

SA results are in: 4 day week an unexpected success

Twenty-six companies have concluded the first ever pilot of the four-day week in a developing country - and the first in Africa - which has produced some surprisingly successful results.



Image source: Anastasiia Yanishevskaya – [123RF.com](https://www.123RF.com)

Launched in March 2023, the trial run by 4 Day Week Global, in partnership with 4 Day Week South Africa NPC and researchers at Boston College and Stellenbosch Business School, was initially met with skepticism.

However, the [research findings of the pilot](#), released today, reveal that companies rated their experience an impressive 8 out of 10, with 92% definitely intending to continue the four-day week or considering it. Employees value their time off so much that 51% say they would need a 21 - 50% pay increase to revert to a 5 day week at their next job. Moreover, 13% report that no amount of money would induce them to return to the five-day formula.

Benefits and improvements

Companies reported a range of business benefits from revenue increases, to improved productivity, positive impacts on recruitment, decreased resignations and decreases in absenteeism.

Employees noted improvements in their overall well-being including a reduction in stress, burnout, fatigue, poor sleep and anxiety, a positive boost in mental health and work-family balance, and an increase in exercise frequency. Self-rated productivity emerged as the most significant change with nearly half of employees reporting an increase in productivity during the trial.

Pilot participants underwent significant review in the way they operated, implementing more structured focus periods throughout the day, reducing meeting duration and frequency, increasing the use of technology and automation, and improving communication, delegation, and employee autonomy.

Companies were innovative in their approach to work-time reduction, working with employees to agree on the day or times that best suited their individual needs while ensuring alignment with business requirements. Although still short of the target of 8 hours a week, 64% of participants reported a reduction in work time, and 57% reported a decrease in the number of days worked each week.



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SA's unique challenges

Unique in the South African context are the benefits of more time off in a country where intergenerational caring responsibilities are high, administrative responsibilities such as renewing driving licenses demand in-person attendance, poor public transport and traffic congestion present daily challenges, and a large number of people engage in side hustles and embryonic entrepreneurial pursuits.

The South African findings differ in some regards from those of pilots in the developed world. No change was observed in time spent by participants volunteering to help the environment. There was little change in domestic and international travels and little to no change in childcare costs.

Surprising results

Commenting on the unexpected success of the experiment in South Africa, Karen Lowe, 4 Day Week South Africa Global Head of Partnerships said: “We seized our ‘Moonshot Moment’ to be the first African country to trial the four-day week, met initially with much skepticism and frequent debate about its viability in South Africa. Our journey reveals success despite numerous challenges facing South African employers and employees.”

On the significance of the trial for South Africa, local research lead Professor Mark Smith of Stellenbosch Business School remarked, “The four-day week presents the rare combination of benefits for both employees and employers by enhancing well-being, productivity, and work organisation. It is exciting to see South African results showing similar benefits to those we observe around the world while also having unique aspects that leave us enthusiastic about its potential for future participants and the wider economy.”

Lead researcher, Professor Juliet Schor of Boston College, highlighted an important outcome, stating “We were encouraged that participants did not experience an increase in the intensity of work. This suggests that the work re-organisation strategy succeeded, and performance was not achieved via speedup, which is neither sustainable nor desirable.”

Participant feedback

Reflecting on the trial experience, pilot participant Annerike Meiring, Human Resource Officer at Elnatan reported that

"Elnatan has overall achieved success with the four-day week and will continue. Our employees are more rested, productivity has increased, and our customers have not experienced any difference in our quality of service. The pilot has taught us how to be more agile and efficient. We are using those learnings to rethink and optimise for the future."

Kealeboga Kaelo, CEO of Precision Vehicle and Asset Tracking shared, "When we signed up for the six-month pilot, we believed that a four-day week was the future of work worth exploring. We are happy to announce that post the pilot, this has become our new normal, our current way of work. We have adopted the four-day week on a permanent basis. Our staff unanimously agreed that the four-day week has significantly benefited them at individual levels since they have an extra day to attend to personal affairs. Some employees mentioned that being given an extra day to rest during the week helped them be more productive the following day."

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