



PRODUCTIVITY

More companies flirt with the idea of the four-day work week

Many white-collar jobs, particularly those in creative industries like PR, publishing, and design, have embraced summer hours for years, with shortened workdays on Fridays. Now, some companies are experimenting with “Winter Fridays,” says [The New York Times](#). While clearly seasonal-specific options, both these trends are part of ongoing explorations on the impact of reduced workweeks. Though hardly ubiquitous in either summer or winter, research points to a year-round, four-day workweek gaining some popularity across industries and across the globe.

The reasons for pursuing a reduced work week are usually rooted in improving work/life balance. Longer commutes, an always-on work culture because of email, the cost of childcare and other challenges for families, and general worker burnout are often cited as reasons for adding an extra day off to the week. For companies that have pursued a shorter week, employees report reduced stress and enjoying spending more time with family, exercising, volunteering, or pursuing a passion.

Those may be good enough reasons to pilot a similar program for some companies. If you need more reasons, consider what less time at work might mean for upskilling or reskilling. Employees could use less work time to pursue training or certifications for further education in areas critical to your company as well as their professional development. Giving employees a chance to take courses and improve their skills benefits both employees and companies.

Still not convinced? You could also factor in even loftier goals like improving gender equity and battling climate change. An article in [Quartz](#) shows how normalizing shorter work weeks helps women combat career lag and lower pay from taking time off after having babies or are dealing



with part-time work for childcare and family reasons. If everyone worked less, the argument goes, there'd be less stigma and financial repercussions for women. It could also empower more men to take a more active role in parenting. In the U.S., where there is no national paid leave policy, enacting a shorter work week could be a game changer for some families.

While these are all desirable outcomes, the concerns around a four-day week are generally related to lost productivity or revenue – legitimate issues for businesses.

Concerns surrounding productivity and performance may be put to rest, if current research holds up. In one trial run in a New Zealand-based company that was widely reported in the news, productivity in fact went up 20 percent! Managers also cite improved creativity and problem solving as well as better customer service, according to [The Guardian](#).

If you're ready to propose or enact a shortened work week, companies that have pioneered the approach have wisdom to offer. To make it work best, experts suggest framing the opportunity as one rooted in productivity with goals and accountability set together. As long as the accountability doesn't resort to outright policing, this collective social contract, says [Thrive Global](#), is more impactful than highlighting more time with family or to pursue personal projects.

Start that accountability by having your team engaged in deciding how to do it (what schedule works, what metrics of success look like, how to ensure someone is always available for customers) so you benefit from their strategies and they have more agency in the program. Experts also suggest making it a flexible policy, giving employees the option to choose if a reduced work week is right for them.

Is there a social, political, or cultural trend at work in the four-day work week? An article in [Salon](#) considers whether it is just a next step in workers' rights. While the eight-hour day and the two-day weekend were union victories of the past that now seem commonplace, a four-day work week may be the next big political thing. While Americans use and get fewer vacation hours and are perpetuators of hustle culture, the British Labour Party has members advocating that the amount of time people work should go down as technology improves.

As America prepares for the 2020 presidential election in the U.S., the national minimum wage and paid parental and sick leaves are on the minds of campaign advisors. Will any candidate take up the four-day work week? One thing they'd need to consider – citizens would have more free time to engage with politics!

Read More:

[How to Make the 4-day Work Week Possible, According to Someone Who's Done It](#)
[Secrets of a Four-day Week, From an Owner Who Wants Every Company to Try It](#)
[The Case for a 4-day Workweek](#)
[Four-day Week: Trial Finds Lower Stress and Increased Productivity](#)
[The "Winter Friday" Off Is Now a Thing](#)

PRODUCTIVITY

Playing in the workplace

Have you heard of gamification? To gamify an everyday activity, you add the best fun or competitive elements associated with games to help boost engagement, according to [G2 Crowd](#). Why bother and not just slog through your paperwork? The idea behind gamification is that feeling accomplished or engaged in fun ways, whether by earning points, badges, or accolades, can help people stay motivated to stick with tasks they might otherwise abandon.

