



**FOUR**

WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

A STUDY OF THE FOUR-DAY WEEK:  
A REPORT BY THE MIX



# FOUR

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## WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

A STUDY OF THE FOUR-DAY WEEK BY  
STRATEGY OF MIND ON BEHALF OF THE MIX

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# FOREWORD

THE MIX

Lots of businesses and brands wrestle with the idea of purpose these days.

When I founded The Mix in 2012, I wasn't really thinking about brand purpose, I just wanted to find better, more compelling ways of understanding human behaviour.

The more obsessed we got with this, the more we started to notice patterns in both the people we worked with and the clients that commissioned us.

Everyone felt stressed.

The daily grind consisted of a dizzying array of emails, meetings, shopping, social media, work, family drama, cooking, cleaning...

I can sympathise. However important your work is, life finds a way in.

My parents separated in 2016, which for us like most families has been a really challenging period of time. When you add in the stresses and strains of running a business as well, by early 2017 I felt emotionally drained.

My husband told me during that time that I gave my all to work and only left him with the dregs and he was right.

Something had to change.

Owning a business meant that the one thing the team and I had at our disposal was a real willingness to have a go at doing things differently.

Looking at other working models and business practices, a four-day week felt like it offered a chance to do something different, and provided an opportunity to talk about how we all wanted to work together.

A half day on a Friday or just more flexible working wouldn't cut it. This wasn't about tinkering round the edges – we wanted to overhaul our relationship with work. To recognise that we're all people and we appreciate that about one another.

Human behaviour is about shared experiences, learning and working out how to make life better, that's why we invited Strategy of Mind to work with us to explore and help us develop this white paper.

Human behaviour is fascinating. Research isn't.

Tash Walker  
Founder, The Mix



# FOREWORD

STRATEGY of MIND

We get to spend our time at work helping other organisations work better, work smarter, work human. And if there is one thing we can attest to in our combined thirty years of experience, it's that work is changing, and it's changing in a positive direction.

That's because organisations exist that are willing to move the ball forward, to think outside of the traditional confines unnecessarily self-imposed by so many companies. But the Googles of the world – organisations that view human capital as the single most important piece of the prosperity puzzle – can now add one more peer to that select list of forward-thinkers: The Mix.

By adopting a four-day work week, The Mix demonstrated just one of the many creative and exciting avenues open to companies that are truly thinking about performance. Too often the business world embraces a 'bottom line' mentality, in which all that seems to matter is the numbers. But let's think about that for a moment.

Companies are not entities unto themselves, they are not natural structures of the physical universe. An organisation is simply a group of people working towards a common goal, and in capitalist economies that common goal is profitability. What we've learned through decades of organisational research is that profitability stems not from spreadsheets, but from building 'human-friendly' environments where innovative ideas can flourish. The real bottom line is this: it's all about people.

Countless studies have shown that organisations with clearly defined corporate values, trusting teams, and a sense of common purpose greatly outperform their competitors. In this report, we'll show you how The Mix, by implementing a four-day work week, made a simple human-oriented change that delivered previously unmatched quantitative results. (Hint: the bottom line improved because they didn't just think about the numbers, they thought about the source of the numbers.)

Cheers to your work,

Ryan & David  
Co-founders, Strategy of Mind

CHAPTER 01

# THE FIVE DAY WEEK: NASTY, BRUTISH & LONG

# Nasty, brutish & long

It's a fairly humbling thought, but one of the biggest challenges facing many businesses today boils down to a fairly simple issue. It's something we can intuitively sense in a toddler about to have a meltdown. It's also something we studiously ignore when it comes to grown-ups in the boardroom – that we're often too exhausted to do our work as skillfully or creatively as we could. Our reluctance to address such an obvious problem has serious economic, personal and social costs.

A good proportion of us go to bed and wake up (if we've slept much) consumed with thoughts about work. Half of us don't feel rested when we wake up (UK workers being the worst in Europe on this score).<sup>[1]</sup> That might well be because a quarter of us have had a work-related nightmare at least once this week.<sup>[2]</sup> We don't sit down to cook or eat together as much as we used to, relying instead on breakfast bars, caffeine and takeaways to get us through the day. The lunch hour is no longer a safety net. Over half of us skip it, handing our employers an extra five hours a week for free in the process.<sup>[3]</sup> That's not to mention the additional ten hours of unpaid overtime that we already work, on average, each week (worth around £32B annually).<sup>[4]</sup> Around 57% of us feel that our personal lives have been affected by overwork – 40% report feeling unhappy as a result.<sup>[5]</sup>

