

Should the Working Day Be Shortened to 5 Hours?

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A classic 9-to-5 workday has been established as the mark of a normal working schedule in the majority of countries around the world, especially in western nations. However, other cultures have different traditions regarding the workday. For example, the Japanese are known to be workaholics who can stay at their workplaces up to 14 hours. However, recent experiments performed at a company in Australia showed that there is a possibility of shortening the working day to 5 hours with no losses in productivity. The idea of reducing the average working day to 5 hours is intriguing, and it challenges the traditional managerial perspective on the topic. Therefore, a review of available evidence about the cases of implementing a 5-hour schedule in order to critically analyze whether reducing the working day is a viable decision.

To begin with, the idea of shortening a working day is seriously considered by many companies. This statement is backed up by the fact that popular media outlets suggest that the reduction of the working day is justified by several factors: an employee working a full 8-hour day spends too much time doing things that are not related to duties, and the human brain is not able to concentrate on particular tasks for more than several hours (Weller, 2017). Therefore, media attention to the topic reflects the interest of the business world in this practice. It is argued that people that are pushed past their peak productive hours are prone to the development of bad workplace habits. For example, Weller (2017) states that employees may adopt various workplace distractions such as social network browsing into their daily working habits, which in turn affects performance in general.

An increasing number of companies are experimenting with reduced workdays, and the industry giant Amazon is among them—though the corporation did not release any official results of the test schedule (Weller, 2017). There are other examples of companies that benefited from adopting a 5-hour working day for their employees. Aarstol (2016), in his article, explored

a story that features an enterprise that is selling stand-up paddle boards, and its owner claimed that the company enjoyed a considerable boost in revenues that was associated with the increased productivity of employees. Most likely, the reason for increased productivity lies in the fact that employees do not have enough free time to be distracted by non-working processes. However, Aarstol (2016) also gave some pieces of advice in order to make the 5-hour schedule productive, and the main tips include a selective choice of employees, making focus on output rather than hours, and using technology to an advantage.

Considering all the information featured above, it is possible to suggest that a 5-hour working day is mostly beneficial for businesses. Employees have less time to wander off from the working process, they are motivated to perform because of reduced hours, and they can enjoy a better work-life balance. All of the positive effects of reduced working hours seem to be clearly evident, but there is a natural question: why do businesses not adopt this practice everywhere?

In order to answer this question, it is required to review other examples of companies that tried adopting a 5-hour working day. To be more specific, the successful experience of the Australian financial advice company, Collins SBA, showed that a 5-hour working day resulted in a rapid increase in productivity (Turek, 2018). As a result, the case of Collins SBA reinvigorated talks about a reduced working day in Singapore, and a Swedish aged-care facility tried implementing a 6-hour schedule (Chan, Field & Cheng, 2018). The latter's results were mixed because of contradicting conclusions that may be seen as consistent with the idea but, in fact, have their shortcomings. According to the article, the facility began to enjoy increased productivity due to reduced hours, but the policy required the aged-care home to hire more nurses in order to cover lost hours (Chan, Field & Cheng, 2018). Therefore, it is possible to state that the 5-hour working day comes with its advantages and disadvantages.

Considering the evidence, each company should carefully evaluate whether a reduced working day yields more benefits than losses. Apparently, this kind of schedule is applicable only to some types of businesses. Companies that provide services tied to real-world events are not able to effectively implement a reduced working day for their employees because of a need to cover up “empty” hours. As a result, these types of enterprises will have to hire more people that will lead to increased expenditures. On the other side, businesses such as companies that specialize in supplies and other enterprises that provide scheduled services are able to experiment with a 5-hour working day with little-to-no risk. Such enterprises can effectively assign their employees to different shifts in order to cover business hours, which would also result in the increased performance that is tied to a 5-hour schedule.

In conclusion, it is required to state that a shortened working day comes with perks and trade-offs. Such an approach to scheduling leads to the enhanced performance of employees; however, it also requires flexibility on a company’s behalf and can possibly result in increased expenditures on labor. Still, the last downside is mostly tied to the type of business that a company is conducting. With all the evidence in mind, it is possible to boldly state that shortening a working day at the legislative level is not advisable; however, individual businesses can implement the policy successfully.

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