

COMPRESSED WORK WEEKS

Description

Compressed work week programs follow similar methods as flextime but differ in that an entire day is eliminated from an employee's schedule. An employee might work 40 hours in four days or 80 hours over two weeks in nine days. Employees generally arrive earlier and stay later than on a typical eight hour day. A 4/40 or 9/80 work plan shifts the worker away from the typical rush hour commute times.

There are benefits for employees and employers: workers get a longer weekend and the organization can reduce operating costs by closing (or only operating with minimum staff on the off day). These benefits have proven to be especially valuable to government agencies seeking cost savings without laying off employees.

The compressed work week program can be for individual workers or can be an organization-wide policy. The use and administration of a compressed work week program depends on the business management and individual workers.

Target Market

Local, State, and Federal Government Agencies
Government agencies employ a large number of people that typically work a shift and are often in heavily urbanized areas. Workers can commute earlier and close later to reduce their contribution to congestion. As an added benefit the office has the possibility of only operating four days a week, or at least operating with minimum staff and saving money on operating costs one day per week.

Business in All Sectors and Industries, Particularly in Office Positions

Office workers generally have more flexibility in their work starting and ending times. Businesses such as processing centers or those without a direct customer support function may benefit from the office being closed, or running



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Cost:	●○○○○
Time:	Short
Impact:	Region
Who:	City/Private
Hurdles:	None

at minimal operation, if their workers have a compressed work schedule.

Manufacturing and industrial-oriented businesses that rely heavily on employee shift work may accommodate compressed work weeks more easily than other commute options such as telecommuting.

How Will This Help?

- Compressed work weeks reduce traffic volume and congestion during peak times by shifting commuters to less congested times and eliminating a full day of commuting each week. Fewer drivers on the road during peak hours reduce roadway congestion.
- The compressed work week technique increases productivity and reduces operating costs and allows an extended weekend. An extra day-off reduces business costs as less electricity and other overhead items are used with the

inclusion of a three-day weekend. Businesses can close or operate at minimum capacity on the fifth workday.

Implementation Examples

Arizona: In June 2008, the City of Avondale launched their Green Friday pilot program. The program's concept began in response to rising gas prices, employee benefits, a down economy, and positive environmental impacts. The City operates Monday through Thursday from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and feels the extended hours enhance their customer service. The program provided an approximate cost savings of \$65,000 in energy and janitorial savings; a removal of 200 peak period vehicles from the roadways each Friday; and an annual VMT reduction of 144,700. A survey of Avondale residents revealed an 82 percent satisfaction rate with the four-day schedule.

Washington: Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) began offering compressed work weeks to its employees in 1980. WSDOT discovered compressed work weeks, along with other travel options, fits with their goal of getting work done more efficiently, while retaining and recruiting top-performing employees. WSDOT observed the benefits of compressed work weeks in helping to attain the state's commute trip reduction law requirements, saving tax payer money by cutting costs, and increasing office capacity. Today, 63 percent of WSDOT employees follow a compressed work week schedule. A majority of the employees are construction positions.

Utah: In 2008, the state of Utah instituted a four day work week for all 17,000 state employees. The policy was intended to save the state money in utility, janitorial, and other operating costs while providing significant benefits to the environment and state employees. The test, which lasted two years longer than originally intended, was viewed with mixed results. State employees favored the program by an overwhelming 82 percent, viewing the program

as a consolation prize after years without any significant raises. Employees reported being more productive at work, while the state found the program to be a good recruiting and retention tool. According to the governor's office, changes in commuting patterns by employees reduced annual gasoline consumption by 774,000 gallons. Energy savings from state office buildings reduced carbon emissions by 4,546 metric tons annually and over \$500,000 in utility costs. The program ended after miscommunication from opinion polls and the governor's office pressured state legislators return the state to a five day week.

Application Techniques and Principles

Work schedules for some businesses are easily managed and changed to fulfill the needs of the compressed work week technique. Adequate planning, enforcement, and coordination are required to make the technique successful at mitigating congestion. An important item to include in the plan is a voluntary adoption clause that also values employee input. The compressed work weeks should take into account the distances workers must travel and the external factors (i.e., family and other situations) that will affect the hours they can work, as starting early and ending later may cause hardships if the employee is traveling a long distance. It is further recommended to incorporate a three to six month pilot program to fully analyze the benefits of compressed work weeks before committing to the technique.

Issues

These programs are easily created but may be less appropriate for some employers. Organizations must evaluate whether they can manage having a four day work week or having a significant portion of their staff absent. Some government agencies can realize the greatest cost benefit by reducing to a four day week. Strong marketing should educate and encourage the right type of organizations to take advantage of this method.

Who Is Responsible?

Business management and individual workers should work together to create a manageable compressed work week schedule. Management should consider what schedules will benefit and affect the workers, while workers should ensure that new schedules accomplish personal or family, customer service, and organizational goals. City and state officials should highlight the benefits of compressed work weeks to business management and workers to convince everyone that it is worth the effort to reschedule the work hours and close for an extra day.

Project Timeframe

The timeframe for implementing compressed work weeks is relatively short compared to more complex alterations. The technique depends on the amount of time it takes businesses to reschedule workers and implement the plan. The principle factors affecting implementation are the time it takes to adequately plan the program and gain employee acceptance, which typically takes between three and six months.

Cost

The cost of compressed work weeks is minimal. A majority of the cost is the work required to implement the plan and reschedule the workers. Any additional costs are primarily due to operational changes in the business. Compressed work week plans typically cost between \$50,000 and \$75,000, but they also have a tendency to save money on the operations side of business.

Data Needs

The data needed to evaluate the compressed work weeks include the number of workers willing to participate. If only a small percentage of people are willing to shift their schedules, the plan management should evaluate the need for the program and the effects of only certain workers being involved. The average commuter distance and number of weekdays utilized under the plan are also needed to evaluate the benefits and cost of the plan.

Compressed Work Weeks Best Practices

- Type of Location: Businesses wanting to provide extended client hours.
- Agency Practices: Strong program support from administrators and policy makers.
- Frequency of Reanalysis: Annually.
- Supporting Policies or Actions Needed: Policy allowing employees to work longer than eight hours per day.
- Complementary Strategies: Flextime, Telecommuting.

For More Information

Crawford, J.A., T.B. Carlson, W.L. Eisele, B.T. Kuhn. *A Michigan Toolbox for Mitigating Traffic Congestion*, Texas Transportation Institute, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, September 2011.

Mobility Improvement Checklist: Managing Demand: Vol. 1. Texas Transportation Institute, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, September 2004.