**1/2 OF US SKIP LUNCH.  
THE LUNCH HOUR IS NO  
LONGER A SAFETY NET.**

**40%**

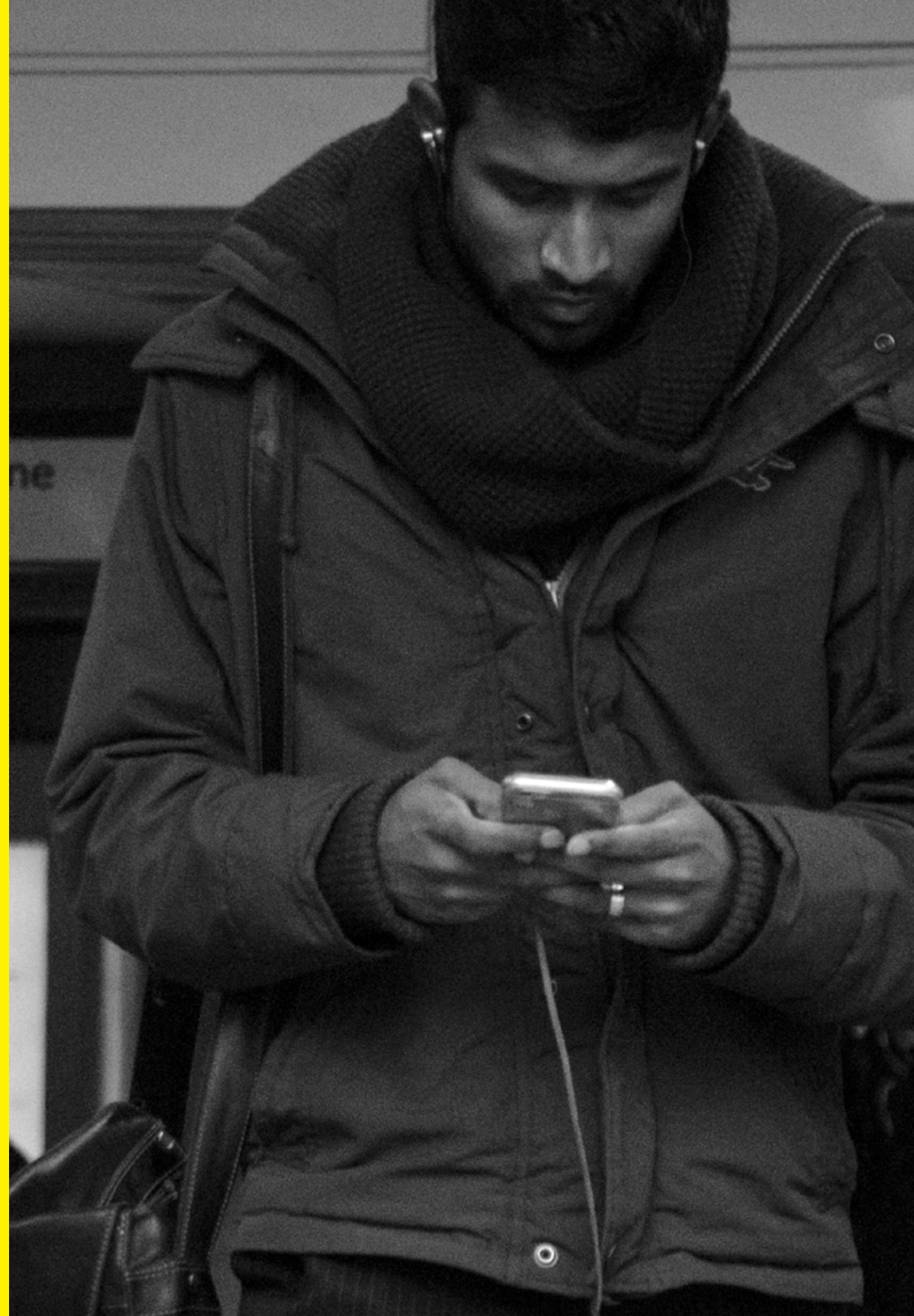
RESPONDENTS  
CLAIMED THEY  
WERE UNHAPPY



**1/4 OF US HAVE HAD  
A WORK RELATED  
NIGHTMARE AT LEAST  
ONCE THIS WEEK.**



-----  
SINCE THE  
ADVENT OF  
SMARTPHONES,  
THERE'S  
NOWHERE TO  
HIDE, EVEN  
AT THE  
WEEKEND



# EIGHT DAYS A WEEK

In the early 2000s it was possible to leave the office and know that it would be unlikely, or even impossible, to be contacted. Since the advent of smartphones, there's nowhere to hide, even at the weekend. We're potentially always on call if we let ourselves be. The TUC estimate that 1.4 million of us now work on every day of the week, with 3.3 million of us working forty-five hours or longer.<sup>[6]</sup>

Perhaps it's no surprise that employee engagement in the UK is at an all-time low. According to Gallup in 2016, only 8% of UK workers felt engaged at work, down from 17% in 2012. Around 73% of workers were 'not engaged', meaning they felt unattached to their work and had little energy for it. A more worrying 19% were 'actively disengaged' – feeling resentful and likely acting out their unhappiness in various unhelpful ways that might range from surreptitiously spending half the day on eBay to bad-mouthing the company to friends at parties.<sup>[7]</sup>

**1.4M**  
-----  
1.4 MILLION  
OF US WORK  
EVERY DAY OF  
THE WEEK

WE'RE POTENTIALLY  
**ALWAYS ON CALL** IF  
WE LET OURSELVES BE

8%

ACCORDING  
TO GALLUP  
ONLY 8% OF  
UK WORKERS  
FELT ENGAGED  
AT WORK

It's not even that all these exhausting days and sleepless nights are helping in terms of national productivity. As Gallup points out, productivity and engagement metrics are intertwined. Overwork leads to stress, which leads to absenteeism, sickness, inefficiencies, mistakes and lower quality work. Gallup's 2016 analysis, which included over 82,000 business units in seventy-three countries, found that units in the top quarter of engagement scores were 17% more productive and 21% more profitable than those in the bottom quarter.

So, if it's not making us richer, why are we working ourselves to the point of mental and physical exhaustion? In 1930, the British economist JM Keynes<sup>[8]</sup> famously predicted that due to the increasing efficiencies of automation, we would likely be working around fifteen hours a week by this point. Our main worry would be what to do with so much free time. Since 1930, automation has improved in ways that would have astonished Keynes. But his prediction? It hasn't really happened. Instead, some of us work fifteen hours a day, while 4% of us don't have jobs at all.<sup>[9]</sup> It seems like it's a good time to explore how things might be done differently. Here's one option.

