

MAKING THE SHIFT

Manitoban Case Studies to
Help Marketers Consider a
Four-day Workweek

By Colton Toews

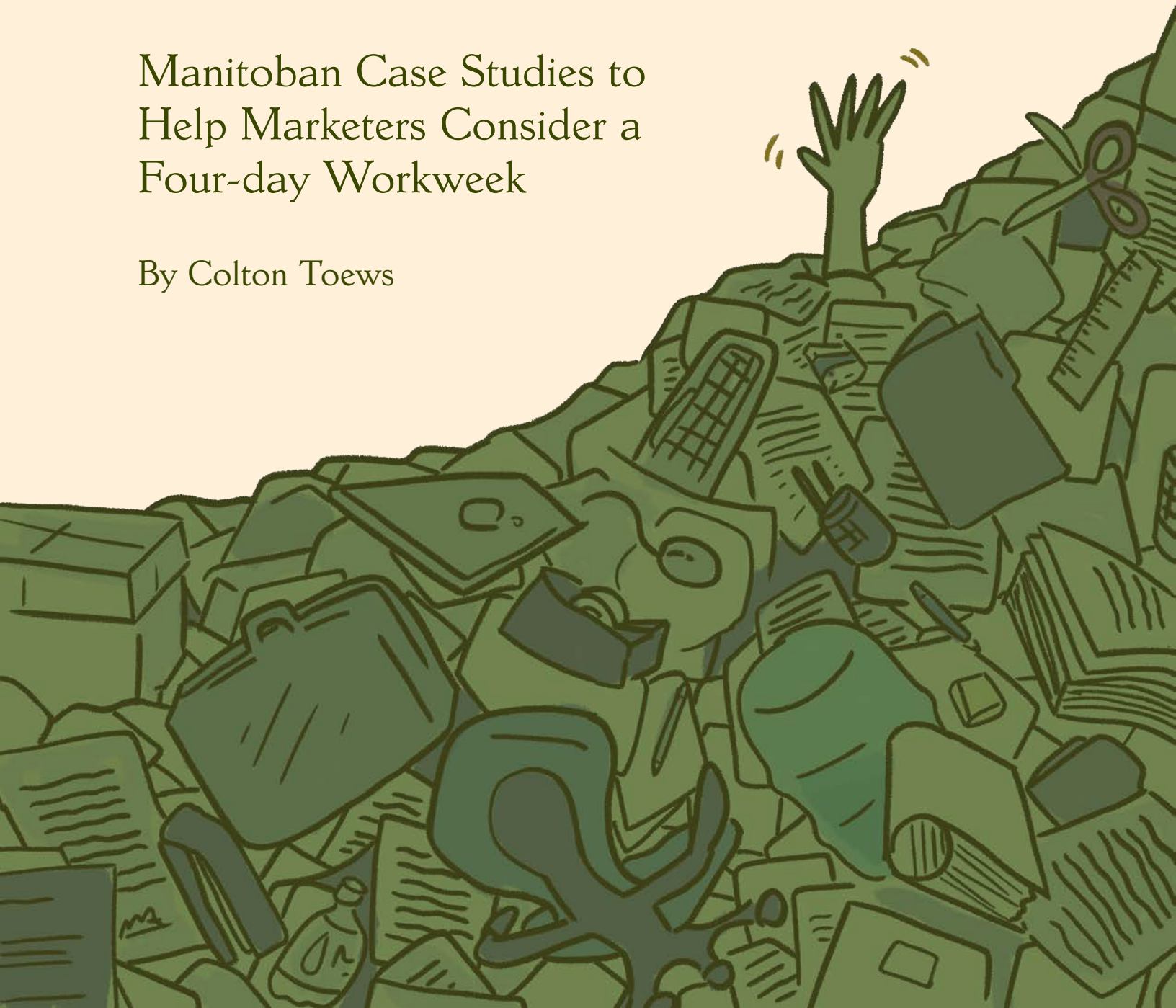


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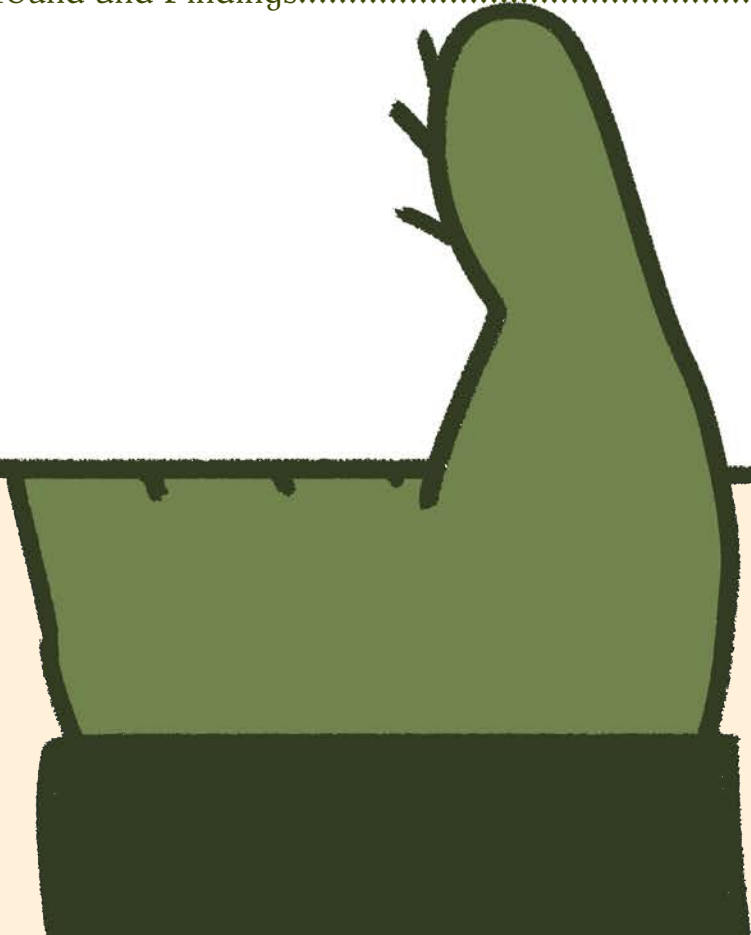
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Abstract

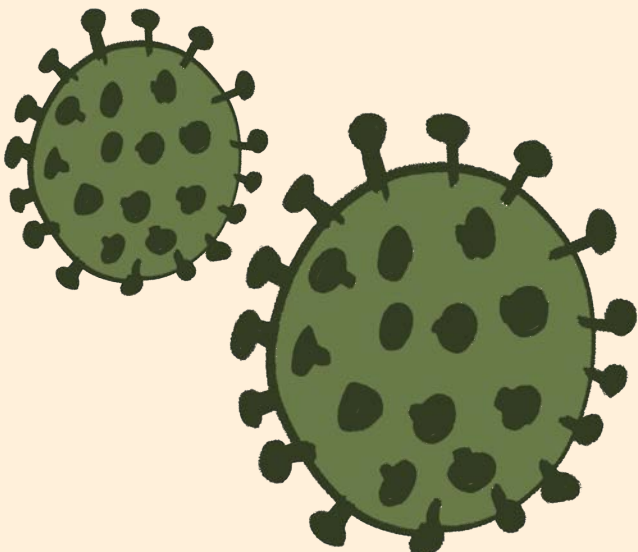
The pandemic onset by COVID-19 has had huge impacts on the operations of many businesses in Manitoba. Some have embraced remote work, and others have reduced hours of operation for a limited time. These changes have shown how mouldable work structure is. Now, businesses are entering into a new era of work. They must find ways to reduce burnout and attract new applications, all while maintaining productivity and profit. Four-day workweeks have potential to help companies achieve all these goals.

In Manitoba, four-day workweeks are much more common in manufacturing than many other sectors. Although many other types of business, such as advertising agencies, have adopted remote work, the typical five-day workweek is still the standard. Both manufacturing and advertising companies are centered around creating deliverables. Advertising agencies have the opportunity to learn from local manufacturers about the four-day workweek and the effects it has on operations, employees, and clients.

Embracing the Future of Work by Learning from Manufacturers

Businesses have faced a string of obstacles since the onset of the pandemic (such as labour shortages¹, layoffs² due to slowed business and health guidelines³, increased retirements, and more). For some sectors like advertising, embracing remote work has been useful.⁴ However, many of these challenges will exist post-pandemic and need a solution. The solution for many might be a four-day workweek.

