

Lingua Inglese (9cfu)
Prof.ssa R. Antinucci
a.a. 2023-24

PART 2 Business Articles
Read, translate, and discuss

1. The world's biggest maker of spectacles wants to be a tech firm

The Economist, Feb 22nd 2024

Luxottica is experimenting with smart glasses and built-in hearing aids



Over the course of six decades Leonardo Del Vecchio, an Italian entrepreneur who died in 2022, built Luxottica into the world's largest maker of spectacles and sunglasses. In 2018 he merged his firm with Essilor, a French lens manufacturer, to create a Franco-Italian corporate giant that is today worth over \$90bn and employs some 200,000 people. The group owns iconic eyewear labels from Ray-Ban to Oliver Peoples, and also produces glasses using the brands of European luxury houses such as Armani and Chanel. On February 14th the company reported that its sales grew by 7% last year, at constant exchange rates, faster than at many other luxury businesses.

Now Francesco Milleri, a close confidant of Mr Del Vecchio's who was appointed chief executive of Luxottica in 2017 and of the combined group in 2020, is looking for the company's next act. He has two big ideas. First is to become the leader in smart glasses. The ambition is not entirely new: the firm partnered with Google, a tech giant, on its Google Glass – an unambiguous flop thanks in part to its clunky interface and dorky design. The device was discontinued in 2015.

Yet there are plenty of optimists who think that the moment for smart spectacles has arrived. In 2021 Snap, a social-media firm, unveiled a pair of augmented-reality glasses. This month Apple began shipping its augmented-reality headset, the Vision Pro. It reportedly pre-sold 200,000 of the devices, despite a price tag of \$3,499. "I

believe we are at the dawn of a product revolution akin to what we saw in the early 90s in mobile phones,” reckons Luca Solca of Bernstein, a broker.

EssilorLuxottica’s latest foray into the technology is through Ray-Ban, in partnership with Meta, another tech giant. The first iteration it launched in 2021 had only modest success. It will be hoping that a new version it began selling in September, which has a snazzier camera and a longer battery life, will do better. The device can capture and relay what the wearer sees. An in-built virtual assistant can hear and respond to their requests.

Mr Milleri’s second idea is the one in which he seems most invested. “We have become a med-tech company,” he declares. Central to that is the development of spectacles with built-in hearing aids, which it will launch in August, for those with moderate hearing loss. It reckons that is a group of some 1.25bn people worldwide, many of whom shy away from the perceived stigma and high price of conventional hearing aids. The company’s spectacles, by contrast, will look no different from other glasses and cost well below the price of a regular hearing aid, says Mr Milleri.

The thinking is not altogether original. The Beltone “Hear-N-See”, one such device, first debuted in 1956. Audiofon, a German maker of hearing aids, has also dabbled in spectacles. But the idea has never been adopted en masse. Mr Milleri is counting on better technology to change that. Last year his company acquired Nuance Hearing, an Israeli startup founded in 2015. Its technology uses an algorithm to detect where sounds are coming from based on when they are picked up by different microphones. The spectacles it has developed then isolate and process the voice of the person the wearer is speaking to and transmit it through tiny built-in speakers. Nothing goes in the wearer’s ear.

Mr Milleri’s enthusiasm for the concept is personal. Mr Del Vecchio, who was 87 when he died, suffered from hearing loss and often lamented that hearing aids were uncomfortable to wear with glasses. That inspired Mr Milleri and Leonardo Maria Del Vecchio, one of the founder’s sons, who is also the firm’s strategy chief, to pursue the idea. Whether they prove to be farsighted remains to be seen. ■

Listen to the podcast on Moodle.

spectacles (n): glasses

constant exchange rates: (it.) cambi costanti

clunky (adj): awkward

dorky (adj): simple

discontinued (adj): suspended

foray (n): venture

iteration (n): version, edition

snazzier(adj): more stylish

(to) relay: (to) communicate

(to) shy away from: (to) avoid

(to) dabble: (it.) cimentarsi

en masse: collectively

strategy chief: (it.) capo strategico, responsabile delle strategie

farsighted (adj): visionary

2. The magic formula of management

Bartleby, *The Economist*, Oct 6th 2022

Five numbers, one connecting idea



This is the age of the data scientist. Employers of all kinds prize people with the skills to capture and analyse enormous amounts of information, to spot patterns in the data and to turn them into useful insights. But some of the most valuable figures in business need neither an analytics team nor knowledge of Python. They are simple to remember and useful for bosses in every organisation. Here is a small selection of management's magic numbers:

Zero: Doing nothing can be the most valuable thing a manager can do, as the fable of Atwood's duck demonstrates. Jeff Atwood, a computer programmer, is credited with popularising the (possibly apocryphal) story of a piece of deliberately unnecessary work that an animator did on a video game called "Battle Chess".