**OVERWORK LEADS TO  
STRESS, WHICH LEADS TO  
ABSENTEEISM, SICKNESS,  
INEFFICIENCIES, MISTAKES AND  
LOWER QUALITY WORK.**



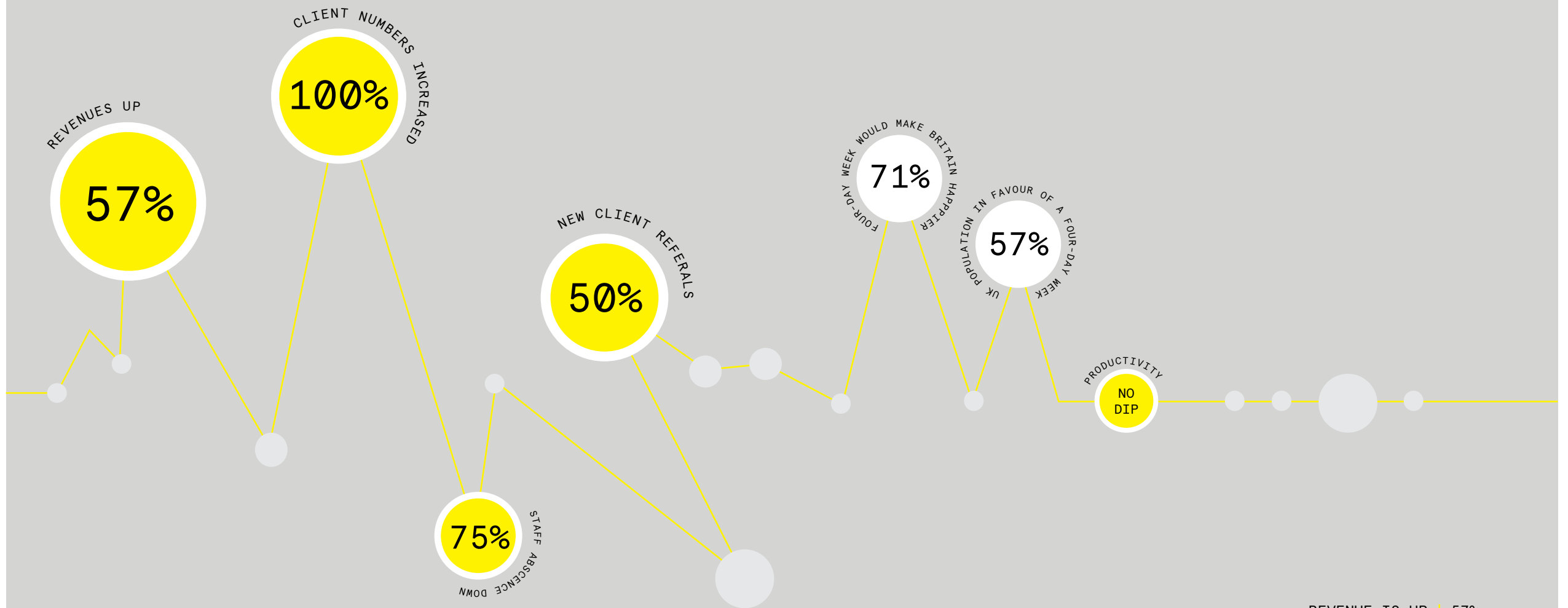
CHAPTER 02

# MIXING IT UP



From October 2017 to October 2018, London research agency The Mix remodelled their working week and asked employees to work a four-day week on full pay. The new arrangement wasn't about condensing forty hours into four days, reducing pay, running a time-limited trial or trying to maintain a typical five-day week in terms of being available to customers, as some other recent four-day week trials have done. It simply involved all staff working four days a week, Monday to Thursday. Everyone had Friday off. After a year, the results are clear.

# After one year of the four day week



REVENUE IS UP	57%
CLIENT NUMBERS INCREASED	100%
STAFF ABSCENCE / SICK DAYS DOWN	75%
NEW CLIENT REFERRALS UP	50%
PRODUCTIVITY (MEASURED BY OVERALL PROFITABILITY) REMAINED	NO DIP

<sup>[10]</sup> OF THE UK POPULATION ARE IN FAVOUR OF A FOUR-DAY WEEK 57%  
<sup>[11]</sup> SAY A FOUR-DAY WEEK WOULD MAKE BRITAIN HAPPIER 71%



The Mix are demonstrating what makes them so effective as an agency: they are showing that working fewer hours can make you more focused, efficient and better at your job – and combining that with the positive impact that having a better work-life balance has on your workforce’s wellbeing to achieve far greater outputs than you might otherwise achieve. Win-win all round.

KATE KNIBBS | NESTLÉ

It’s obviously got such clear benefits both mentally and physically. I totally endorse The Mix’s approach.

JESSICA HERRIDGE | ASAHI

The Mix are actively demonstrating innovative thinking. I think their approach no doubt contributes to a happy, healthy and motivated team as well as attracting and retaining great talent by offering them something different.

EMMA WALKER | NESTLÉ

It’s a brilliant idea. I’m a huge supporter of what The Mix are doing.

KIRSTY TEMPLETON | DIAGEO

What our clients are saying  
about our four-day week



I love Fridays now! I think my mental health has seen the most improvement. I don't feel as anxious, and I have more energy at work and during my time off.

It gives me the chance to cook a proper meal for me and my partner rather than us both rushing in the week.

I'd never want to work five days again.