Four-day workweeks are common in manufacturing. Although manufacturers differ from advertising agencies, they share one major similarity: they're in the business of creating. Just like agencies, manufacturing businesses must create deliverables by deadlines for clients. Manufacturers also must weigh productivity with work-life balances and prevent burnout among their employees. Advertising agencies can turn to the manufacturing sector to learn how to successfully shift to four-day workweeks. See pages four through eight for case studies that show this.



Businesses, such as various Winnipeg malls, reduced hours of operation and/or used a shorter workweek during the pandemic.⁵ These changes have potential beyond temporary measures. Making a permanent switch to a four-day workweek could help advertising businesses stand out from competitors and attract new talent.

What is a four-day workweek?

A four-day workweek refers to any workweek that is limited to four days. This can take a lot of forms. For some businesses, it means working four eight-hour shifts, making for a workweek of 32 hours.

However, some places have four 10-hour shifts that amount to 40 hours per week. Some places may use a four-day workweek, but still occasionally have five-day workweeks if catch up is needed.

Younger Generations Prefer Shorter Workweeks

In the United Kingdom, a study from Henley Business School found that Gen Zers and Millennials were more likely to apply for jobs that use a four-day workweek.⁶ In fact, 80 per cent of Gen Z employees said that work flexibility is “an important factor when choosing where to work.”

Similar values are present in younger Manitobans as well. In November 2021, I conducted a [survey](#) asking people who work in Manitoba about different work models, work-life balance, and more. According to the survey, only two per cent of Gen Y and Gen Z applicants didn't prefer a four-day workweek. Also, when

asked to choose a value from one to five (one being the least, five being the most) reflecting how much they value their work-life balance, 83 per cent said five.⁷ To learn more about the details of my study, see page [ten](#).

Four-day Workweeks Reduce Overhead

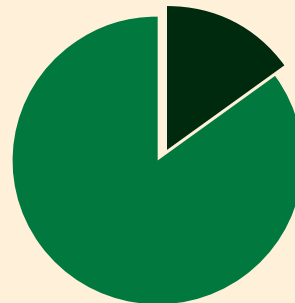
Jasmin Guenette, of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, told CTV News that “40 per cent of small businesses are making normal sales at the moment. So increasing wage is not something that is possible for many businesses.”⁸ This statement is referring to how COVID-19 has hurt profits. Using a shorter workweek can help. Eliminating one workday can reduce “20% of variable overhead expenses like electricity and energy consumption.”⁹ And, as employees use equipment less often, machines will take longer to depreciate. For companies that offer commuter benefits and/or on-premise food, one less day means these



budgets are shrunk. Janitorial services are needed less often as well.

Improving work-life balance for your employees can also improve their work abilities. In the [survey](#) I conducted, 85 per cent of people working in Manitoba said that increased stress worsens their work's quality. This means that integrating the system correctly can recuperate losses while also improving the value of the work performed by employees.

How does stress impact the quality of work done by people employed in Manitoba?



85% The quality of my work is worsened by stress

15% The quality of my work is improved by stress

Source: *My survey*. See page [ten](#) for overview.

Four-day Workweeks Used Beyond Canada

Netherlands

Four-day workweeks are neither a new nor perfect system. In some places, they are very commonplace. As of 2018, women in the Netherlands worked an average of 25 hours per week and men worked an average of 34 hours per week.¹⁰ There are risks that some employees might simply dislike the system, or it might not work for everyone's schedules.

It is also possible that removing a workday might cost too much if it means the loss of too many customers. And although working

from home for only four days sounds like the future of work-flex culture, it can pose risks. Remote work can result in employees working overtime. This happened a lot during the pandemic.¹¹ Working remotely can blur the line between work and home. It can be especially tricky for parents, leading to longer work but decreased productivity. In response to these issues, Ontario will implement a policy that enforces the right-to-disconnect.¹² This is meant to help protect peoples' mental health.