Aware that the higher-ups needed to feel that they were adding value by making changes, the animator gave the character of the queen a wholly extraneous pet duck. Sure enough, the reviewers asked the programmer to do only one thing: remove the bird. In theory everyone ended up happy, except the duck. In practice time had been wasted because people higher up the chain needed to justify their existence.

One: This is the number of bosses people should have. In reality, matrix structures and team-based approaches mean that lots of workers report to multiple masters. According to a Gallup survey in 2019, 72% of American employees occasionally or consistently work in different teams. This approach can have benefits, but clarity is not one of them. The Gallup poll showed that those who work in a matrix are less likely to know what is expected of them, and more likely to spend their day festering in endless internal meetings. Managers in matrix structures should at least try to make their underlings feel like they have one boss, even when they do not.

Three: In a paper published in 2013 two academics tested whether there was an optimal number of claims that marketers should make for their products and services in promotional messages. They found that making three claims was best: any fewer and consumers felt they lacked enough information to make their minds up about a product; any more and they became sceptical that the claims were authentic. The “rule of three” is useful in many other settings, too, from points in presentations to pricing options for customers. One place it does not apply is in a column about magic numbers, so:

Ten: The number of people who should be in a meeting depends not just on what is being discussed, but also on where it is taking place. According to a survey of British workers conducted in 2021 by Nicholas Bloom of Stanford University and Paul Mizen and Shivani Taneja of the University of Nottingham, the efficiency of online meetings declined steadily as the number of participants grew. Zoom calls work best with between two and four participants, when there is less need for people to keep muting and unmuting, more chance to see people’s facial expressions and less chat-room blather. Efficiency declines until ten people or more are involved, at which point it is better to hold meetings in person.

150: Dunbar’s number postulates that the number of stable social connections a human can have is roughly 150. First proposed by Robin Dunbar, an anthropologist at Oxford University, the figure has its critics. Some researchers reckon it is too low; introverts think it is ludicrously high. But this group size recurs in many settings, from the congregations of single-leader churches to networks of Christmas-card recipients. Companies have also found that it has significance; passing the 150-person threshold requires a change in management practices, from informal and undocumented to structured and codified.

There is a pattern to these numbers. In one way or another, they illustrate the risks of addition. Expand a company beyond a certain size and social bonds will weaken. Invite more people to the meeting and you will wait longer at the start as everyone dials in. Add extra reporting lines and the burden of collaboration will spiral.

The idea that less is more is not new, of course. Max Ringelmann was a 19th-century French engineer who found that adding more and more people to a rope-pulling team had an adverse effect on individual productivity. The more people there were to tug on the rope, the less sense of responsibility each person felt for the outcome and the less hard they pulled. Ringelmann’s insight is still valid. Subtraction has its attractions. ■

(to) spot: (to) identify

apocryphal (adj): spurious, false

higher-up: (it.) ‘pezzo grosso’

Gallup poll (n): survey, (it.) ‘indagine Gallup, a campione’

(to) fester: (it., fig.) ‘marcire’

underlings (n): subordinates

whether: if

blather (n): (it.) ciance, chiacchiere, discorsi a vanvera

(to) reckon: (to) think, believe

ludicrously (adv): ridiculously, absurdly
(to) dial in: (to) connect, join, log on
(to) spiral (up): (to) increase, grow
(to) tug: (to) pull

Listen to this story

<https://www.economist.com/media-assets/audio/068%20Business%20-%20Bartleby-de47a057df8ae4bb7e5b86efd5cc9782.mp3>

3. The importance of handwriting is becoming better understood

Johnson, *The Economist*, 14th September 2023

Research on pens and paper highlights their benefits.

Two and a half millennia ago, Socrates complained that writing would harm students. With a way to store ideas permanently and externally, they would no longer need to memorise. It is tempting to dismiss him as an old man complaining about change. Socrates did not have a stack of peer-reviewed science to make his case about the usefulness of learning concepts by heart.