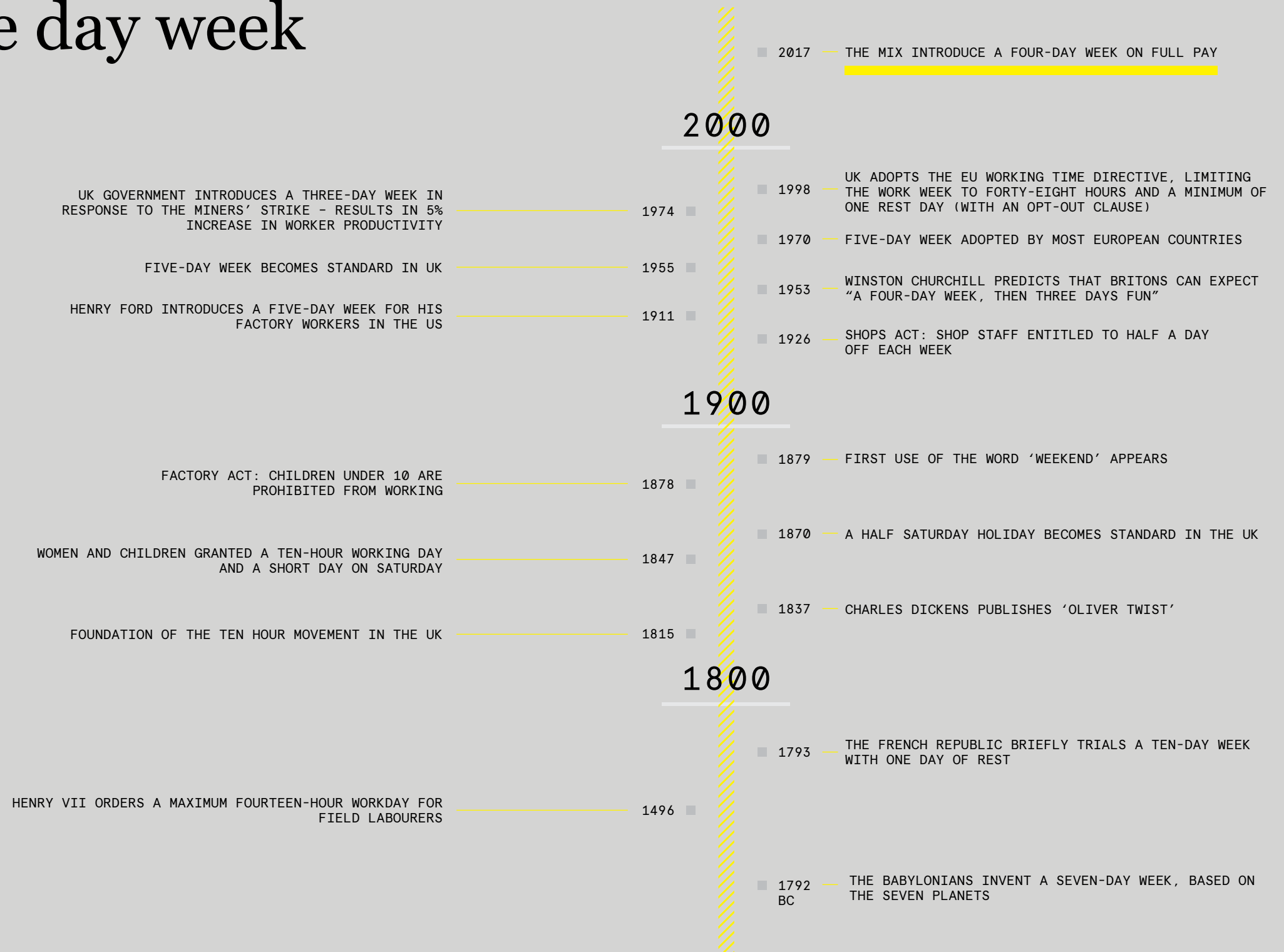
I genuinely look forward to going into the office.

The extra weekend day gives your brain time off. On Monday morning when you return to work you feel like you've had an actual break.

What our staff are saying  
about our four-day week



# A brief history of the five day week



CHAPTER 03

# WORKING HARD OR HARDLY WORKING?

# The UK is one of the hardest working countries in Europe, in terms of hours clocked up.

The UK is one of the hardest-working countries, in terms of hours clocked up. Yet, in terms of productivity, we're dragging our heels. Looking at OECD data from 2017, the most productive country in the world (in terms of GDP per hour worked) was Luxemburg, with an average work week of just twenty-nine hours.<sup>[12]</sup> For every hour worked by a British worker, a French worker produces 23% more. In Germany (where there is far less cultural acceptance of chit chat and wasting time at work) workers produce 36% more each hour.<sup>[13]</sup>

**29HRS**  
-----  
MOST PRODUCTIVE COUNTRY IN THE WORLD IS LUXEMBURG WITH AN AVERAGE WORK WEEK OF TWENTY NINE HOURS

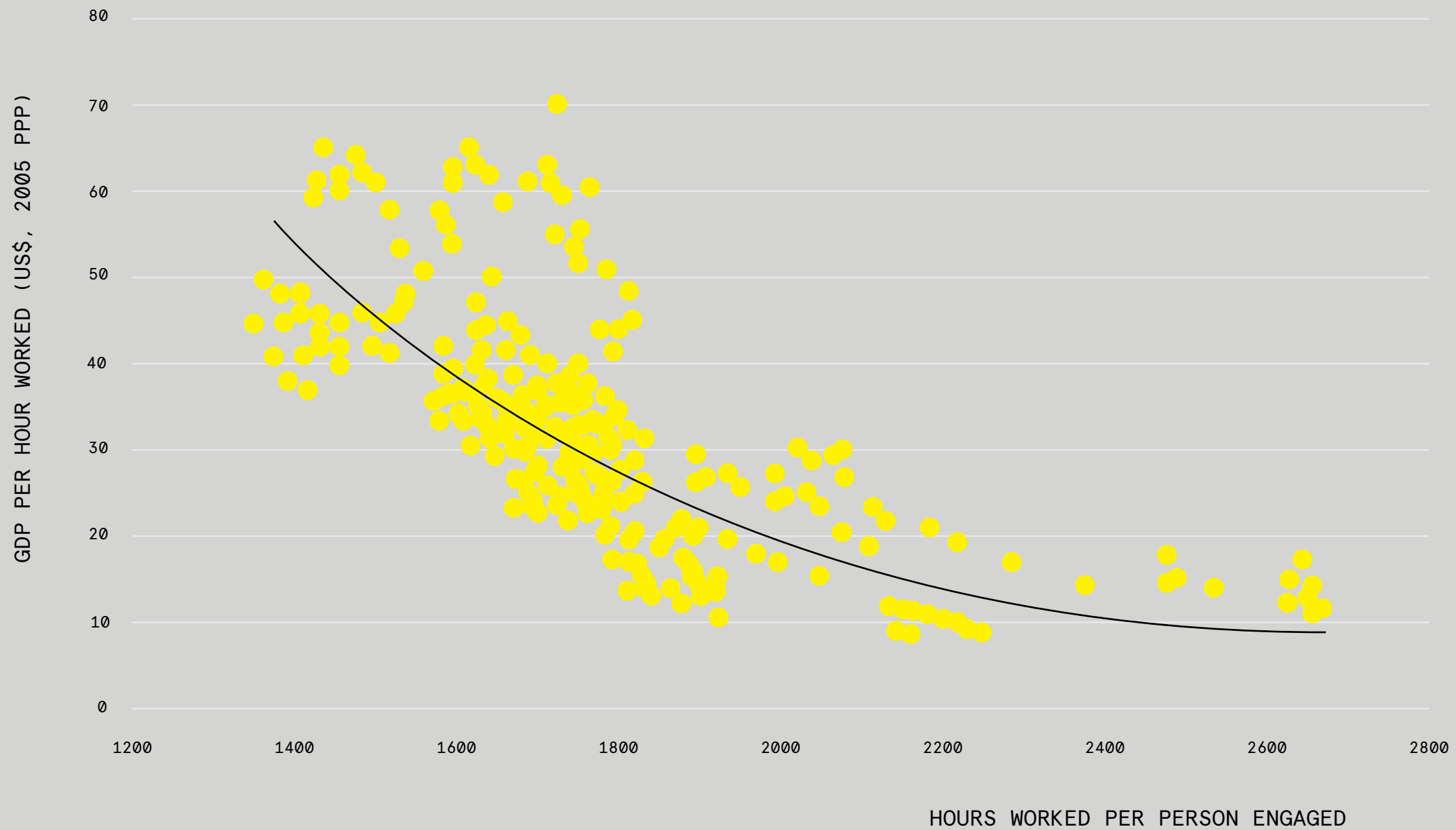
Both countries work considerably fewer hours overall than the UK. In other words, it takes British workers until Friday to produce what the French and Germans have already efficiently filed away by Thursday lunchtime. It's not just the UK that's struggling. At least one of our commonwealth colleagues also consistently overworks and under-delivers. According to a typically self-effacing 2013 study, New Zealanders work 15% longer than the OECD average but produce 20% less output per hour worked.<sup>[14]</sup>

