

Workday and Productivity Study

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Introduction

Many workers work longer than 40 hours a week, and many researchers worry that extended hours will not only lower productivity but may have lasting adverse effects on workers' mental health. Long work days displace time workers might spend with family, contributing to the community, or participating in other worthwhile, healthy outlets. One human resources study suggested that while employees were often willing to work longer hours to advance in the workplace, this led to wide-spread employee dissatisfaction (Sturges & Guest, 2004).

Some companies have adopted a compressed work week, asking employees to work four 10-hour work days. The state of Utah adopted a compressed work week for nearly all state employees in 2008 with the aim of cutting energy costs, improving air quality, expanding service for the state's citizens, and attracting and retaining quality employees (Facer II & Wadsworth, 2010, p. 1041). The state did see some savings by reducing energy costs and facility expenditures. Most Utahans supported the change, and the majority of employees (82%) expressed a clear preference for the new schedule. Employees benefited from shorter commutes and more personal time (Facer II & Wadsworth, 2010, pp. 1044-1045).

Rather than compress the work week, another option is to shorten the work week to 35 hours. Employees would benefit from more discretionary time, and employers could hire more employees and increase productivity. In his study of the effects of France's move to a 35-hour work week, Hayden (2006) concluded that employment and productivity levels did increase as a result of the policy change. However, he also noted that less-skilled workers who had less autonomy often took the brunt of the new policy, including the pressure to complete more work in less time and increased demands to multi-task.

Golden (2010) came to a similar conclusion, finding that a flexible work schedule may be more important than a shorter work day. He concluded that "the timing of work and employee control over such work may matter as much as, if not more than, the duration of work hours" (p. 1201).

A flexible work schedule does seem promising. In a meta-analysis, de Menezes and Lelliher (2010) found that many studies did conclude that providing employees with more control of their schedules increased overall job satisfaction and lowered stress. However, other studies suggested that some flexible work opportunities, such as working remotely or working for a company that undervalued flexible work schedules might actually increase workers' stress. In the end, they suggested current research was inconclusive. A lack of clear methodology made it difficult to predict a clear benefit from more flexible work schedules.

Brown and Associates hopes to increase employee satisfaction and productivity by shortening their employees' workweek. This report, based on data gathered through an employee survey and the company's most recent financial statements, concludes that while a shorter work week may yield an initial boost in employee morale and productivity, the cost of hiring and training additional staff would outweigh the benefits.

Methods

Survey Delivery

The Eclipse Foundation administered a survey to all company employees. The survey was designed in Qualtrics and delivered to employees using their employee e-mail addresses with an invitation from the company president to participate. The survey clearly indicated that all responses would remain anonymous. Of 378 employees, 292 completed the survey.

Survey Design

The survey was designed to measure employees' job satisfaction and their interest in moving to a shorter work week. The questionnaire consisted of ten statements measuring employee satisfaction based on the top indicators of job satisfaction identified in the Boston Consulting Group's 2014 study. Participants were asked to respond to each statement using a five point Likert Scale indicating whether they strongly agreed (SA), agreed (A), were neutral (N), disagreed (D) or strongly disagreed (SD) with each statement. The final multiple choice question asked employees to express a preference for a shorter work week, a more flexible schedule, higher compensation, or an opportunity to telecommute.

Survey Analysis

Survey results from the first ten questions were averaged to determine an over-all job satisfaction score for each participant using the following scale. (see Table 1)

Job Satisfaction Statements	
Strongly Agree	5
Agree	4
Neutral	3
Disagree	2
Strongly Disagree	1

Table 1

Participants were then divided into five job satisfaction categories: highly satisfied (42-50), satisfied (34-41), neutral (26-33), dissatisfied (18-25), and very dissatisfied (10-17). Responses to the final multiple choice question were recorded and correlated with participants' over-all job satisfaction scores.

Results

Satisfaction

The majority of respondents expressed a high level of job satisfaction. As figure 1 illustrates, the vast majority of workers would reapply for their current position (VSA 124, 42%; SA 102, 35%; N 41, 14%; D 22, 8%; SD 3, 1%), and just a slightly smaller number felt their work was valued by their company and co-workers (VSA 98, 33%; SA 117, 40%; N 60, 21%; D 14, 5%; SD 3, 1%).