Today a different debate is raging about the dangers of another technology—computers—and the typing people do on them. As primary-school pupils and PhD hopefuls return for a new school year in the northern hemisphere, many will do so with a greater-than-ever reliance on computers to take notes and write papers. Some parents of younger students are dismayed that their children are not just encouraged but required to tote laptops to class. University professors complain of rampant distraction in classrooms, with students reading and messaging instead of listening to lectures.

A line of research shows the benefits of an “innovation” that predates computers: handwriting. Studies have found that writing on paper can improve everything from recalling a random series of words to imparting a better conceptual grasp of complicated ideas.

For learning material by rote, from the shapes of letters to the quirks of English spelling, the benefits of using a pen or pencil lie in how the motor and sensory memory of putting words on paper reinforces that material. The arrangement of squiggles on a page feeds into visual memory: people might remember a word they wrote down in French class as being at the bottom-left on a page, *par exemple*.

One of the best-demonstrated advantages of writing by hand seems to be in superior note-taking. In a study from 2014 by Pam Mueller and Danny Oppenheimer, students typing wrote down almost twice as many words and more passages verbatim from lectures, suggesting they were not understanding so much as rapidly copying the material.

Handwriting—which takes longer for nearly all university-level students—forces note-takers to synthesise ideas into their own words. This aids conceptual understanding

at the moment of writing. But those taking notes by hand also perform better on tests when students are later able to study from their notes. The effect even persisted when the students who typed were explicitly instructed to rephrase the material in their own words. The instruction was “completely ineffective” at reducing verbatim note-taking, the researchers note: they did not understand the material so much as parrot it.

Many studies have confirmed handwriting’s benefits, and policymakers have taken note. Though America’s “Common Core” curriculum from 2010 does not require handwriting instruction past first grade (roughly age six), about half the states since then have mandated more teaching of it, thanks to campaigning by researchers and handwriting supporters. In Sweden there is a push for more handwriting and printed books and fewer devices. England’s national curriculum already prescribes teaching the rudiments of cursive by age seven.

However, several school systems in America have gone so far as to ban most laptops. This is too extreme. Some students have disabilities that make handwriting especially hard. Nearly all will eventually need typing skills. And typing can improve the quality of writing: being able to get ideas down quickly, before they are forgotten, can obviously be beneficial. So can slowing down the speed of typing, says Dr Oppenheimer.

Virginia Berninger, emeritus professor of psychology at the University of Washington, is a longtime advocate of handwriting. But she is not a purist; she says there are research-tested benefits for “manuscript” print-style writing, for cursive (which allows greater speed) but also for typing (which is good practice for composing passages). Since students spend more time on devices as they age, she argues for occasional “tuning up” of handwriting in later school years.

And perhaps even into adulthood. Johnson had not handwritten anything longer than a letter in decades before putting actual pen to paper to write this column’s first draft. Whether it made any difference to the outcome is a question that readers must decide.

Socrates may or may not have had a point about the downsides of writing. But no one would remember, much less care, if his student Plato had not noted it down for the benefit of posterity.

Listen to the podcast on Moodle

stack (n): pile (n)

is raging: it. si sta diffondendo

hopefuls (n): candidates, wannabes (it. aspiranti)

dismayed (adj): perturbed, upset (it. sgomenti)

(to) tote: (to) carry (informal)

rampant (adj): uncontrolled (it. dilagante)

random (adj): arbitrary (it. casuale)

grasp (n): understanding

by rote: by heart

quirks: unique characteristics (it. peculiarità)

squiggles: scribbled marks (it. scarabocchi)
(to) feed into: it. alimentare, tenere viva
verbatim: in the same words (it. alla lettera)
(to) parrot: (to) mimic words (it. ripetere a pappagallo)
(to) mandate: (to) require, order
advocate (n.): supporter, defender
(to) tune up: re-introduce