Perhaps the correlation isn't so surprising. A variety of studies have demonstrated the link between longer working hours and decreasing productivity. For example, a 2018 study by Oxford University of 5,000 workers in BT call centres over six months revealed that a four-day week led to an increased amount of calls made, happier customers, more sales, fewer absences and an increased sense of well-being. A 2005 study of construction workers in the US across eighty-eight projects found a decrease in productivity as the number of hours worked per week increased. A 2000 US manufacturing study across eighteen industries showed that a 10% increase in overtime resulted in a 2.4% decrease in productivity measured by hourly output.<sup>[15]</sup> Indeed, according to the OECD, productivity declines in a fairly straight line as more hours are worked.

**15%**  
-----  
NEW ZEALANDERS WORK ABOUT 15% LONGER THAN THE OECD AVERAGE BUT PRODUCE ABOUT 20% LESS OUTPUT PER HOUR WORKED

# LESS IS MORE

The relationship between hours worked and productivity (OECD countries, 1990 – 2012)





On the plus side, employers at Ernst & Young found that for every additional ten hours of holiday time an employee took, their yearly performance review improved by 8%. On top of that, they were more likely to stay with the company, a huge cost saving in itself. A study by Deloitte in 2016, for example, estimated the cost in terms of hiring and lost productivity per departing high-skilled employee at £92,000.

CHAPTER 04

**EVER  
AT YOUR  
SERVICE**

# Why are we working so hard but getting so little done?

One answer might lie in the fact that we have shifted towards a service economy but retained the working hours of a former industrial era. In 1841, only 33% of UK workers were in the service economy (the rest of us worked on the land or in industry's 'dark satanic mills'). By 2011 that figure had become 80% (91% in London). As a country, we've bet the farm (almost literally) on services. In 2013, 79% of UK GDP came from services.<sup>[16]</sup> With Brexit on the horizon, the need to address our productivity slump and play our economic cards as skillfully as possible is critical.

One of the poster boys of the service sector is the so-called 'knowledge worker', a term that only came into common usage in the 1960s. The problem is that our working practices operate under the implicit assumption that ideas are a bit like manufactured goods. If ideas are the currency of the knowledge economy, then the impetus to mint more of them, faster, seems logical. But ideas and insights at work can't be produced at a rate per minute – they are more often discovered through thoughtful reflection and contemplation. That takes time and, rather like yelling at an overtired toddler to focus and get a grip, too much pressure can lead to worse results. When combined with relatively low job security, long hours take an even greater psychological toll.

Annoyingly, it's difficult to accurately gauge how hard a typical knowledge worker in a big firm really is working. A valuable insight that could result in huge revenue gains might come to one employee while idly staring out of a cafe window while another might agonise at their desk fruitlessly for weeks. It doesn't quite seem fair. Given how hard it is to measure the actual value of ideas or other intangible assets like empathy or helpfulness, we've instead become more interested in keeping track of who at least appears to be making an effort. Of course, that's a difficult task just by monitoring claimed hours worked. In a 2015 study of consultants by Erin Reid, for example, managers couldn't tell the difference between consultants who actually worked eighty hours a week and those who just pretended to, while working far fewer.<sup>[17]</sup>

## 80%

BY 2011  
80% OF UK  
WORKERS  
WERE IN THE  
SERVICE  
ECONOMY

**THE PROBLEM IS THAT  
OUR WORKING PRACTICES  
OPERATE UNDER THE  
IMPLICIT ASSUMPTION  
THAT IDEAS ARE A BIT LIKE  
MANUFACTURED GOODS**





CHAPTER 05

# IN PURSUIT OF BUSYNESS

In the 1890s, the sociologist Thorstein Veblen observed how anyone complaining of being busy would have been seen as having very low status. For much of history, not having to do physical or mental work has been the clearest sign of success. In Han China, for example, wealthy women would grow impractically long fingernails to display how little effort they needed to put into any kind of physical labour. It's hard to imagine PG Wodehouse's 1920's creation Bertie Wooster feeling too pressed by his daily schedule to set aside his 11a.m. bath followed by a three-hour lunch over drinks. Things are now totally reversed; claiming to be busy has become the established status symbol.

