

Dr. Judit Szilágyi:

Is the four-day workweek a reality or a distant dream?

(summary)

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The Japanese story

- Microsoft Japan introduced a four-day workweek for all their 2,300 employees with Fridays off in August with salaries unchanged.
- The **productivity** of Microsoft's Japanese employees **increased by 40%** during the given period.
- **Electricity** consumption **decreased** by more than **23%** and nearly 60% less paper was used.
- Over **92%** of employees **expressed willingness** to switch to a four-day workweek.
- Japan is known for its strict work culture, so the tech giant's initiative has received a lot of attention.

The context

The results of the Japanese test are worth analyzing:

- The tech firm's employees knew exactly that they were participating in an experiment - if we are monitored and measured for a well-defined period of time, we react differently to everything.
- Employees also knew that in case of positive results, they could have a lasting impact on their work schedules.
- The test lasted for a certain amount of time, so habits weren't formed, hedonic adaptation did not develop.
- Japan is Japan. Their efficiency, processes, systems are legendary. What about ours?

Old plan reloaded?

Despite the huge media coverage of the Japanese experiment, the concept is far from new.

- In 1956, Nixon promised the Americans a four-day workweek.
- A few months ago, the British Labour Party promised to decrease working hours if they can form government.
- And a reform that has been implemented: France introduced a 35-hour workweek in 2000.

Businesses want faster productivity growth, while employees want more time off and more flexible work schedules. Organizations in the Western world are desperate to meet their employees' expectations.

Diverse results

- New Zealand's Perpetual Guardian: the 240-person company reported a 24% increase in productivity as a result of their four-day work schedule.
- Wellcome Trust tried and rejected the concept due to complex implementation difficulties.
- American e-learning company Treehouse returned to the classic business operation in 2016 after a decade-long four-day schedule, due to competitors entering the market.

A 2019 study by Henley Business School in England showed that **the majority of employees would welcome the change**. However, practically every leader would find it difficult to implement it in practice (especially in customer service roles)

Don't seek the Holy Grail!

- The workforce is often tired, stressed and burns out in every role faster than ever. I do not think that the universal cure for these symptoms is an extra day off for everyone.
- In my experience, **the cause of burnout and stress-related symptoms often not the amount of work but low efficiency at work, experiencing the meaninglessness of days, and being forced to undertake unnecessary activities.**

The original article is available in Hungarian: <https://forbes.hu/legyel-jobb/realitas-vagy-tavoli-alom-a-neqynapos-munkahet/>

An important element of the Japanese experiment was to encourage employees to shorten meetings and avoid email communications. It is better for every organization to start the miracle within their own circle of influence.

Some examples are changing meeting and email culture, creating a suitable work environment, empowering leadership, explaining organizational goals, a flexible schedule with the possibility of remote work, and creating a corporate culture that incorporates positive psychology.

These concepts and tools can act as a magic wand in any organization in any country.



About the author

Dr. Judit Szilágyi

senior consultant, coach, sales executive

partner and owner at [FranklinCovey](#), [ComeandGrow](#)

10+ years experience in B2B sales and leading sales teams,
committed mindfulness practitioner