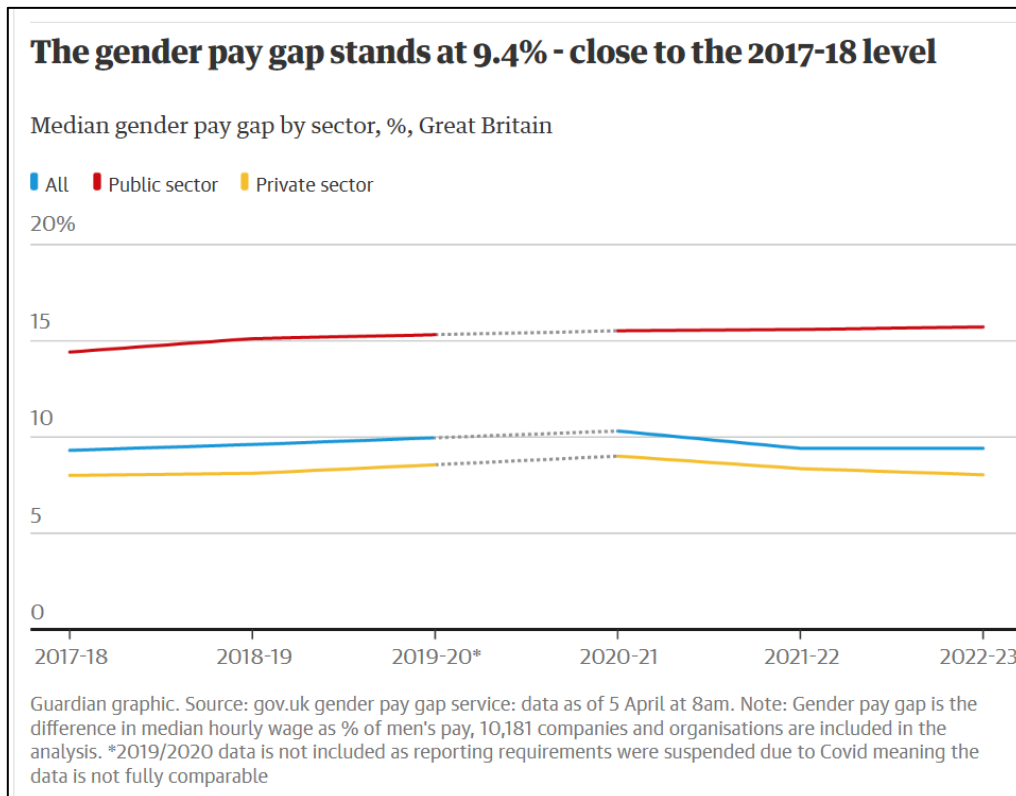
4. Women still paid less than men at four out of five employers in Great Britain

Pamela Duncan, Carmen Aguilar García and Jasper Jolly, *The Guardian*, 5th April 2023

Guardian analysis shows median gender pay gap is stubbornly wide at 9.4%, the same level as five years ago

Four out of five companies and organisations in Great Britain still pay their male employees more than female ones, according to Guardian analysis of the government's gender pay gap reporting.

The median pay gap remains stubbornly wide at 9.4% – the same level as in 2017-18, when employers were first required to publish the information. About 10,000 companies and public bodies filed their gender pay gaps to the government's reporting mechanism before this week's deadline.

