

# Killing The 40-Hour Workweek

Has the time come to rethink how employees are paid?

By Amanda Mendoza



It's not news that the 40-hour workweek is dead. Gone is the notion that employees are most productive when they are at their desks from 9 to 5 Mondays through Fridays.

We know now that humans are different; some do their best work at 6 AM and others get the most done at 6 PM. So how can the traditional 40-hour workweek be restructured to restore a more healthy work-life balance?

One big problem is understanding that workers aren't really working only 40 hours. The devices that keep them connected to their friends and family also keep them connected to work.

This always-on mode provoked French officials to pass a law that, as of January 1, 2017, employers are required to make clear their expectations for how employees should be available outside of work hours.

The trick is that the law requires only clarification. Employers just have to explain the rules; it's up to the employees to agree to the rules and continue to work there, or quit. While the law hasn't made any large-scale change (so far), it has prompted dialogue about the issue.

And none too soon, since recent studies indicate that 40-hour workweeks might be more hazardous for our health than we think, causing fatigue- and stress-related illnesses.

As a consequence, companies – particularly startups – are taking a chance on some interesting alternatives to the traditional work schedule which are being tried out across the globe:

- Flexible start/end times: Avoiding rush hour means increased productivity for workers since they spend less time in transit. Less time commuting gives back large portions of the day to employees who otherwise lose hours sitting in traffic.
- Seasonal changes: If business is slower during certain times of the year, consolidate the workweek. For example, a 10-hour workday Monday-Thursday with Friday off during the summer.
- "Comp Time" This solution involves changing the workweek from 40 hours to 35 hours, but with a salary that matches those

35 hours. This can also be arranged to squeeze 12 hours out of a 3-day week.

- Shorter workdays: A 2015 Swedish experiment decreased the workday from 8 hours to 6 hours. While workers were mentally healthier and happier, more had to be hired to complete the work. The jury's still out, but so far results suggest workers aren't getting the same amount of work done in those 6 hours.
- Unlimited vacation: Those words sound awesome, but in reality, "unlimited" doesn't really mean "unlimited." Workers arrange with colleagues and managers to take whatever time off they want (time that is not tracked by managers). It's possible for employees to take the time off that they need, but managers say that they would frown upon anything more than a few weeks.

All of these alternative workweeks add up to one major existential question: How should we be measuring productivity? If hours don't necessarily equate to results (because the employees have flexibility in achieving those results), then what is the effective metric of the employee's contribution?

In a roundtable discussion, DATABASICS director of business analysis Torbjorn Nilsen suggested a \$1 billion opportunity: a sharing economy resource management solution, "a system that allows you to plan and manage progress against that alternative unit of measure."

The business climate will continue to change; social values, political ideologies, economic factors and company strategies will guarantee that. However no matter what drives these changes, such a reporting partner needs to have the flexibility to respond to them. As your company looks at new ways to measure employee contribution, you need a robust solution today. But your reporting partner's tools need flexibility for tomorrow, no matter how your company chooses to define the workweek. **BT**

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