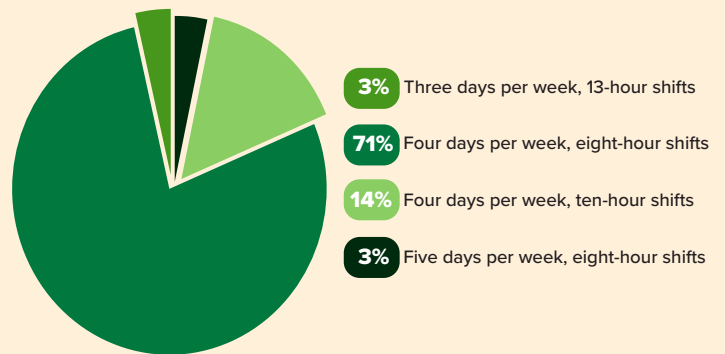
Iceland

From 2015 to 2019, trials in Iceland tested four-day workweeks with 2,500 workers.¹³ The trials included a wide variety of workplaces and had positive results. Burnout among employees was largely reduced, and a majority of employee productivity either remained the same or improved. Now, “86% of Iceland’s workforce have either moved to shorter hours for the same pay, or will gain the right to.”

It’s clear that the success of the system can vary widely. The trials in Iceland attributed their success to their approach. Companies didn’t simply remove a day from their schedules. Instead, they shortened meetings, used technology mindfully, and

introduced “focus time” — a period where employees can work without interruption. To reduce meeting lengths, one business used hard chairs that become increasingly uncomfortable. Another implemented countdown timers. Through Zoom, scheduled meetings can end automatically at a set time.¹⁴

Which model do people working in Manitoba prefer (assuming they’d make the same income)?



Source: My survey. See page [ten](#) for overview.

Utah, USA

The State of Utah implemented a four-day workweek for their employees in 2008. One study examining the impacts found that the system worked better with employee involvement.¹⁵ By simply asking employees to weigh in on the ideal execution, they’re likely to perceive an improved work-life balance. This opens up more questions for employers considering the change. Should you change? How do you go about it? Which execution of the model is best?

To gain insight, I’ve met with representatives from a small pool of Manitoba businesses currently using some iteration of the four-day workweek. The first three are manufacturers, and the last is an advertising agency that recently switched to a four-day workweek. Manufacturing has paved the way for these models. Now is the time for other sectors to embrace the future.

Case Study: Quintex

Key takeaway: Four-day workweeks reduce how often employees skip work.

Quintex is a multi-generational manufacturing business in Winnipeg. They originally opened in 1911 and currently produce uniforms, mats, linens, and so on. David Quinton, president of Quintex, told me they adopted four-day workweeks around 25 years ago. While there are some salespeople who work five days per week, Quinton said that 95 per cent of their employees work 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Mon–Thurs. This doesn't really work for salespeople, as it isn't feasible to make sales that early for them, and after around 4 p.m. they only have computer work to do.

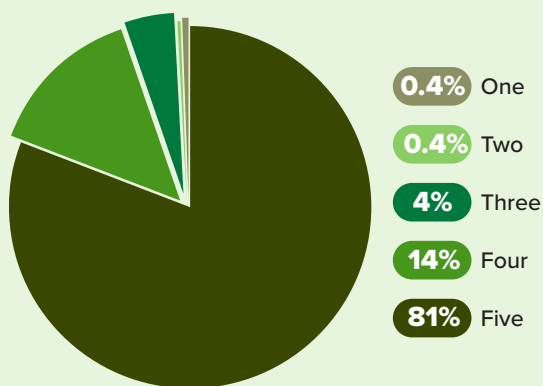
As for people working four days, there are some exceptions to the 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. shifts. Quinton said that they try to be flexible to accommodate employee lifestyles. Some work 6:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. However, some jobs require employees to work as a team (specifically assembly lines), making it harder to be flexible. Engineers, however, have more leeway. Ultimately, Quinton said this flexibility

“makes for a happier employee.” He said that if they can make a shift work better for an employee's lifestyle, then “that's the best way to go.”



The four-day workweek makes sense for their operations. Switching to a four-day workweek better prepared them for weeks with statutory holidays, as they were no longer losing a day of work and are still able to make deadlines. In fact, back when they used five-day workweeks, weeks with holidays often led to confusions between drivers and customers about delivery schedules. Since switching, these confusions have disappeared. They also found that employees were positively impacted. Drivers are now better rested and able to make heavy deliveries easier. Quinton also found that employees don't miss as many days now. It's harder to rationalize skipping work for one day when it's worth 25 per cent of that week's income. Quintex has low turnover and around 90 per cent of employees agree to the four-day model when renewing their government variance.