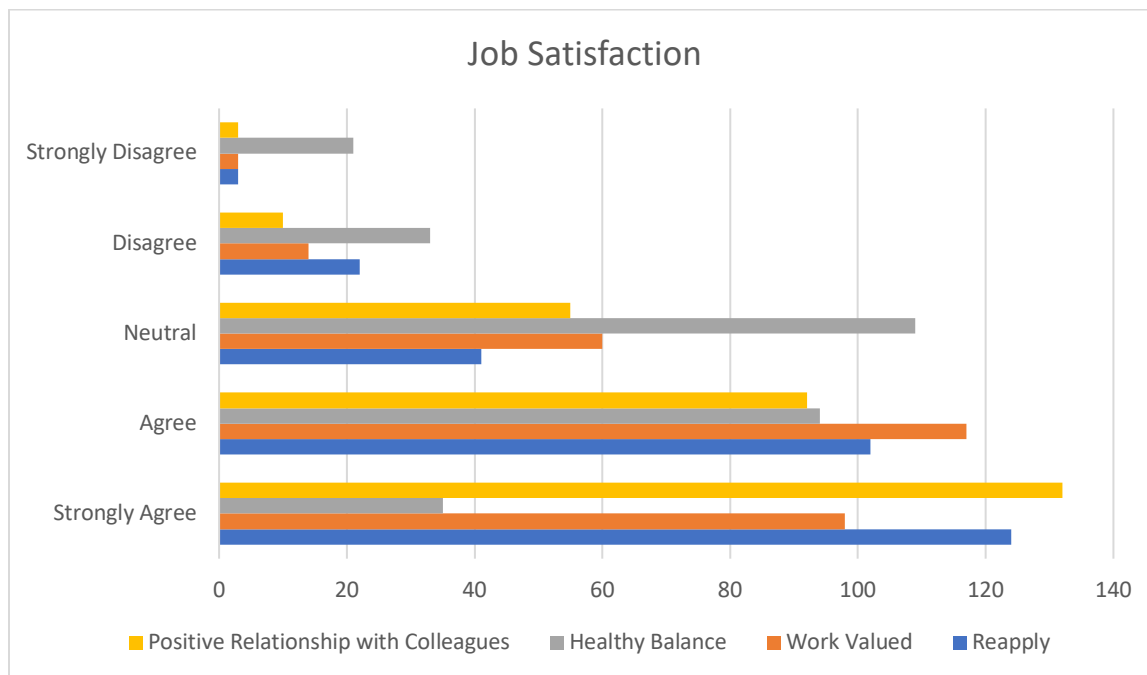


Figure 1

While the number of workers who felt their work allowed them to strike a healthy work/life balance dropped (VSA 35, 12%; SA 94, 32%; N 109, 37%; D 33, 11%; SD 21, 7%), the number of employees who felt very strongly that they had good relationships with their colleagues (VSA 132, 45%; SA 92, 32%; N 55, 19%; D 10, 3%; SD 3, 1%) was higher than every other survey response with the exception of the question measuring workers' specialized skills and experience.

Engagement

But while most workers expressed satisfaction in their work, they did not express strong engagement in that work. All respondents felt their work required specialized skills or experience (VSA 150, 51%; SA 104, 36%; N 38, 13%; D 0, --; SD 0,--), but as figure 2 shows, many workers felt they did not have the opportunity to learn or develop new skills (VSA 30, 10%; SA 98, 34%; N 34, 12%; D 112, 38%; SD 18, 6%).

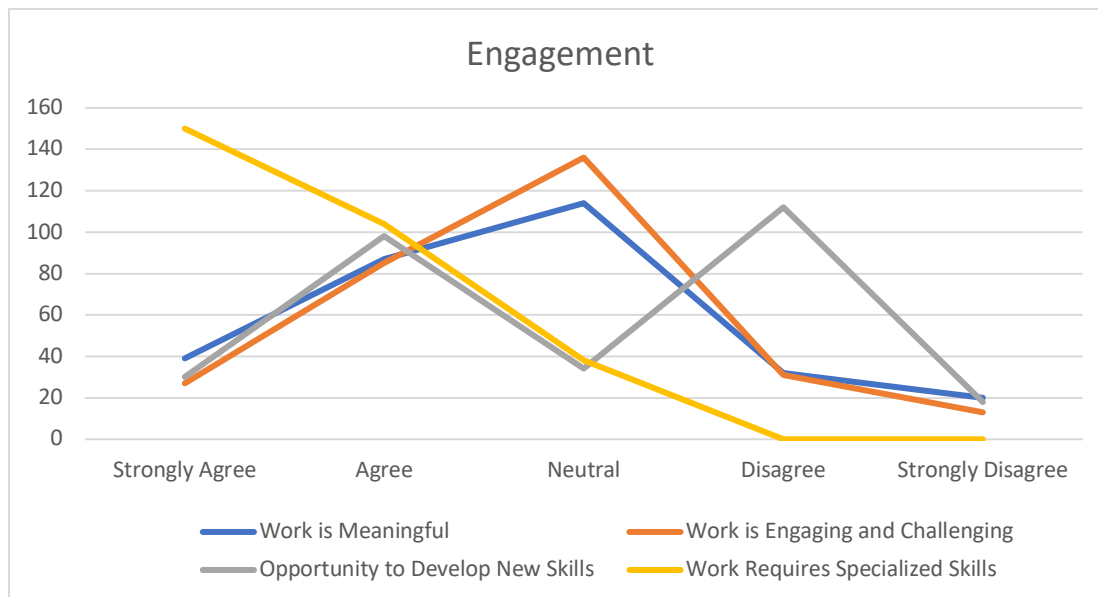


Figure 2

In addition, most respondents were neutral when asked if they found their work meaningful (VSA 39, 13%; SA 87, 30%; N 114, 39%; D 32, 11%; SD 20, 7%) or engaging and challenging (VSA 27, 9%; SA 85, 29%; N 136, 47%; D 31, 11%; SD 13, 4%).

