

Briefing Note: Four-Day Work Week – Pilot

April 20, 2022

The Idea

New Dawn Enterprises has proposed an organizational pilot of the 4-day work week for their employees. This pilot will run for 6 months beginning June 1st, 2022 and ending December 31, 2022. We were approached by New Dawn to host a webinar for the sector to share their plans for the pilot and to invite other organizations to pilot the 4-day work week alongside New Dawn to collect evaluation data across various organizations to get a better sense of the impacts of the model in the Community Impact Sector. At the end of the 6 months, there will be a Case Study drafted outlining the findings across the participating organizations.

Joining this pilot feels in line with our values and strategic direction of finding innovative ways of working for the sector and modeling a learning organization. The evaluation and formal learning model of this pilot project are attractive to the IONS team as it would provide us with concrete and tangible data and research to support innovative work models. This pilot also provides us with an opportunity to trial a method of responding to employee burnout in the sector as well as trialing a potential value-add attraction & retention practice to compete with the private / public sector in attracting new talent to the sector.

Expected Benefits & Advantages

There is much research available to support the benefits of the 4-day work week (see the resources at the end of this document). We anticipate that throughout this pilot we will see some – if not all – of the following benefits:

- **Productivity:** The vast majority of studies and research that has gone into a four-day work week has indicated an increase in workplace and individual employee productivity under a four day work week model. This is particularly true for staff who have concrete work plans with measurable indicators of progress (both of which IONS staff have due to the nature of our work).
- **Employee Retention & Recruitment:** We know that We expect to be onboarding three new staff members prior to this pilot. Being able to offer a 4-day work week may help us attract new talent (or encourage people to stay) given that we are aware that as a sector we can't always compete with salaries.
- **Opportunity for IONS to Show Leadership and Model our Values:** At our core, IONS is a learning organization. Participating in this pilot would provide us with an opportunity to model our values of learning and innovation while providing leadership to the sector through sharing our learnings and data to support other organizations in trialing new ways of working.
- **Increased creativity, personal growth, and reflection:** Increased opportunity for personal growth, reflection, and engagement in hobbies which are typically connected to our work (e.g. camping, gardening, volunteering) could bring fresh perspectives to our work.

- **Physical Health:** Many studies and health professionals have referred to “sitting as the new smoking” and given that all IONS conduct office work as the majority of their job this move could increase personal physical health and reduce pressures on our health care system now and in the future.
- **Reduced Burnout and Mental Health Concerns:** Staff have reported symptoms of burnout and anxiety/grief in the past. This move would help us to continue to foster opportunities for self-care and ensure staff are motivated and supported in tackling the complex challenges we face in our work.

Potential Disadvantages

While the above benefits are certainly very attractive, we do recognize that there will be challenges in adopting this model and throughout the pilot. Some of those challenges that we’ve identified initially include:

- **Managing Shift Patterns and Hybrid Work Schedules:** One of the most common disadvantages of a 4-day work week is that most of our partners and supporters subscribe to a Monday-Friday schedule. Meetings and workshops led by other organizations may fall on non-work days. Another concern is that, since we have adopted a flexible hybrid work practice, supporting staff to work from home as well as in person each week, depending on when some choose to schedule their in-office time and their free day of the week we may end up not seeing some people as much or at all in person.
 - **Solution:** Prior to June 1st, the IONS team (and departments) will work to clearly identify the shift schedules and days in/out of the office so that there is scheduled time for the people who need to connect in person or regularly to be working at the same time or place during the pilot.

Also adopting flexibility to change the schedules throughout the pilot should the need arise or we realize that it is not working as intended.

- **Balancing Workload with Less Hours:** It is commonly reported across the team that, with the number of projects and low staff compliment (currently) there often aren’t enough hours in the day to get the work done. Reducing work hours may lead to staff time management and workload challenges.
 - **Solution:** Regular check-ins with staff in each department and as a team to ensure that workload is balanced and they have the time required to meet deliverables and outcomes.

Formalizing the process for determining whether or not IONS takes on a new project or event to ensure we’re not over-committing ourselves and risking mission drift and burnout.

- **Managing Tensions if some staff need to work the full work week to manage workload:** It has been noted that some, especially at the management / senior level, are concerned that they won't be able to commit to working only the reduced work week regularly. This disparity in schedules could lead to tensions building between staff who "can't afford" to take the time off and those who can easily manage the reduced week.
 - **Solution:** Regular check-ins as a team and between staff prioritizing addressing tensions as they arise to avoid future conflict and address changes to the pilot and our way of working if needed.

- **Compensating Employees for reduced hours can be expensive:** Perhaps the most obvious disadvantage of a 4-day work week to any shrewd employer is that giving staff the same pay for less hours can feel like you're taking the scenic route to giving them a pay rise. If you're skeptical that cutting hours could increase productivity, this probably feels like a gamble to lock yourself into.
 - **Solution:** Number of hours worked is just one way to measure productivity. It is important to consider productivity with other measures, such as completed tasks, employee morale, etc. In addition, in our conversations with other groups and individuals it has become clear that a four-day work week model is incredibly desirable and could help with employee recruitment, morale, and retention. This should be considered as it takes a considerable amount of time to onboard and train new staff.

- **Some staff may see this as an opportunity to work a second job during regular IONS work time:** With the additional personal time, some staff could see this as an opportunity to seek additional employment opportunities which could potentially impact their productivity and engagement with IONS.
 - **Solution:** For the duration of the pilot, we will clearly communicate with staff that the intention of the experiment is to enhance work-life balance and enable more free time rather than taking on new work. We will stick to our current operational procedures, which require Supervisor sign-off on any work outside of IONS commitments.

Implementation & Timing

Propose that we join New Dawn's 6-month Pilot project of the 4-Day Work Week. Beginning June 1 – December 31, 2022, staff team will work reduced hours each week.

Staff would be expected to work a flex schedule where employees work a minimum of 30 hours (4 days at 7.5 hours/day) and work extra as needed based on deadlines and mandatory meetings. Any hours worked above 30 hrs, would not be considered overtime but can be taken at a later date as PTO (Paid Time Off).

Each team will decide whether there is a need for staggered days based on work flow.

More details around implementation and management to be determined as we get closer to June 1st.

Evaluation

Since the goal of this pilot is to develop a formal case study and provide research data to support the findings, a strong emphasis will be placed on evaluation throughout the project – both qualitative and quantitative. IONS will work closely with New Dawn (and any other organizations that join the pilot) as well as Karen Pyra – our Evaluation Consultant – to ensure that we are collecting relevant data to support the learnings and make decisions throughout the pilot.

Key indicators we'll be looking to measure include:

- Employee Well-Being and Happiness
- Productivity with an emphasis on Outcomes vs Presenteeism
 - Workplan Reviews and Project Reviews
- Employee Turnover
- Leave time (Wellness days, etc.)
- Employee working hours
 - How many / often did team members need to work over the 30-hours/week?

The Ask for the IONS Board

We are seeking approval to join New Dawn's 6-month Pilot project for the 4-day work week as an organization.