Perhaps the psychological burden of meeting quarterly targets and the spectre of automation has forced us to adopt a slightly pathological need to continually assert our indispensability. One of the staple responses to the question 'how are you?' in the office is 'so busy'. But in our hearts, we know that can't really be the case, or at least, not all of the time. Most of us, however highly motivated, are only able to concentrate and produce good work for up to around four hours a day.<sup>[18]</sup> Ironically, that would mean that many of us are, in actual fact, working for close to the fifteen hours a week that Keynes predicted in 1930, it's just that we feel the need to pretend we're doing a lot more. Which raises the question then, what are our colleagues actually doing all day?

**MOST OF US, HOWEVER HIGHLY  
MOTIVATED, CAN ONLY PRODUCE  
GOOD WORK FOR UP TO A  
MAXIMUM OF 4 HOURS A DAY.**

# What do people do all day? <sup>[19]</sup>



ACTUALLY WORKING	02 HOUR 51 MINUTES
READING NEWS WEBSITES	01 HOUR 05 MINUTES
CHECKING SOCIAL MEDIA	44 MINUTES
DISCUSSING NON-WOR-K-RELATED THINGS WITH CO-WORKERS	40 MINUTES
SEARCHING FOR NEW JOBS	26 MINUTES
TAKING SMOKE BREAKS	23 MINUTES
MAKING CALLS TO PARTNERS OR FRIENDS	18 MINUTES
MAKING HOT DRINKS	17 MINUTES
TEXTING OR INSTANT MESSAGING	14 MINUTES
EATING SNACKS	08 MINUTES
MAKING FOOD IN THE OFFICE	07 MINUTES

“ We’re victims of a particularly materialistic and selfish form of neoliberal capitalism that assumes we ought to be living to work, rather than working to live.

OLIVER  
JAMES

PSYCHOLOGIST  
AND AUTHOR

“It’s no surprise that levels of mental illness in the UK are around twice as high as they are on the continent. We’re victims of a particularly materialistic and selfish form of neoliberal capitalism that assumes we ought to be living to work, rather than working to live. Unlike some of our friends on the continent who wisely combine better job security with higher productivity, many workplaces in the UK can feel insecure, individualistic and unhealthy. When employers just want to wring the most of their workforce for as little as possible in return, can staff really be blamed for putting up a facade of effort while doing as little actual work as possible? A four day week is one sign at least that an employer has a little more concern for the wellbeing of their staff. I’ve no doubt that when employers make these kinds of moves, their good will will be reciprocated many times over.”

CHAPTER 06

# IF THURSDAY IS THE NEW FRIDAY...

Plenty of companies have adjusted their working environments to make them feel more like leisure areas, adding bars, slides, bean-bags and ping-pong tables in an attempt to blur the boundary between work and personal time. But when it comes to Fridays, many companies have had to resort to bribery just to get employees to show up. We're offered the opportunity to wear jeans, to have beers at our desk or to have the radio on. Radio 1 have even recently introduced a three-day weekend schedule on the basis that we're in a different headspace on Friday anyway and not 'really' working. It might be marginally more fun to turn up to work in a T-shirt, but what's the real cost to our economy in terms of creativity and innovation of making people come to work when they really need a break?

MONDAY  
TUESDAY  
WEDNESDAY  
THURSDAY  
FRIDAY



Work exists to produce income, the purpose of which is to enable leisure, but leisure exists for its own sake.

"It is common today to weigh the value of things in terms of return on investment. Food is good because of the energy and pleasure it gives us, and time is valuable because of what it enables us to produce. When we view leisure through the lens of such pragmatism though we risk missing the real value of time off. For the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, leisure was set apart from work by being intrinsically valuable. Work exists to produce income, the purpose of which is to enable leisure, but leisure exists for its own sake. The more time we have not just to rest so that we can get 'back in the game', but to engage in the things that really make life valuable, the better we will be living. Equally, the closer aligned our work is to our values and identity, the more leisurely our professional efforts will be."

**BRENNAN  
JACOBY**

PHILOSOPHER AND FOUNDER  
OF PHILOSOPHY AT WORK





## WORKING BETTER. BETTER WORK.

One of the people to observe the link between time off and creativity was the head of the German Army in the early 20th century, Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord. His policy was to promote not those officers who worked long into the night but those who were able to make the most of their free time (as long as they were equally intelligent). He noted that the time they spent relaxing and chatting with others not directly connected to their work allowed them to foster more creative strategies than their more workaholic peers. Admittedly, things didn't work out terribly well for the German Army around that time, but the point stands. And the number of firms recognising that the industrial model of work is no longer fit for purpose is growing. Though not going as far as introducing a four-day week, it's been pointed out that, were it not for Google's historic policy of allowing their engineers to spend 20% of their work time freely exploring their own ideas, there would have been no Google Earth, Gmail or AdSense.

There's a good neuroscientific reason for why creativity depends on taking some time for ourselves. It's the same reason that, for over two-thirds of us, our best ideas come to us in the shower.<sup>[20]</sup> Our brains need downtime in order to make sense of what we've seen, resolve conflicts, reflect and make new connections.<sup>[21]</sup> The most original ideas require regular periods of unhurried reflection, often in solitude, allowing our minds the freedom to mull over amorphous hunches and explore areas adjacent to the immediate challenge. Bill Gates, for example, is a champion of annual, reflective retreats, bringing with him stacks of seemingly unconnected reading material. When the poet Louis MacNiece was offered a job as a BBC producer, his new employers invited him to create his own weekly timetable. He left half of it empty, to the consternation of those he'd be working with. When asked what all the blank space was for, his answer was simple: "for thinking".

**2/3**

FOR OVER  
TWO THIRDS  
OF US, OUR  
BEST IDEAS  
COME TO  
US IN THE  
SHOWER

“ The correlation between sleep, time to think, and creativity is becoming clearer. Shorter work hours can lead to greater thinking and reflection, greater opportunity to “connect the dots” and the clarity to notice them in the first place.

# OUR BRAINS NEED DOWNTIME



On a similar note, David Bowie was such a creative force not because he worked longer hours than other musicians but because he allowed himself the time to playfully explore seemingly unrelated areas: Japanese theatre, cinema, science fiction, art or Buddhism. Doing so allowed him to make connections that others missed. As a by-product of his unconventional approach, he also made a lot of money.