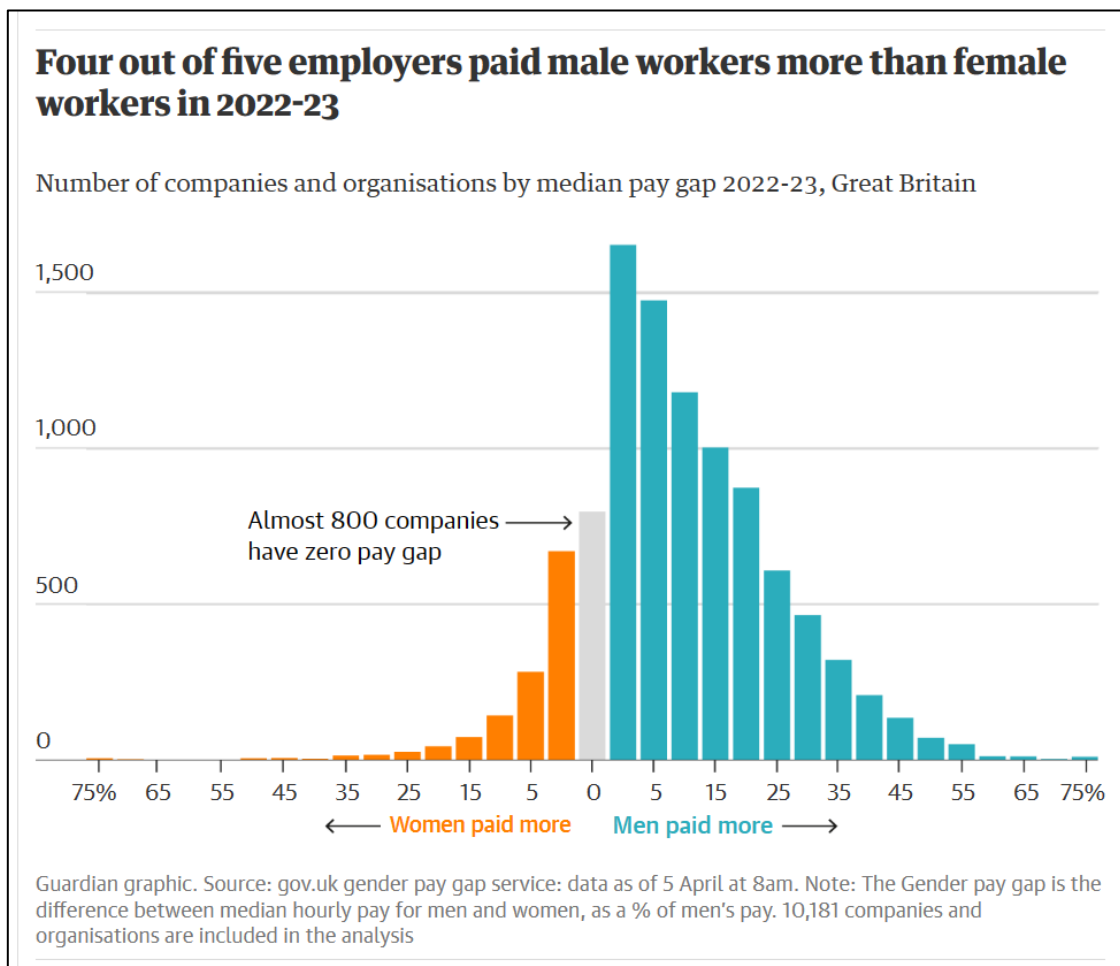


The gap remains larger in the public sector at 15.1%. This compares with 8% in the private sector, and both are broadly similar to last year's figures.

In almost half of companies and public bodies male employees are paid at least 10% more than their female counterparts. This compares with only 3% where women are paid 10% more than men.

Only one in 10 pay female and male employees equivalent wages (where the difference is zero or less than 0.5% in either direction).

Campaigners have expressed frustration and disappointment at the lack of movement in the pay gap despite the reporting process, which was meant to help close it by ensuring all employers with 250 or more employees put this information into the public domain.