How much do Manitoban workers value their work-life balances?



Source: My survey. See page [ten](#) for overview.

Case Study: Custom Castings Limited

Key takeaway: Having a variety of shift options enables employees to work a schedule that better accommodates their life.

Custom Castings Limited, located in the Dugald area of Winnipeg, aids customers with designing and manufacturing mold castings. Not everyone at Custom Castings Limited uses a four-day workweek. Erika Reimer, their human resources manager, told me that they value flexibility to accommodate different lifestyles. Some office positions work Monday to Thursday for nine-hour days and then a four-hour shift on Fridays. Others work eight-hour shifts from Monday to Friday.

Regarding four-day workweeks, some staff work ten-hour shifts from Monday to Thursday. There are also three-day workweeks at the company. These employees work 12-hour shifts on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. The weekend shifts are only worked by the machining department, who drill holes and perform a variety of cuts. However, in the spirit of flexibility, not everyone in the department must work those three-day shifts. Employees in this department can instead work Monday to Thursday. It's worth noting that some manufacturing businesses have their employees alternate work schedules on a weekly basis. At Custom Castings Limited, this isn't the case. Employees stick to a set schedule that is the same every week, but there are opportunities for many different set schedules.

Reimer said that employees love the system. If you work a four-day workweek here, you're not paid overtime unless you work over 10 hours (as opposed to the usual eight hours that Manitoban businesses adhere to). To do this legally,

they have a variance from the government allowing it. Companies can only receive this if enough employees agree to the system. At Custom Castings Limited, they consistently receive 100 per cent of their employee signatures agreeing to the system. According to Reimer, they reach 100 per cent because their employees love that "every weekend is a long weekend." She said that employees find it easier to make time for appointments and family time due to having Friday off.

The system is also useful for them during especially busy periods. If needed, they can schedule employees on the Friday, giving them an entire day to catch up and overtime pay. Erika has been with the company for 13 years and in that time, they've always used this work model. The system has been useful for recruitment as well. But if an employee finds that the long shifts are too much for them, the company works to accommodate this by finding them a different set of shifts. This flexibility also helps with recruitment, said Reimer.

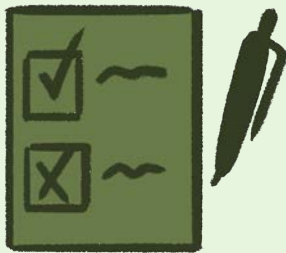
Four-day workweeks are more common in manufacturing than other sectors. An upside to this is that in the summer, when the foundry (where metals are melted and casted) gets hot, employees are in the shop for one less day. Reimer also pointed out that a downside to working longer days during the winter is that you don't get much off-time when it's bright out, and this can have negative consequences on mental health. But, if that situation arises, Custom Castings Limited communicates with employees to find a better schedule for them.



Case Study: Loewen

Key takeaway: Having longer shifts reduces preparation time, improving productivity.

Loewen, located in Steinbach, Manitoba, manufactures luxury windows and doors. Craig Goldstein, the talent acquisition manager at Loewen, said that the company has both five-day and four-day workweeks. The company has 700 employees, 500 of which work in the plant. The manufacturing team works four-days per week, and so do some support teams. Shifts don't change for employees; they work the same set each week. 350 employees work day-shifts (6 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) and 150 employees work evening shifts (4:30 pm. to 3 a.m.).



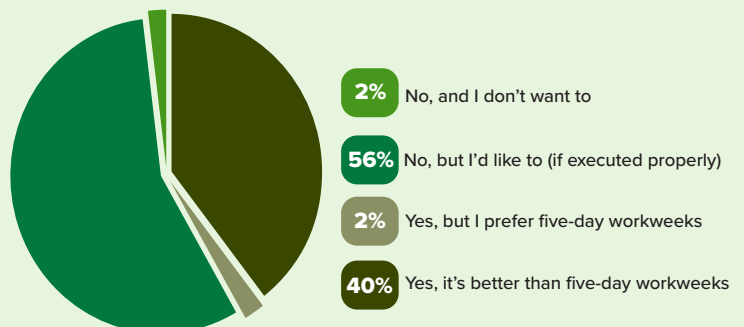
Loewen hasn't always used this system. In fact, it's only their second year doing so. Their research suggested that losing a few hours of work wouldn't hurt productivity and would create happier employees. After the management team decided to move forward with the idea, they needed to assure themselves that this is something employees wanted. Over the course of a few months, they conducted surveys asking what work model employees would prefer. The majority wanted four ten-hour shifts per week. Since then, they've continued conducting surveys, and the answers overwhelmingly support four-day workweeks consisting of ten-hour shifts. The ongoing surveys also ask other questions about the culture, hours, training benefits, and more.

