.

The latest experiment in the UK is by far the largest, but it is not the first of its kind. In the last decade [Iceland, Sweden, New Zealand](#) and many other countries have tried to implement shorter workweeks in one way or another. The results have been mostly positive, with employees

being able to achieve better work-life balance and lower stress levels. The pandemic and the resulting move to work from home and hybrid working models has only made the idea more prominent, especially among the younger population seeking more flexible work schedules.

The last time the workweek was undergoing tectonic shifts of this magnitude was almost 100 years ago, when the automotive pioneer Henry Ford introduced the well-known 40-hour, 5-day workweek that we still use to this day. This system later became the norm in most legislations around the world. Before that, 6-day workweeks were the norm. Now that schedule's roots trace to thousands of years ago, and in the case of the Christian world, to the creation of the world itself. Working for 6 days and resting on the seventh is how God created the world. In fact, even the 5-day workweek was somewhat based on religious motives, when the New England cotton mill introduced the [2 non-working days](#) so that their Jewish employees could observe Sabbath on Saturdays, while the Christians could have Sundays off. The [7-day cycle](#), a seemingly unnatural and somewhat odd amount of time, can also be attributed to the Babylonians, who observed 7 celestial bodies (the Sun, the Moon and 5 planets visible to the naked eye), and attributed a day to each of those.

Anyway, the 40-hour workweek that has been in place for almost a century, but for the most part of the industrialized civilization that we live in today, is not exactly a must. For billions of people those 40 hours are just a number on a contract, while their actual hours worked are sometimes double that amount or even more. So, for people that stay late or come to the office on the weekends, the switch does not make much difference. The people that did manage to complete their tasks in the 40 hours will try to do so in 32. Those that did not will have to work even more overtime. If an employee stays for two more hours than the 8-hour workday presumes, that means that regardless of the change in the contract, they still need 50 hours to complete their weekly

tasks. So trying to pack those 50 hours into a 4-day workweek translates into 12.5-hour workdays. Now the employee has to work 56% more than he or she is supposed to according to their contract. If they are still getting the same pay, it becomes an issue of whether they want to stay longer hours in less days, or they would be better off with the original setting.

If we look at the most extreme cases, such as Wall Street internships, the issue gets all the more complicated. Last year's [infamous internal survey](#) amid Goldman Sachs interns showed that recent graduates worked 90, even up to 100 hours a week, which had become the norm throughout the industry for first-year analysts. Some firms have even introduced “no work from Friday 9pm till Sunday 9am” rules, so one cannot help but wonder if the 40-hour, 5-day workweek is really the norm, or if it is just one of a myriad of possible work schedules.