

**A RESOUNDING SUCCESS:
RESEARCHERS FIND THAT FOUR-DAY WORK WEEK IS DOABLE
PERPETUAL GUARDIAN TAKES FIRST STEPS AND MAKES
RECOMMENDATIONS TO BOARD**

[Perpetual Guardian](#), New Zealand's leading statutory trust business, has shared the highly anticipated results of its landmark four-day work week trial. The findings indicate that the company and staff experienced a range of benefits, while also revealing a number of learnings and challenges linked to fitting five days' worth of work into four.

Perpetual Guardian's founder [Andrew Barnes](#) embarked on the unprecedented experiment earlier this year to define the future of work at the company. Over eight weeks in March and April, the company trialled a four-day work week across its 240-person-strong business. The trial gave every employee a day off each week at full pay, with the aim of empowering a staff-led discussion about engagement and productivity.

The trial sought to start a conversation and challenge the way we work – and to discover whether increased working flexibility and more free personal time could lead to an increase in productivity.

Mr Barnes says there were positive improvements across all aspects of the study. “Our analysis of the results shows the objectives of the trial were successfully met. The key areas we sought to measure including work-life balance, engagement, organisational commitment and work stimulation all showed positive increases – that is a powerful combination that leads to job satisfaction. Both the qualitative and quantitative research attached to our trial correlate this.

“Our leadership team reported that there was broadly no change in company outputs pre and during the trial. They perceived no reduction in job performance and the survey data showed a marginal increase across most teams.”

When looking at job satisfaction, engagement and retention, Professor of Human Resource Management at AUT, Jarrod Haar identified these job attitudes as being very high compared

to New Zealand data of more than 6,000 employees. “Already high pre-trial, these significantly increased post-trial and the scores are easily the highest I have seen in my New Zealand data. In summary, employees reported enhanced job attitudes reflecting positive effects from the trial,” says Professor Harr.

In correlation, Dr Helen Delaney, Senior Lecturer at the University of Auckland Business School, found many employees expressed a sense of greater voice and empowerment in their work because of the planning discussions that preceded the trial. She says, “Employees designed a number of innovations and initiatives to work in a more productive and efficient manner, from automating manual processes to reducing or eliminating non-work-related internet usage.

Mr Barnes views the trial and its outcomes as being much bigger than just the future of work at Perpetual Guardian. “This is about flexible working and about using technology to enable that. I am pleased with the results of the trial and am thankful to the researchers, Professor Jarrod Haar and Dr Helen Delaney, who took on the challenge of studying how this trial has affected staff and the company.

“The researchers have found that the four-day work week is doable. This is a promising outcome and one that we are eager to work through in terms of how we adopt more flexible working arrangements within our business. I am working with my board and HR team and consulting within the business on ways in which we can implement the four-day work week where appropriate. The learnings and challenges that were uncovered as part of the trial raise a number of questions that we will work through to ensure we address areas that need improvement or further innovation in order to increase flexibility and productivity.”

Of the learnings and challenges, Mr Barnes postulates, “If you can have parents spending more time with their children, how is that a bad thing? Are you likely to get better educational outputs as a consequence?

“Are you likely to get fewer mental health issues when you have more time to take care of yourself and your personal interests – probably. If you can take 20 per cent of people off the roads every day, what does that mean? If you have fewer people in the office at any one time, can we make smaller offices? If people work more efficiently or remotely, coming to the office less frequently, what does that mean for urban design?

“These are interesting issues, and we should be debating them because I think it changes the composition of society. And once that changes, the opportunities available for people will change. Maybe more people will be providing services for people’s leisure as opposed to traditional business-related support services. I don’t know what the outcomes will be, but I would say to all business owners, be a little creative, think about trying a few things.”

Key research findings*

To ensure robust methodology of the trial on levels of staff engagement and any impact of the trial on employee stress and wellbeing, the company invited two academic researchers to assist with the trial: Dr Helen Delaney of the University of Auckland Business School (who conducted [qualitative research](#) into employees’ experiences of the trial) and Professor Jarrod Haar of AUT (who conducted [quantitative research](#) into the trial and its effects).

Professor Haar’s research falls into four main clusters, with three being a direct link to the trial: how we manage our work, family and life roles such as work-life balance; leadership and its influence on followers; and team functioning and its influence on team member wellbeing and job outcomes. His findings show job performance was maintained in the four days that staff worked during the trial. Of interest is that staff stress levels and work demands lowered and the scores for work-life balance, stimulation and commitment improved significantly. All detailed scores are available in the fact sheet and research results.

Dr Delaney’s research indicates the measurable benefits of the four-day work week trial with both managers and staff indicating improved workplace behaviours, relationships, culture and environment. Common themes were improvement to workplace dynamics (such as intellectual engagement and stimulation; ‘work smarter’ innovations; collaboration and teamwork; delegation, sharing and trust; upskilling and task variety; voice and empowerment; focus and presence; goodwill and reciprocity; stamina and motivation; organisational resilience and reduced risk). Many people talked about the impact of reduced working hours on non-work life – such as more time to participate in family life; time to accomplish tasks, to restore and reconnect, to learn and contribute, and to explore and imagine.

Perpetual Guardian’s Head of People and Capability, Christine Brotherton, says the research has been invaluable, partly because of some unanticipated findings. “We have been reflecting on aspects highlighted in the trial that we had not expected to observe. In

particular, the trial has given us an opportunity to evaluate leadership within our company. The academic research shows that our people are ready to embrace change.

“In some teams, the experience of the trial was more successful than in others – where leaders coached, guided and supported their teams to come up with their own productivity measures and rosters for ensuring excellent client service, we think that teams felt empowered and motivated to succeed. Where leadership was not demonstrated so strongly (for example, not empowering staff to make good decisions), we have been able to identify deficiencies in leadership that perhaps we may not have had the opportunity to see if not for the trial.”

*See fact sheet for further results and links to research reports

ends

For more information:

Jemma Crook Alexander PR +64 (0)9 347 1044 / (0)21 271 3318 jemma@alexanderpr.co.nz