Goldstein said that longer shifts are useful from a production standpoint. Occasionally, an employee might get to the end of the day and wish they had just a couple more hours to finish the job. With ten-hour days, it's easier to avoid this. This system saves time because you don't have to put everything away only to unpack again the next day. Manufacturing is hard labour. By having a three-day weekend, employees can recharge better, helping their productivity through the week.

The new system has given them an edge in hiring as well, according to Goldstein. They've even put a sign in the front of their building advertising three-day weekends. New applicants often cite this as one reason they want to work at Loewen. Naturally, not every employee had the same reaction to the change. Some employees thought they'd like it but found that they couldn't handle working those longer days. Some left before the change because they thought they wouldn't like the system. After hearing good things, some of those employees came back asking to rejoin, and Loewen happily brought them back.

Let's see if the successes of four-day workweeks in manufacturing are carrying over with a local advertising agency.

I asked: Have you worked a four-day workweek and if so, did you enjoy it?



Source: My survey. See page [ten](#) for overview.

Case Study: Brandish

Key takeaway: Treating Friday as an optional day motivates employees to improve productivity.

Brandish is an advertising agency located in Downtown Winnipeg. It's typical for agencies to use traditional 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. five-day workweeks; however, Brandish is setting a new example by adopting a four-day workweek. Brandish began using the remote-work model during the pandemic. Lee Waltham, managing partner and marketing director at Brandish, said their employees were experiencing burn out after working during the pandemic for two years, especially as their work is "already incredibly fast-paced." So, they began looking for a solution.

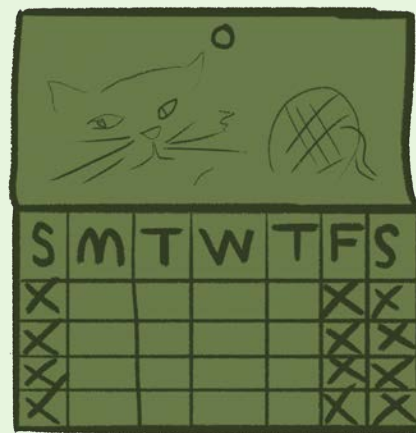
"There was a lot of examples of companies giving their teams time off like Bumble, HubSpot...", said Waltham. "Giving them a week or two weeks off to recharge. Ultimately, we felt that we could take that a step further. And that, we had an opportunity to actually do something a little bit more meaningful, and a little bit more permanent."

Justine Dechaine, operations manager at Brandish, said that their culture team (a group of employees who find ways to improve work culture) was researching changes other companies were making as the pandemic became less prevalent. As employees returned to work, companies found ways to make their work more flexible. That's when they decided to try a four-day workweek.

In August 2021, Brandish did a test run of the work model, and in September they made the change official. Many places that change from a five-day to four-day model do so by taking the hours of day

and dividing them on top of the other days (making a total of fewer, longer workdays). Instead, Brandish simply removed Fridays from their workweek. They also didn't issue pay cuts. But how were they able to improve productivity enough to make the leap?

Waltham said that it required micro-efficiencies, the biggest one being the removal of unnecessary meetings. For some, that means simply skipping out on



meetings, but it can also mean that some meetings became emails. Organically, people changed their meeting schedules. Hour-long meetings became only 15 minutes. Weeklies became bi-weekly. Bi-monthly meetings became monthly. Having less time made them more considerate of how to spend it. As everyone works from home, employees must find ways to improve their organization.

