

The 4-day week - Positive results in UK, discussion in Finland

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In the UK, as many as 56 of the 61 participating companies intend to continue with the four-day week pattern after a half-year trial period. 18 of them have already decided to adopt the new scheme permanently. The results of the test indicate reductions in work-related stress levels, burnouts, sickness absences as well as an increase in business revenues. Workers have upheld their pay. The companies operate in a variety of sectors, such as banking, IT, retail, and recruitment groups.

Before the trial, many questioned whether we would see an increase in productivity to offset the reduction in working time – but this is exactly what the researchers found. As far as managers are concerned, many of them see the shortened week as a rational response to the pandemic, which could also attract talent in the labour market. Enthusiasts call these results a major breakthrough. The number of sick days taken by staff in the trial fell by around two-thirds, while almost two in five said they were less stressed. Some argue that the shorter working week could be an opportunity to contain teleworking, at a time when the office culture is increasingly under jeopardy.

Furthermore, it must be pointed out that only a limited number of workers were covered by the British pilot project. Its voluntary participation means that companies open to the idea in the first place took part and lastly that mainly SMEs in the private service sector and service-sector participated in which it is easier to adjust work processes than for bigger manufacturing companies.

In Finland, people within the social democratic party have sought inspiration from the UK trial and included a 4-day week in the ongoing election campaign. For instance, the Vice Chair of the party has suggested a wide survey on the topic during the next parliamentary term. The objective would be to study effects on burnout and malaise which have become a national disease. The Finnish unions on their side report that little has happened so far in this field except for a few company agreements.

Edited by industriAll Europe.