At the workplace, gamification can boost productivity — such as boosting sales calls or conversions — or help employees commit to a wellness plan through a bit of healthy competition. The approach can also be used before an individual ever joins your company or organization, according to [Workforce](#). Recruiters say using tools with simulations or gamified components can provide insight into how a candidate might perform in new or challenging situations. For current employees, gamification can help with learning or improving skills, according to an article in [Society for Human Resource Management](#). Gamified activities where winning is an all-team effort instead of a competition can help build cohesiveness, camaraderie and improve collaboration within business units or departments.

This all sounds great, right? Be mindful that jumping on any new trend without a plan is rarely a good idea. Gamification has its critics and requires thoughtfully designed programs. When gamification works, it works. When it doesn't, it can actually decrease productivity and diminish engagement and morale, according to a second article in [Society for Human Resource Management](#).

If the competition is too fierce or the game too difficult, you risk unintentionally demotivating people. Be mindful, too, of individual circumstances, like an employee who is disabled, pregnant, dealing with stress at home, or tackling a new challenging role. In those cases, what may seem like a fun competition may feel like a task now made impossible. The added stress of even the friendliest competition can negatively impact some workers.

To make gamification work, tailor the program to your team and their work. Remind everyone it's about better overall performance measure through small goals, not about one person winning and "beating" everyone else. Include potential participants in the design process to ensure your gamified activity hits its mark. Offering more than one winner, avoiding publicly shaming an employee for participation or results, and regularly changing what winning is (improvement in an area to closing sales to skill gains). Bear in mind no game can fix a systemic problem or company culture failure. You can expect small gains in some areas, but a game won't radically or magically rewire your company.

If the caveats have you concerned, it may be a good idea to also bring in experts on learning and behavior to ensure the design will elicit the goals you seek and motivate in the ways you want. And while we may be a more and more online, app-driven culture, not every game has to be a digital experience, according to [CEOWorld Magazine](#). Consider analog activities, as well, that can give individuals opportunities to shine or teams a chance to cooperate in new ways.

While you may be eager to attract Millennial and even Gen Z workers, most of whom are digital natives raised on apps that track and reward, game systems in their pockets, and gamification at school even including university, gut check that you are moving forward with an authentic and well-considered plan. Better to be a bit behind on a trend than dive in and do more harm than good!

Read more:

[What is Gamification?](#)

[Reskilling: The New Trend in Recruiting](#)

[Be Careful: Gamification at Work Can Go Very Wrong](#)

[Viewpoint: Is Gamification Good for HR?](#)

[Gamification: 5 Surefire Ways to Skyrocket Your Team Productivity](#)

FUTURE OF WORK

The future is freelancing

The freelance revolution is here, and it's here to stay. In the past, freelancing was an option for workers between jobs with the likely goal eventually getting back into a full-time position. Today, it's shifted into a lifestyle choice individuals make for a host of reasons, and something they may do for the long-term. Some research points to more than half of all workers identifying as part of the contingent economy, with those numbers trending upward.

Freelance includes the gig economy, jobs like driving for Uber, but it also includes a growing number of highly qualified people who provide needed services to businesses. [Forbes](#) points to these individuals as possessing expert skills and talents that are in high demand, especially in today's tight labor market. While these services may sometimes fill a temporary seasonal surge, more and more business are looking at building long-term relationships with freelancers who serve as integral and trusted member of in-house teams.

Before you need this specific kind of talent is the best time to assess if you are ready to work with today's population of freelancers. Your HR and legal departments can proactively create contracts, processes and systems that make a freelance relationship one that benefits everyone and operates smoothly.

Get your tools straight. [HR Technologist](#) recommends adjusting tools beyond just considering payroll. This may mean new solutions and apps for workforce management, time tracking, and even looking toward freelance hiring apps. Staying current with available technology for both hiring and managing will help companies compete for and keep top freelance talent.

Kick off smart. Helping freelancers succeed certainly starts with on-boarding them successfully, according to [Entrepreneur](#). It's essential to help a freelancer understand both the culture of your company and the context of a project. Giving a freelancer a dump of information is better than nothing, but smart transfer of applicable knowledge critical. What is the goal of the project? What resources are at their disposal? Which people are their main points of contact?