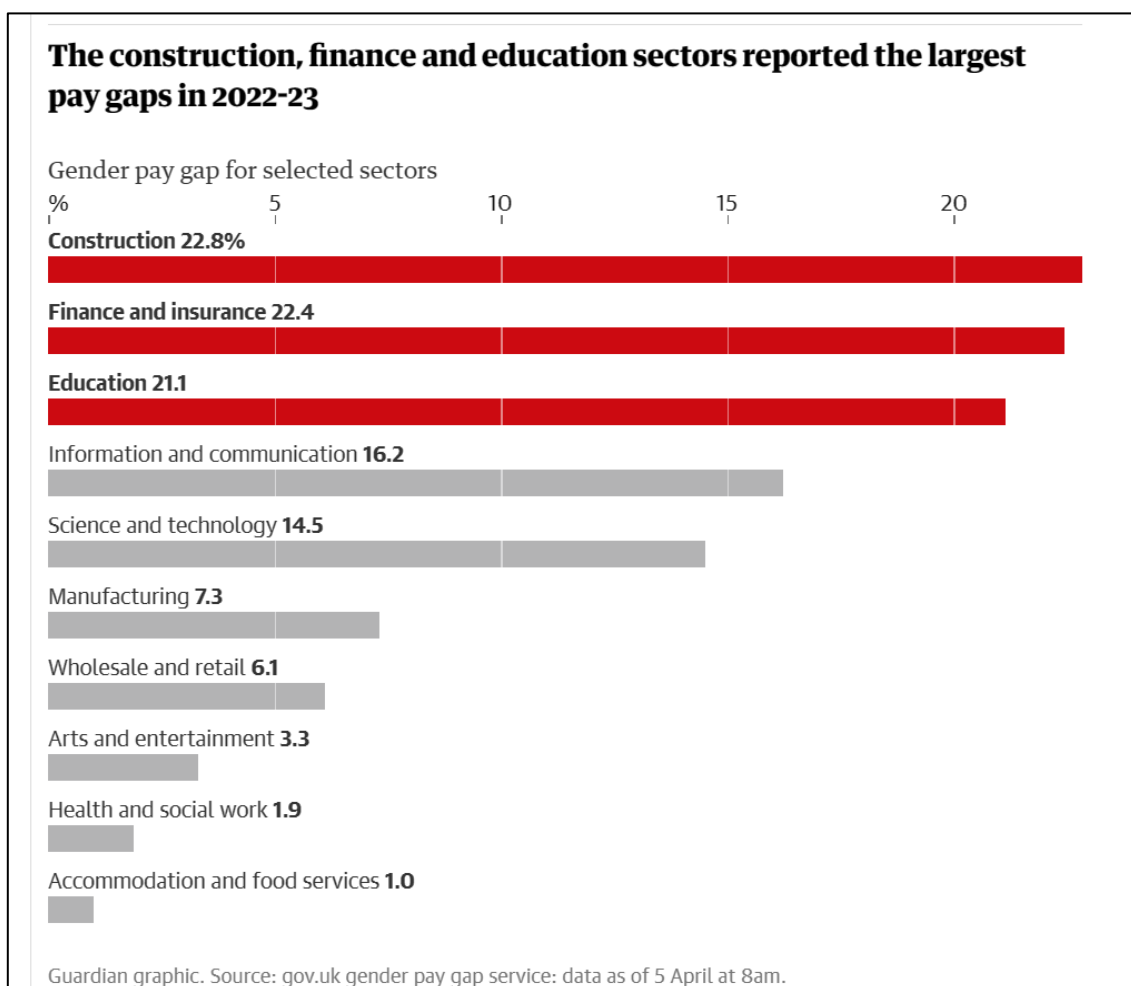
The Fawcett Society, which campaigns for gender equality, said it was disappointing that progress on closing the gap had all but stagnated. The UK is behind countries such as France, Belgium, and Sweden in making employers address gender pay gaps directly.

“If we are to see meaningful progress on closing the pervasive pay gap, employers must go further than data sharing,” it said. “We want this government to require every employer to create an action plan which sets out how they will improve gender equality in their workplace. Many do, but it is not yet widespread.”

The Trades Union Congress said it backed the introduction of mandatory action plans for larger employers, and for these to be extended to pay gaps related to ethnicity and disability.

“The gender pay gap is closing at a snail’s pace,” the TUC’s general secretary, Paul Nowak, said. “At current rates of progress, it will take more than 20 years to close it. That’s just not good enough. Ministers must step up, or we will consign yet another generation of women to lower pay.”

The construction, finance and insurance activities and education sectors reported the biggest median pay gap, with women earning between 21% and 23% less than their male colleagues, according to the analysis of more than 9,000 companies that provided information about their industrial sectors.



On the other side of the table, the health and social work sectors and accommodation and businesses registered the lowest pay gaps, with the median gender gap at 2% across those industries.

A government spokesperson said: “The government has taken significant action to support women at work. The Chancellor recently announced a childcare revolution with 30 hours free childcare for children over the age of nine months. In December we announced that millions of employees will be able to request flexible working from day one, and earlier this month we launched recruitment for our programme to get Stem returners back into the workplace.

“We strongly urge organisations to take steps to ensure female employees reach their full potential.”

stubbornly: in a resistant way

(to) campaign for: promote

(to) stagnate: be inactive

(to) set out: define/establish

(to) back: (to) support

(to) step up: (to) present yourself, volunteer (it. farsi avanti)

Chancellor: British Treasury Minister (Ministro delle Finanze)

Stem: Science, technology, engineering, maths

5. Four-day week made permanent for most UK firms in world’s biggest trial

Rachel Hall, *The Guardian*, 21st February 2024

Research shows 51% that took part permanently adopted the change, while 89% still operating policy one year on



Most of the UK companies that took part in the world's biggest ever four-day working week trial have made the policy permanent, research shows.