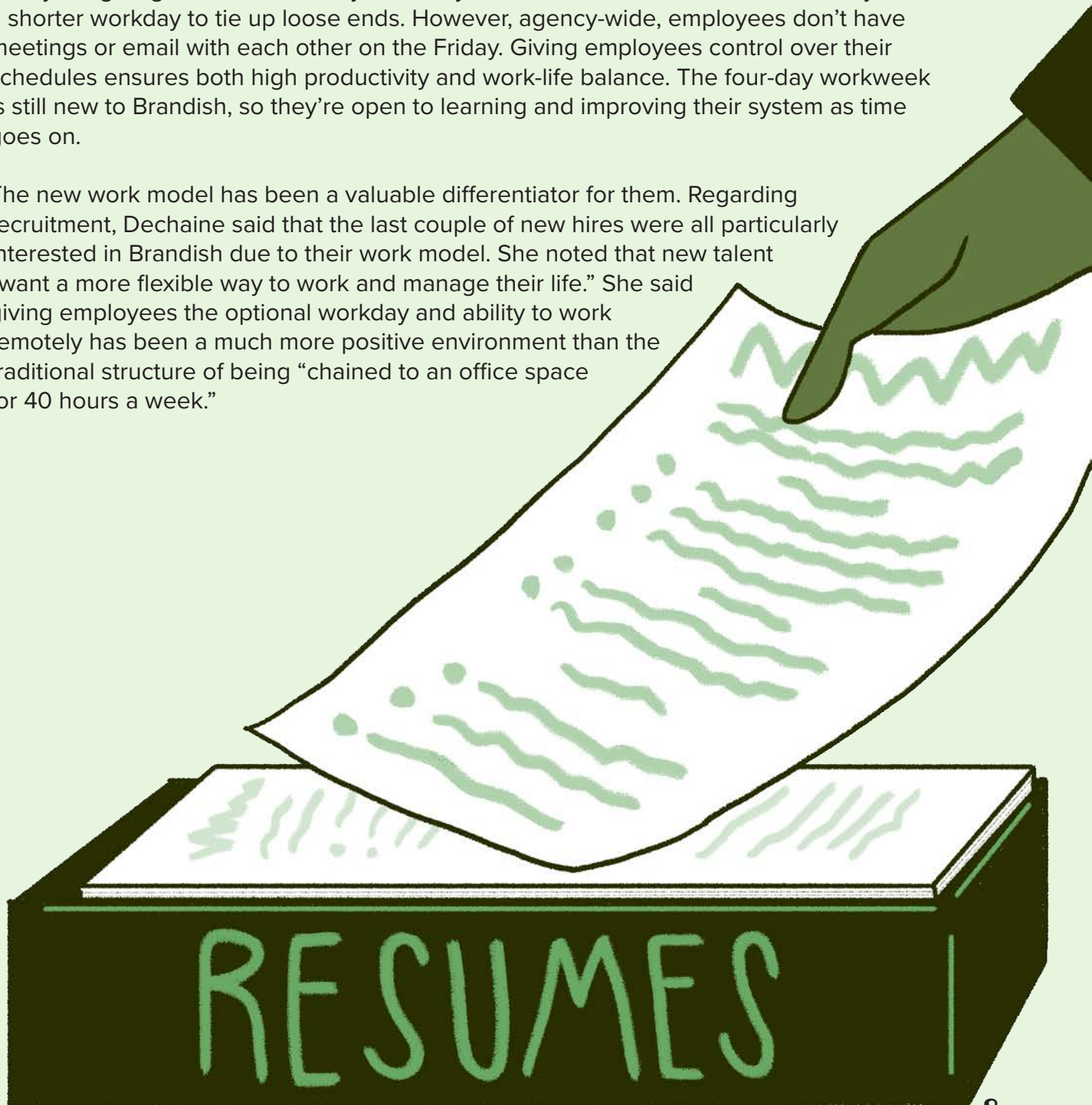
Dechaine found that it's easy to get distracted by low-priority work. Now, every Monday, she makes a list of work items she won't allow herself to do that week. This helps her maintain focus on the important tasks. She also now "batches" her work. This means that she blocks out her days by the type of work she's doing.

Case Study: Brandish (Cont.)

Dechaine found that by forcing herself to keep to one type of work, she eliminates the “context switching” it takes her brain to change focus. These two tactics have made her “more focused and productive.” Dechaine also said that communication had to improve. On an agency-wide level, they had to push back immediate deadlines. If anyone doubts they’ll meet a deadline, employees are now quick to send an email to everyone involved ahead of time.