Set expectations about communications. It's essential to not just discuss how often a freelancer should check in, but to also delineate what format is most acceptable. Knowing if an in-person meeting, phone call, or email update is sufficient helps keep everyone on track. With an ever-growing remote workforce, consider the benefit of the occasional face-to-face meeting, even for freelancers.

Talk to the internal team. Buy-in from your in-house employees is essential to helping a freelancer succeed. There may be anxiety that the freelancer is competing for their job or being brought in because of a perceived skill deficit. Help your employees feel like a resource and see the freelancer as a valuable addition to the team.

Include them. While a freelancer brought in on one short project may not make the office holiday party list, work to integrate freelancers into company life in ways that make sense. If you're hosting a lunch-and-learn on a relevant topic, extend an invite. If the team is meeting up for lunch and the freelancer is in the same city, see if they are free. Don't be offended if they opt out, and be sure to clarify if they should track this time as billable.

Provide feedback. This, of course, helps a freelancer improve their services for your organization. It also helps them improve as professionals. It's also worth considering giving freelancers an opportunity to give you feedback, too. Their outside perspective may help you identify opportunities for improvement within your organization.

Offer support. Another idea is to keep a list of portable benefits, such as those described in [Employee Benefit News](#), to help support your freelance team. Whether an individual is new to freelancing or not, access to an ongoing list of insurance options and other resources available to improve their quality of freelance life and work is something they'd definitely appreciate.

For busy HR professionals looking to fill full-time openings, the addition of navigating freelancers may seem to be another duty on an already long to-do list. Why bother investing in someone who won't be a full-time addition? [Forbes](#) points out that freelancers are a way to fast track top, diverse talent and potentially save money on salary and benefits. With many new employees leaving in less than a year, investing in long-term freelancers may just be a smart long-term cost and effort-saving measure.

Plus, HR is the heart of talent management! As the most likely group to help a more traditional organization see the future of work, you help find a vision and path for incorporating freelancers into a company culture. Ensuring your company can successfully attract and integrate contingent workers into your workforce is likely to become a more and more essential skill for you, as well. Keep your freelance-related skills sharp in case you're asked about it in your next interview!

In a tight labor market, one where [Forbes](#) shows nearly half of global companies struggling to hire for full time roles, these freelancers are not only a smart option, but they are likely to have other options. If it's not already happening in your industry, top freelance talent is likely to become a hot commodity in the same way top full-time job seekers have.

Consider, too, if things do change, your intentional efforts with a freelancer build a solid working relationship with someone who has insight and experience working with your company. Should these freelancers decide to shift to a full-time position, and you're hiring? They'll be more likely to opt in with your company if their past experience was positive. Set the stage now, and see what happens!

Read more:

[7 Workforce Management Trends for 2019](#)
[Portable Benefits: Perks for the Gig Economy](#)

[Onboarding Freelancers Is Tough — Here's How to Do It Right the First Time](#)
[HR, Time to Embrace the Freelance Revolution: Your Career Depends on It](#)
[The Agile Talent Wave: The Contingent Workforce is Taking Over](#)

IN BRIEF

Changing marijuana laws impact HR

In more and more states, the legalization or impending legalization of cannabis requires HR teams to assess, and potentially continually reassess, company policies. In some states, legalization has been limited to medical use but, in others, it has extended to recreational use. *Workforce* magazine has had several recent articles focused on helping HR professionals understand how new and existing laws impact their work and workplace. In nearly every state, every employer will need to consider current and future policies around possession, use, and what constitutes impairment.

Here are some things to guide your conversation around cannabis policies.

