The Four-Day Work Week []

Troppo stress, sovraccarico ed esaurimento? È arrivato il momento di rivendicare la settimana lavorativa di quattro giorni.

A five-day, forty-hour working week was the best model when most people worked outside the home on business premises during established hours. Technological innovation has changed all that. Can we take control of those changes and make them work for us in a positive way, for example, by working less for the money we earn? The UK's 4-Day Week Campaign thinks the answer is a definite yes! As the campaign's homepage claims: "The UK works longer hours than most of Europe. It is not making us more productive. It is making us stressed, over-worked and burnt out. It is time for a four-day week." Joe Ryle is the director of the 4-Day Week Campaign. Speak Up asked him why so many people feel it would be impossible for them to work less. **Joe Ryle (English accent)**: I think that highlights the problem: there's an unhealthy addiction to work, where way too much of our identity is **bound up** in work. What we've found, with the evidence where people have moved to a four-day working week, is that actually by working less hours, you're more productive in the time that you are at work. So I think it's about getting the balance right. It isn't about not working, it's about just

having one extra day to be able **to cope** with all the different aspects of life, whether it's bringing up a family, doing the shopping, doing **life admin**... It's just getting that balance right.

AN UNHEALTHY CULTURE

Many people are worried that advancements in technology have actually created more work rather than **lessened** it. We asked Ryle if that were true, and **if so**, why. **Joe Ryle**: I think the smartphone generation are living in quite an unhealthy culture, this kind of 'always on' culture where you're always expected to be taking emails, and the kind of **boundaries** between work and the rest of your life are very **blurred**. These new models of technology, which have happened over the last few decades, are making us more productive and so, therefore, we're performing more productively at work... We should be at work less, and that hasn't really happened. All of that greater productivity hasn't really been passed on to workers in more free time or leisure time. Where it has gone is, it's gone to bosses in greater **profits**. So this is about reclaiming our time.

ISSUES OF TRUST

As Ryle explains, a four-day working week would not only make us more efficient but also feel more responsible and valued in our jobs. **Joe Ryle**: Number one: don't **overthink** it. There's a real danger in **overthink**ing and **overthink**ing every possible eventuality. The idea behind it is **fairly straightforward**, you know? It's reducing hours by 80 per cent while maintaining pay and trying to be as effective as a business organisation. So don't **overthink** it. The second one is: a **bottom-up** approach is much better than a **top-down** approach. So trust your staff in the implementation. Involve them in the process of moving to a four-day working week, '**coz** they know their jobs better than anyone else. Thirdly, I would say **give it a go**, **trial** it first. We do always recommend **trial**ling it for three months or six months first, which gives you some **leeway**, and also helps make the case to management, you know?: it's just a **trial** and they don't have **to stick** with it if at the end of it, if it's not working. The last one is to think about ways in

which productivity can be improved and business performance can be improved before doing a four-day week. Because if you can find those hours that are being **wasted** in a week — and every organisation has hours that are being **wasted** — we all have tasks that we do at work that don't really contribute to the **output** of an organisation — if you can look at those hours that are being **wasted** and improve on that before moving to a four-day week, that's going to make the transition a lot **smoother**.

SMARTER ABOUT SHARING

And, says Ryle, a four-day working week isn't just a necessity, it's an inevitability. **Joe Ryle**: I think it's starting to spread. I do think it'll be the future. I mean if we think about automation and new technology, and there's more to come, **undeniably**, then we're gonna have to be **smarter** about sharing work more equally across the economy. There's gonna be a diminishing amount of jobs anyway. I think we're at the very beginning of the transition to a four-day working week and I do think it will be the future of work.

THE STATS ENDORSE THE FOUR-DAY WORK WEEK

The world's largest four-day week **trial** involved sixty-one firms from various sectors in the UK and around 2,900 workers. Led by researchers at the University of Cambridge, the study took place between June and December 2022. Out of the sixty-one firms took part and of those, fifty-six (92%) decided to continue with the four-day week. The **trial** was carefully prepared, with two months of workshops, coaching and peer support. The only **proviso** was that pay should be maintained at 100 per cent and employees should have a **meaningful** reduction in work time. Apart from that, there were no rigid guidelines and companies of various sizes and cultures were able **to tailor-make** the four-day week solutions **to suit** their organisational structure and environment. The research highlighted significant benefits for employees' well-being, with people reporting lower levels of anxiety and fatigue and improved sleep, mental and physical health. **SPECIFICALLY: 39%** said they were less stressed **60%** found it easier to combine work with care

responsibilities **62%** said it was easier to combine work with their social lives **71%** participants reported lower levels of burnout The companies also benefitted. Compared with the same six-month period the previous year, there was a 65 per cent reduction in **sick days** and a 57 per cent **drop** in the number of staff leaving. Some organisations even reported **revenue** increases of 35 per cent on average during this period of working time reduction. www.4dayweek.co.uk

Glossary

- **wasted** = sprecare
- **sick days** = giorni di assenza per malattia
- **life admin** = gestione della quotidianità
- **blurred** = sfumare
- **coz** = perché (abbr. because)
- **to tailor-make** = personalizzare
- **to suit** = adattare
- **if so** = in questo caso
- **boundaries** = confini
- **overthink** = rimuginare
- **meaningful** = significativa
- **drop** = caduta
- **to cope** = fare fronte a
- **profits** = profitti
- **undeniably** = innegabilmente
- **revenue** = fatturato
- **lessened** = ridurre
- **give it a go** = tentare
- **trial** = provare
- **fairly straightforward** = piuttosto semplice
- **top-down** = dall'alto verso il basso
- **leeway** = margine d'azione
- **bound up** = legata, connessa
- **smoother** = più morbida
- **proviso** = condizione
- **smarter** = più intelligenti
- **bottom-up** = dal basso verso l'alto
- **to stick** = attenersi, mantenere
- **output** = rendimento