There is a strong case for reducing paid working time for all workers so that four days becomes the new ‘normal’.

There is a strong case for reducing paid working time for all workers, so that four days becomes the new ‘normal’. Research by the New Economics Foundation indicates that this could help to address a range of urgent, interlinked problems: overwork, unemployment, overconsumption, high carbon emissions, low well-being, entrenched inequalities, and the lack of time to live sustainably, to care for each other, and simply to enjoy life.

**ANNA  
COOTE**

PRINCIPAL FELLOW  
NEW ECONOMICS FOUNDATION

CHAPTER 07

# THIS WEEK IS KILLING ME

## KAROSHI

THE JAPANESE  
WORD FOR  
DEATH  
THROUGH  
OVERWORK

In 2015/16,<sup>[22]</sup> in the UK, over half a million workers suffered from work-related stress, leading to 12.5 million lost working days at a cost of between £33B and £43B to the economy.<sup>[23]</sup> The largest cause of all these mental strains by far was having too much work to do.

In the US, it's estimated that job stress as a result of overwork is responsible for some 120,000 deaths a year.<sup>[24]</sup> The Japanese even have a word for death through overwork – *karoshi*. Their government is planning to introduce a 'Shining Mondays' scheme, where employees are allowed to start work after lunch one Monday a month to try to inject a little more balance.

# 1/2M

IN 2015/16  
IN THE UK,  
OVER HALF  
A MILLION  
WORKERS  
SUFFERED  
FROM WORK-  
RELATED  
STRESS



“

The Mix is showing that  
profitability and happiness at  
work can mix well together.  
Congratulations!

“Miserable people do miserable work. And certainly long hours cultures breed misery. It’s high time that all companies recognised that happy teams are high performing teams. Our work with over 2,000 teams has shown that happy teams are 3x as creative, have 30-40% lower staff turnover and 15-40% higher productivity. Even though we’re called Friday as a business I wholeheartedly support the idea of many businesses not working Fridays. The Mix is showing that profitability and happiness at work really can mix well together. Congratulations!”

NIC  
MARKS

CEO & FOUNDER OF FRIDAY

## 39HRS

A 2017 STUDY  
BY THE  
AUSTRALIAN  
NATIONAL  
UNIVERSITY  
FOUND THAT  
WORKING FOR  
MORE THAN  
39 HOURS A  
WEEK WAS  
DETRIMENTAL  
TO HEALTH

## 61%

61% OF UK  
EMPLOYEES  
HAVE  
RESORTED  
TO TAKING  
A 'DUVET  
DAY' DUE TO  
EXHAUSTION  
AT WORK

One of the unique features of The Mix's experience was that it wasn't about cramming a full five days work into four days. There aren't really any major benefits to doing that, and it's likely that doing so would lead to just as many or more productivity and health problems as spreading it over five days.

There are limits to how long we can keep working before we start doing ourselves harm. A 2017 study by the Australian National University, for example, found that working for anything more than thirty-nine hours a week was detrimental to health.<sup>[25]</sup> British medical doctor Professor John Ashton<sup>[26]</sup> has similarly raised concerns about how the five-day week is likely contributing to a range of short- and long-term illnesses that are in turn putting a severe strain on the health service. According to a recent study, 61% of UK employees have resorted to taking an impromptu 'duvet day' simply to recuperate due to exhaustion at work.<sup>[27]</sup>

It seems we have forgotten the advice of the father of modern capitalism Adam Smith, who suggested in 1776 that "the man who works so moderately as to be able to work constantly, not only preserves his health the longest, but in the course of the year, executes the greatest quantity of works."<sup>[28]</sup>



“

The man who works so moderately as to be able to work constantly, not only preserves his health the longest, but in the course of the year, executes the greatest quantity of works.

ADAM  
SMITH

‘THE WEALTH OF THE NATIONS’, 1776

# EMERGENCY ON PLANET EARTH

While there's no doubt that we need to conserve our own physical resources, of course, at a planetary level, the need to preserve our natural resources and reduce energy usage is arguably even more pressing. A time-limited experiment in Utah in 2008 where state workers were asked to work a four-day week (at ten hours a day) in order to save money resulted in a 13% reduction in energy use, a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of over 12,000 metric tons and a reduction in petrol consumption of 744,000 gallons.<sup>[27]</sup>

**13%**

REDUCTION IN  
ENERGY USE  
AFTER STATE  
WORKERS IN  
UTAH WERE  
ASKED TO  
WORK A FOUR  
DAY WEEK  
INSTEAD OF A  
TEN DAY WEEK

CHAPTER 08

# THE CHANGING FACE OF WORK

Though work stress is arguably doing the planet, our bodies and our minds untold harm, improvements in nutrition and healthcare also mean that we'll be able to enjoy experiencing that for much longer. Many of us born today can expect to live to one hundred and have at least a sixty-year career.<sup>[30]</sup> The old model of learning skills for the first third of life, applying them for the second third and retiring for the last third is going to have to change. We'll have to continually retrain and learn new skills throughout our lives, reinventing ourselves multiple times. A 2017 report by Deloitte notes how the HR function in many organisations is recognising the need to treat employees more holistically and is transitioning from its traditional role as a personnel department into an internal consultancy to help optimise productive performance.<sup>[31]</sup>

In 2017, Carlos Slim, the second-richest man in the world, put forward the idea of the three-day week (with eleven-hour days). His point was that if we might end up working to seventy-five, we'll need more time to rest and be willing to accept some short-term productivity losses in return for bigger long-term gains. This kind of thinking was embraced in Germany when, as a response to the economic downturn in 2008, they introduced a policy of Kurzarbeit, or 'short work', cutting hours instead of jobs. It's been used to explain how Germany managed to respond so successfully to the recession. Many workers, it's claimed, used the extra time to retrain and learn new skills.<sup>[32]</sup>

# KURZARBEIT

/ NOUN, GERMAN

Short-time working. A form of government work subsidy in Germany in which employees get about 80% of their salary for working half-time.