Of the 61 organisations that took part in a six-month UK pilot in 2022, 54 (89%) are still operating the policy a year later, and 31 (51%) have made the change permanent.

More than half (55%) of project managers and CEOs said a four-day week – in which staff worked 100% of their output in 80% of their time – had a positive impact on their organisation, the report found.

For 82% this included positive effects on staff wellbeing, 50% found it reduced staff turnover, while 32% said it improved job recruitment. Nearly half (46%) said working and productivity improved.

The report's author, Juliet Schor, professor of sociology at Boston College, said the results showed "real and long lasting" effects. "Physical and mental health, and work-life balance are significantly better than at six months".

But Matthew Percival, a director at the Confederation of British Industry, said the four-day week was not a "one size fits all answer" and would be "unlikely to pay for itself in many industries".

He said: "If businesses have the budget to add to their offer to employees, then they will be considering the relative merits of reducing working hours compared to increasing pay, pensions or paid parental leave, as well as better supporting health and wellbeing."

The four-day working week report, by the thinktank Autonomy and researchers from the University of Cambridge, the University of Salford and Boston College in the US, found that "many of the significant benefits found during the initial trial have persisted 12 months on", although they noted that it was a small sample size.

Almost all (96%) of staff said their personal life had benefited, and 86% felt they performed better at work, while 38% felt their organisation had become more efficient, and 24% said it had helped with caring responsibilities.

Organisations reduced working hours by an average of 6.6 hours to reach a 31.6-hour week. Most gave their staff one full day off a week, either universal or staggered. The report found that protected days off were more effective than those on which staff were "on call" or sometimes expected to work.

The most successful companies made their four-day week "clear, confident and well-communicated", and co-designed their policies between staff and management, thinking carefully about how to adapt work processes, the authors wrote.

Challenges encountered by some companies included working with clients and stakeholders where four-day weeks were not the norm, or where the policy was implemented unevenly, leading to resentment among some staff.

This month, the Scottish government launched a four-day working week trial for some public services. Autonomy is calling for the Westminster government to introduce policies that would enable its wider take-up, including giving workers the right to request a four-day week with no loss of pay, a public sector trial, and funding to support the shift in the private sector.

Paul Oliver, chief operating officer at Citizens Advice Gateshead, said that a four-day week helped his employees cope with a “demanding role”, and improved retention as the charity was unable to pay high salaries. “We wanted to see a way to improve staff conditions so they would be better rested and could give more to work,” he added.

The greater efficiency introduced by the pilot meant it exceeded its targets, including improving the quality of advice and the number of clients spoken to, expanding to a seven-day service thanks to greater flexibility, increasing profitability and reducing levels of staff sickness. “We’re breaking out of the nine to five model, which doesn’t work for our society or our clients,” Oliver said.

Mark Downs, chief executive of the Royal Society of Biology, said his organisation was keeping the policy – in which staff divvied up Mondays and Fridays off between them – because it had been positively received by staff and external partners.

One unexpected benefit he encountered was that days when he was working and most other staff were off were much more productive. He also felt it made RSB a more attractive employer, with applicants citing the four-day week as a draw.

Anthony Painter, director of policy at the Chartered Management Institute, said he was “following the four-day week trials with interest” since CMI research had shown that employees valued flexible working above all else, including pay rises.

He added that managers would need to be better trained to implement the changes. “They will need the very best managers in place to ensure that flexibility and productivity can be two sides of the same coin – better ways of working,” Painter said.

A government spokesperson said: “We have no plans to introduce a four-day working week. Ultimately it is for employers and employees to agree what working arrangements work best for them, and we will be making changes to our flexible working legislation in April, including the right to request flexible working from day 1 of a new job.”

output (n): tasks, work, production

(to) pay for itself: (to) be advantageous, beneficial

thinktank: group of experts

staggered (adj): evenly spaced (it. scaglionato)

protected (adj): guaranteed

take-up (n): it. adesione

retention: keeping employees

profitability (n): it. redditività

(to) break out of: it. liberarsi del

(to) divvy up (informal): (to) divide, share out (it. spartirsi)
draw (n): attraction

6. Two experts predict AI will transform companies' understanding of themselves

Don and Charlie Sull, *The Economist*, 12th February 2024

Two experts predict AI will transform companies' understanding of themselves.