Autonomy

The lowest satisfaction scores came from questions focused on workers' autonomy (see figure 3).

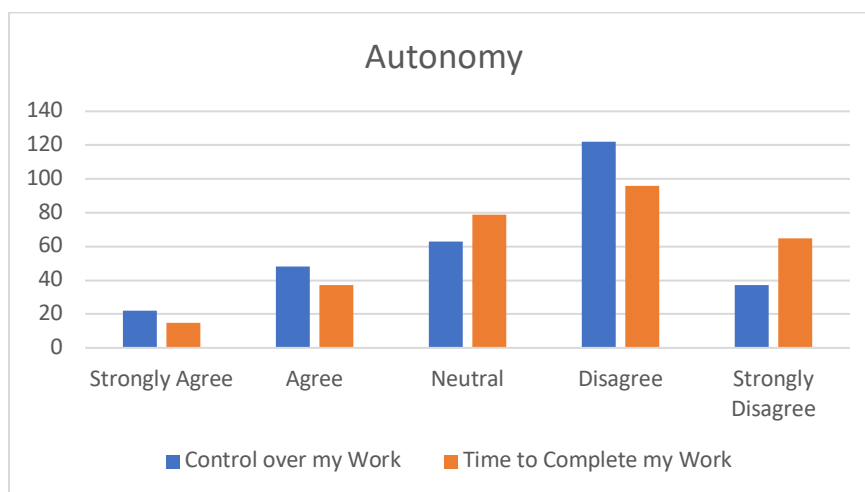


Figure 3

Most workers felt they did not have enough time to complete their work (VSA 15, 5%; SA 37, 13%; N 79, 27%; D 96, 33%; SD 65, 22%), and an almost equal number were dissatisfied or strongly dissatisfied with the control they had over how they completed their work (VSA 22, 8%; SA 48, 16%; N 63, 22%; D 122, 42%; SD 37, 13%).

When asked about their work schedule preferences, most workers (154, 53%) preferred a shorter work week to a more flexible schedule (86, 29%), the opportunity to telecommute (31, 11%), or higher compensation (21, 7%).

Discussion

Job Satisfaction

The majority of employees report a high level of overall job satisfaction with over half (53%) expressing satisfaction to high satisfaction, and 77% responding positively when asked if they would reapply for the same position. While employees are generally satisfied, the survey did suggest workers would welcome a more flexible work schedule perhaps as a means to exert more control over their workflow.

Appreciation

Employees score high on the most important indicators of job satisfaction: appreciation for work and good relationships with co-workers. In fact, of all considerations, respondents rated their relationship with colleagues as the most satisfying aspect of their jobs. Were the company to adopt a shortened work week and bring in new employees to fill those hours, existing healthy and productive workplace relationships might be disrupted. Were even 50% of the current workforce to move to a 35 hour work week, the company would need to hire and train 27 new employees, nearly a 7% increase. This influx of new workers would impact nearly every existing team and might affect their ability to function at their current levels.

Autonomy

The survey indicated that workers crave more control of their work schedules. A shortened work week may provide more personal time away from work, but nearly half of current employees (44%) already feel they strike a good life/work balance. What most employees want is more autonomy to complete their work. The two survey prompts that measured the highest dissatisfaction amongst employees dealt with control of workflow (55%) and insufficient time to complete work (55%). Both issues can be resolved by providing workers more flexibility to manage their own time without making changes to the existing work schedule.

And while it is true more respondents preferred a shorter work week (53%), nearly a third (29%) simply favored a more flexible work schedule.

Cost

Our survey shows that most workers do favor shortening the work week. However, as illustrated in figure 2, nearly all respondents indicated that their jobs required specialized skills or experience. Finding and training enough employees to fill current positions during a shortened work week may be challenging and expensive. Current training and professional development efforts are already falling short as the opportunity to learn and develop new skills ranks third in overall dissatisfaction among respondents (44%).

Rather than shortening the work week, the company and its employees may benefit most from providing workers more opportunities to structure their workday and increasing their access to

professional development and training. These changes will most likely lead to increased job satisfaction which may, in turn, increase employee productivity. To best meet these needs, future research should focus on how employees use their time, how their time is currently managed, and what types of training and professional development will provide the most benefit.

Conclusion

Most employees would welcome a shortened work week, but our analysis shows a shortened work week will increase cost, may disrupt collaboration among colleagues, and may lower productivity. Instead, we recommend the company work with employees to increase their autonomy within the current work schedule. Allowing workers to control their own work flow while providing meaningful professional development opportunities for them will be the most effective way to increase their productivity and job satisfaction.

References

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