

The 4-day work week and how it could impact workplace mental health

Tanya Woolf, Head of Psychological Services at Onebright, discusses the impact of excessive hours on mental health and employee well-being.



Workplace Mental Health: How to Create a Happier, Healthier Workforce

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, August 9, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In June 2022, companies and businesses

across the UK began trials for a four-day working week with no reduction in employee pay. This step was taken to help employees who may be heading towards burnout as they balance their personal and professional lives and to boost overall productivity and morale. Currently, full-time employees in the UK work two and a half weeks more a year than the average in Europe.

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With 60% of CEOs in the UK concerned about the mental well-being of their staff, a shorter week with longer workdays is one way to improve quality of life without compromising productivity. Should more companies consider a flexible working model that offers the 4-day week as an option to employees, and what impact could this have on workplace mental health?

The issue with excessive work hours

If you ask people why they work such long hours – they may cite:

Competing or unrealistic deadlines, too few resources (mainly meaning not enough staff to cover workloads) and the drive for greater profitability or to manage reduced budgets.

While some of these perceptions undoubtedly have a degree of accuracy, these unhelpful or self-destructive thinking patterns can sometimes lead to behaviours based on incorrect assumptions. One of the aspects found in [Cognitive Behavioural Therapy](#) (CBT) sessions is that clients believe their work and performance should always maintain a “perfect” standard. For people who think this way, “good enough” is not an option, even when clients or managers are entirely happy with it.

Even for those not driven by perfectionism, focusing on things that don't matter much or

procrastinating can be part of the problem.

What of the genuine external pressures?

Managers and clients may persuade employees to work excessively or pressure them to do so. By combining a person's willingness to help and their internal drive to deliver work that meets their high expectations, you have a "perfect storm" where they are driven to work excessively. Organisations that pressure staff excessively due to a combination of over-controlling management, excessive focus on profits/cuts or their fear of losing business can all affect the psychological well-being of people throughout the workplace. These work environments have high turnover rates and work-related stress, which is ultimately unsustainable for long-term success.

What does long-term work pressure result in?

40% of people in a recent Deloitte survey said their mental health worsened in the pandemic, and 28% resigned in 2021 or planned to resign in 2022. The pressures of strenuous working hours can contribute to poor health outcomes for people, overall workplace well-being and work satisfaction. The pressures can also result in poor performance due to sick leave and presenteeism – showing up for work but performing at an unsatisfactory level or barely at all. It can also lead to poor quality of the work itself.

There have been many studies over recent decades on the impact of excessive work on people's performance. They show consistently that performance drops dramatically once a person has worked 8-10 hours regularly. Fatigue means performance slows down, and there is a greater chance that more mistakes are made. Concentration levels can diminish, so they may have to keep checking their work, so something that generally only takes 30 minutes has turned into a two-hour task.

Taking steps to improve productivity at work

The key to improving health and work performance is not working to excess and focusing on tasks that matter most, but rather scheduling and prioritising. Onebright's [mental health training](#) for line managers empowers people to begin conversations surrounding workplace mental health with more confidence and compassion. Whether you're considering a 4-day working week for your organisation or not, employers who are dedicated to understanding workplace mental health are in a better position to reduce the stigma of mental health and, in turn, can work towards improving productivity as well as the performance of employees.

CBT can help treat issues related to perfectionism, including the fear of failure and associating self-worth with performance. It does this by replacing flawed beliefs with more realistic ones. It's highly structured, aiming to find solutions to problems in a short time frame and helps employees break down problems into manageable chunks, which are dealt with in steps.

Just a few years ago, it would have been hard to imagine the far-reaching societal impacts and shifts that have happened in the wake of the pandemic. A re-evaluation of what's important in

life was a common side effect. And for many people, that included examining the balance—or lack thereof—between working life and personal life. Countless trials and studies have proven that the 4-day work week benefits employee mental health, and now businesses need to consider offering employee benefits that reflect society’s changing priorities.

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