It’s important to note that some employees still work on the Friday. Brandish treats the Friday as an optional day for catching up on work. Some work extra hard to have the Friday off, giving them an extra day for family time and so on. Others use the Friday as a shorter workday to tie up loose ends. However, agency-wide, employees don’t have meetings or email with each other on the Friday. Giving employees control over their schedules ensures both high productivity and work-life balance. The four-day workweek is still new to Brandish, so they’re open to learning and improving their system as time goes on.

The new work model has been a valuable differentiator for them. Regarding recruitment, Dechaine said that the last couple of new hires were all particularly interested in Brandish due to their work model. She noted that new talent “want a more flexible way to work and manage their life.” She said giving employees the optional workday and ability to work remotely has been a much more positive environment than the traditional structure of being “chained to an office space for 40 hours a week.”



Conclusion

Four-day Workweeks Benefit Employees and your Business

Local manufacturers with four-day workweeks show a variety of ways to make a four-day workweek successful for both employees and their businesses. Other industries, like advertising, can learn from them. As Brandish is successfully showing, taking the time to change your work model can have great impacts on employee work-life balances and the business productivity.

Optimizing work-life balances with a four-day workweek can

- reduce costs
- prevent employees from missing work
- increase productivity
- enhance quality of work
- improve employee mood
- attract applications, especially among younger workers (Millennials and Gen Zers)

If you're considering making the shift, start by understanding how your employees feel. Create surveys or interviews asking them to rate their work-life balances, their stress rates, and what their ideal shifts would look like. Feel free to use my survey questions as inspiration for your own. From there, you'll have a better understanding of how to execute a system that suits employee needs, customer needs, and operational ones as well.



Survey Background & Findings

The survey was conducted on November 2, 2021. It was posted to Reddit communities r/Winnipeg and r/Manitoba. This means it has a limitation of only reaching people with internet. It received a total of 273 respondents that claim to work in Manitoba. These represent an estimated 507,200 people working in Manitoba. At a confidence level of 95 per cent, these survey results have a five per cent margin error. You can also take the [survey](#), although it won't save new responses.

See below for a breakdown of the answers to my survey.

How much do you value your work-life balance?

5.....	81%
4.....	14%
3.....	4%
2.....	0.37%
1.....	0.37%

Have you worked a 4 day work week and if so, did you enjoy it?

Yes, it's better than 5 day work weeks.....	40%
Yes, but I prefer 5 day work weeks.....	2%
No, but I'd like to (if executed properly).....	56%
No, and I don't want to.....	2%

Of the options, which work model do you think you'd enjoy the most? Assume you'll make the same income in all options.

5 days per week, 8 hour shifts.....	3%
4 days per week, 10 hour shifts.....	14%
4 days per week, 8 hour shifts.....	71%
3 days per week, 13 hour shifts.....	3%

How does stress impact the quality of your work?

The quality of my work is improved by stress.....	15%
The quality of my work is worsened by stress.....	85%

What field do you primarily work in?

Manufacturing.....	7%
Science.....	4%
Education.....	12%
Engineering and Architecture.....	7%
Arts.....	1%
Communications.....	7%
Business Management/Administration.....	8%
Social Services.....	4%
Installation, Repair and Maintenance.....	3%
Farming, Fishing and Forestry.....	0%
Sales.....	4%

Government.....7%
 Law.....3%
 Health and Medicine.....9%
 Other.....22%

Do you work in Manitoba?

Yes.....100%
 No.....0%

About Working Draft

From the [About](#) page:

“Working Draft is a student-produced web magazine from Red River College Polytechnic’s Creative Communications program in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

Working Draft brings eclectic new voices to communications and writing professionals — readers who care about great storytelling, contemporary issues and culture, the media landscape, and the broad and quickly evolving field of communications.

Working Draft’s writers inform, investigate, question, challenge, entertain, critique, educate, and persuade — all from a Manitoba perspective.”

Read more articles on the [Home](#) page.

About the Author

Colton Toews is a copywriter, humour writer, and stand-up comedian. He’s studied Advertising and Marketing through the Creative Communications program at Red River College Polytechnic in Winnipeg, MB. He’s also taken comedy writing classes at Second City in Toronto, ON.

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