In a recent survey of North American chief executives and chief financial officers, nearly 80% listed corporate culture as one of the five most important factors driving their company's financial performance. A growing body of empirical evidence supports their belief that culture matters—and can boost profitability.

Yet, in the same survey, an even higher number of respondents—84%—said their company's culture is not where it needs to be. Again the data supports their intuition. The average culture rating of large employers in America on Glassdoor, a website that lets workers rate their employers, is 3.6 out of 5. Few people would be excited to eat in a restaurant or ride with an Uber driver with that kind of rating. Similarly, few employees are likely to relish spending 40 hours each week in an average culture.

Building and maintaining a healthy corporate culture can be even more challenging in organisations where employees work remotely. In an ongoing study, we find that the companies where employees are most effusive about remote work score lower than their peer groups on corporate culture, especially on learning and development opportunities and honest communication.

Leaders cannot improve what they cannot measure. Unfortunately, the most common tool for gauging corporate culture—the engagement survey—suffers from serious limitations. Faced with a long list of questions, employees switch to auto-pilot and assign identical or similar scores to every question. Employers that ask dozens of multiple-choice questions, as many do, might get only a couple of reliable insights, and little guidance on how to improve things. And what if the topic the employee really wanted to weigh in on wasn't included?

Recent advances in AI—most notably Large Language Models (LLMs)—allow leaders, for the first time, to get nuanced insights into their corporate culture from how employees talk about their company in their own words. Rather than answering reams of questions on a five-point scale, workers can now simply explain what is and isn't working in their organisation and offer suggestions for how it can improve. The AI can do the heavy lifting, providing much more granular classification of comments and assessment of sentiment.

Freed from the shackles of traditional surveys, organisations can use AI to gather and process employee feedback from many sources. The volume of available feedback is staggering. Combining free text from internal surveys, performance feedback provided to managers, online employer reviews and other sources equates to tens of thousands of pages of data each year for a large company. Until recently,

organisations had to rely on crude tools such as word clouds or search keywords to gain insights from this trove of information.

Armed with the more numerous and granular measurements that AI brings, executives can more quickly and easily assess whether their company is living up to the values it considers “core”, identify the most important cultural elements, diagnose toxic subcultures within the organisation, and plot progress over time.

Take Amazon, which aspires to be the best employer in the world. We used our AI platform to analyse tens of thousands of employee reviews of the e-commerce giant. This showed that Amazon does well on many of its leadership principles, such as “customer obsession” and “invent and simplify”. But the firm’s culture also contributes to employee burnout, especially among software engineers, who are twice as likely to complain about burnout than warehouse workers or drivers. Raw employee feedback points to ways Amazon could reduce stress for engineers, like fixing a performance-review process widely viewed as brutal or minimising late-night disruptions when technical employees are on call.

Even the largest companies will take their time adopting AI. But cultural analysis is one of the few areas where it can be embraced right now, because it plays to one of AI’s biggest current strengths: understanding natural language at scale.

This does not mean that leaders should blindly trust the output of LLMs. Models should measure the elements of culture based on solid evidence, rather than the latest management fad. Leaders need to take a broad view of culture, measuring not only the factors that influence employee satisfaction but also topics that shape a company’s ability to adapt to market shifts and to avoid unethical or illegal behaviour.

Leaders who do adopt AI for cultural insights can use these to make their employees happier, lower the odds of reputational disasters and, ultimately, boost their profits. Culture has always been an enigma at the heart of organisational performance: undoubtedly important, but inscrutable. With AI, meaningful progress can be made in deciphering it. ■

Don Sull is a professor at the MIT Sloan School of Management and a co-founder of CultureX, a research and AI firm. Charlie Sull is a co-founder of CultureX.

Chief Financial Officers (CFO): direttore finanziario (DF)

(to) relish: (to) enjoy greatly, love

effusive (adj): enthusiastic

(to) gauge: (to) measure

(to) weigh in: (to) offer opinion

reams of: large amount of

heavy lifting: (*id.*) the most difficult part

staggering (adj): astounding (it. sbalorditivo)

crude: unrefined (it. grossolani)

trove (n): collection

(to) live up to: (informal) be as good as (it. essere all'altezza di)

fad (n): short trend (it. moda passeggera)

the odds: the probability