1. Consider your industry. Safety rules will differ for use and possession based on the industry and perhaps the specific job duties.
2. Consult your legal team and outside experts to understand testing and screening options. Few states have legal limits in place, and compliance with laws around sanctioned medical use complicates things further.
3. Crosscheck where you employ people. While some state laws have changed, federal law still classifies marijuana as a controlled substance. For employers with employees in multiple states, that means understanding the different laws and regulations in place and crafting policies that align to them.
4. Collaborate with your community. Now would be a great time to reach out to other business owners, the local medical, or recreational cannabis stakeholders. Share resources, ideas, and best practices.
5. Consider offering counseling. While legal use may be expanding, substance abuse is still a very real challenge. As an HR team, be sure you have resources and information available for anyone who is concerned about their marijuana use. Make sure any policies about substance abuse treatment are updated to reflect any legal changes.

Read more:

[Does Marijuana Work at Work?](#)

[Legalized Cannabis Remains a Burning Topic for Employers](#)

EMPLOYER WEBINAR

What Employers Need to Know About Health Coverage in Mergers and Acquisitions

Tuesday, April 9, 2019
2:00 p.m. ET / 11:00 a.m. PT

When employers negotiate a merger or acquisition, it's important for the buyer and seller to consider how health benefits will be offered after the transaction closes. A buyer or seller may have the responsibility to continue employees' coverage, offer COBRA continuation coverage, or complete reporting under the ACA. This webinar will help employers understand their responsibilities when planning a merger or acquisition.

This webinar will:

- Review the basics of a merger or acquisition
- Explain key concepts such as an asset sale and a stock sale
- Discuss concepts such as a controlled group, affiliated service group, and an aggregated applicable large employer (ALE) group
- Discuss how the employer shared responsibility provisions apply when two non-ALEs merge to have 50 or more full-time employees or full-time equivalents
- Describe how an ALE will determine acquired employees' status (as full-time or not full-time) after a merger or acquisition
- Discuss how an ALE will measure acquired employees' hours after a merger or acquisition
- Describe how coverage should be offered (or continued) after a merger or acquisition
- Provide tips on reporting coverage offered during the year that a merger or acquisition occurs
- Discuss the situations under which an employer must offer COBRA continuation coverage to individuals as part of a merger or acquisition
- Discuss notices that should be provided to individuals who are affected by a merger or acquisition
- Describe best practices when negotiating health coverage as part of a merger or acquisition

This 60-minute intermediate level webinar will help employers understand their health coverage obligations when there is a merger or acquisition.

Registration

[Register here for the webinar](#). The presentation will be posted on the [UBA website](#) the afternoon before the webinar.

About the Presenters

[Lorie Maring](#) is a partner in the Atlanta office of Fisher Phillips and a member of the Employee Benefits Practice Group. She has extensive experience in all areas of employee benefits, including health and welfare programs, qualified and non-qualified retirement plans and executive compensation. She routinely advises employers, including non-profit and government employers, trade associations and employee benefit insurance and risk management consultants on the complex compliance and day-to-day issues arising under ERISA and other state and federal laws governing employee benefit plans and programs. Lorie also advises employers on compliance issues involving the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and Affordable Care Act (ACA), employment tax, the employee benefits and executive compensation aspects of mergers and acquisitions, and handling IRS and DOL audits and ACA penalty assessments.

[Chelsea Deppert](#) is an associate in the Atlanta office of Fisher Phillips. She provides practical guidance to employers on the technical aspects of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) and other state and federal laws impacting the design, implementation and ongoing compliance of employee benefit plans and programs. She advises clients with respect to all aspects of employee benefits, including retirement plans, health and other welfare benefit plans. Chelsea works with employers on a broad array of issues relating to tax qualified retirement plans, such as plan operation, drafting, participant communications, and compliance with ERISA's fiduciary responsibility provisions. In her practice, she regularly represents employers in curing qualified plan operational issues under the Internal Revenue Services (IRS) Employee Plans Compliance Resolution System (EPCRS) and other corrective programs, as well as counsels employers with respect to income and employment tax issues related to employee benefits. Chelsea also advises employers with respect to their obligations under Health Care Reform, ERISA, Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA), the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and other federal laws that regulate health and welfare plans.

Certification

This webinar has been submitted to the [Human Resource Certification Institute](#) and the [Society for Human Resource Management](#) to qualify for 1 recertification credit hour.