## **BETA TEST IT**

We tested the 4 day week for 3 months without telling anyone to make sure we had a chance to experiment with different ways of working before telling anyone else.

## **TALK ABOUT IT**

Although a 4 day week sounds like a great idea, it does throw up some questions about how you work together which not everyone will be comfortable with. It's important not to assume that everyone will love the idea straight away and to talk about stress points before they happen.

## **PLAN IT**

You can't just do 5 days in 4 unfortunately. You need to plan how it might work, work out ways of being more efficient and lose things that slow you down. It needs the whole team to make it work, so allowing the team to come up with the most effective ways of working really helps.

## **REVIEW THINGS**

Our 3 month beta test gave us a chance to check in and see how things were going. We spoke to both clients and staff to see what the effects had been. For us it was a massive green light but you might need to be prepared to adjust or tinker with how it works.

## **TELL PEOPLE**

Once we had the confidence of our 3 month beta test, we started telling clients about it as much as possible. As a service business, we can only work in this way if we are supported by our clients so it was just as important that they were on board. Luckily so far our clients have been awesome, and really supportive. At times when we send the odd email on a Friday they tell us off or call us out on it. You need that. A 4 day week takes a village not an individual to pull off.

CHAPTER 09

# TIME FOR A CHANGE



**37%**

37% OF UK  
WORKERS FEEL  
THEIR JOB  
IS FAIRLY  
MEANINGLESS

The Mix's experiment might seem difficult to replicate in a wider context, but there's nothing preordained about the way we currently set up our working week. Attitudes to social norms change fast. It wasn't long ago in the UK that women weren't able to vote, wearing seatbelts was seen as obsessively cautious, smoking in restaurants was commonplace and drink driving was just a bit of fun. When Victorian campaigners suggested that it wasn't terribly nice for small children to spend the majority of their waking hours wedged in narrow chimneys or toiling at the loom, there were plenty who opposed change. Their arguments were based on the inherent dignity of labour, the importance of national productivity or the need to ensure that children had the right to work for as many hours as they might want to. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, for example, argued that employing children was necessary to avoid idleness and mischief.

A four-day week won't be the answer for everyone. There will undoubtedly be many entrepreneurs, freelancers, creatives and other kinds of workers who will, out of choice, opt to work incredibly long hours. And there's absolutely nothing wrong with such a work-life imbalance – as long as it's consciously chosen and embraced. A Japanese study, for example, found an increased risk of depression in those working longer hours but no increase in risk when the work in question was itself meaningful and satisfying.<sup>[33]</sup> For those who feel their job is fairly meaningless in the first place, however, as 37% of UK workers currently do<sup>[34]</sup> (none at The Mix of course), doing a bit less of it will only go so far to addressing our problems with engagement and productivity.

It's estimated that by 2020, 30% of all jobs in the UK have the potential to be automated.<sup>[35]</sup> The efficiencies this will bring could well lead to a certain degree of chaos and social unrest, with many workers potentially facing the prospect of jumping out of the frying pan of exhaustion into the fire of irrelevance. More positively, it might lead to a renaissance in how we conceive of our working lives. Some have suggested bringing in a universal basic income, or that, rather than treating humans as robots, we might consider treating robots as humans and tax them (or their corporate owners) based on their output instead. There's no doubt merit in exploring these and other options too. Will robots actually steal our jobs? For some, no doubt the prospect is only slightly less awful than the thought that they might steal them, find them as draining as many of us currently do now, and give them straight back.

Historically, it's often taken riots, revolutions or recessions to bring about major changes in how we work. But today's situation offers a calmer route to explore how we might work better and produce better work. In September 2018, the TUC pointed to the efficiencies that new technologies were bringing as marking the right time to call for a nationwide four-day week, allowing the benefits of automation and AI to be shared fairly across the whole working population.

The idea is nothing new, but it's one that's beginning to gather momentum. As the British philosopher Bertrand Russell observed over eighty years ago "modern methods of production have given us the possibility of ease and security for all [...] we have continued to be as energetic as we were before there were machines; in this we have been foolish, but there is no reason to go on being foolish forever."<sup>[36]</sup>



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RATHER THAN  
TREATING  
HUMANS AS  
ROBOTS  
WE MIGHT  
CONSIDER  
TREATING  
ROBOTS AS  
HUMANS AND  
TAX THEM



ABOUT  
**THE MIX**



## ABOUT THE MIX

At some point in your life you will encounter a bit of marketing that is really crap, probably quite thoughtless and possibly even a bit discriminatory.

It doesn't matter who you are, it happens to everyone at some point.

It happens because marketers, creative agency types, brand managers and pretty much everyone involved in selling stuff to people have one significant knowledge gap.

People.

They don't understand what it is like to be a person in the world today.

Relying on personal life experience isn't enough.

It's the reason the market research industry came to be in the first place.

The problem is that being stuck behind a glass mirror, eating deep fried food and catching up on your emails is how most research gets done, making it the corporate version of a chicken nugget. And if it's not a focus group, then it's most likely a 400 page data set.

This leaves us with one simple question.

Where is the humanity in research?

The Mix are taking on a whole industry, clashing together different specialisms and skills and experiences because the best ideas emerge from unexpected places.

And we are doing it because we all believe that human behaviour is fascinating and deserves to be seen, heard, experienced and enjoyed in all its messy glory.

Human behaviour is fascinating. Research isn't.

[www.themixlondon.com](http://www.themixlondon.com)

ABOUT  
**STRATEGY**  
**OF MIND**

## ABOUT STRATEGY OF MIND

Strategy of Mind is a Boston-based executive coaching and consulting firm that helps companies around the world perform better by focusing on their most important component: their people. Through a unique blend of scalable executive coaching, team training, research projects, and keynote speaker events, we rely upon the power of Active Inquiry - a process we refer to as Think Talk Create - to powerfully transform your organization. We've worked with major financial institutions, lean startups, and even nonprofits to empower human-oriented growth. This report was managed, drafted, and delivered brilliantly by our Associate, Ewen Haldane.

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# ENDNOTES

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