

POWERful Women: How ElectraLink's four-day working week has supported gender equality in the workplace

ElectraLink has been working a four-day week model since June 2023 following a suggestion from its employee forum, with no compressed hours from Monday to Thursday and no reduction of pay or benefits. As well as increased wellbeing and satisfaction across all employees with no visible drop in productivity, the four-day week model can support gender equality in the workplace and create a more inclusive working environment for all.

Why the four-day week can support gender equality

ElectraLink believes that the four-day working week can be a powerful tool in reducing “the motherhood penalty” - the negative impact on a woman's career often experienced after starting a family.

With only 29% of first-time mothers returning to a full-time career after maternity leave¹, research has consistently shown the long-term impact on career progression, development and earning potential that men don't experience on the same scale when starting families². By introducing the four-day week, ElectraLink has seen a decrease in part-time employees to just three across the whole business, despite this still being a supported option. Normalising a four-day working week allows for an improved work-life balance and empowers employees to balance personal responsibilities with their careers, without the ‘othering’ effect that can be associated with going part-time. It also supports other forms of caring responsibilities, and with women seven times more likely than men to be out of work due to caring commitments³, this can further help to alleviate this gender gap.

However, the four-day working week's positive impacts on inclusion only increase when part of a broader culture change. Other initiatives ElectraLink has introduced include gender-neutral enhanced parental leave, a dedicated menopause and menstruation policy, and encouraging senior management to speak openly about their caring responsibilities, regardless of gender, which has resulted in a 100% return rate to full-time

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employment-pathways-and-occupational-change-after-childbirth/main-report>

² <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14040275>

³ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/women-7-times-more-likely-men-be-out-work-due-caring-commitments>

work for employees of all genders who have taken parental leave since 2024. This, combined with a long-established hybrid working approach with no compulsory office days, encourages a healthier work-life balance and gender-neutral approach to balancing caring responsibilities, all of which support a more inclusive culture.

In terms of employee wellbeing, ElectraLink's stats continue to be on the rise. In its employee engagement survey independently managed by Best Companies, the ElectraLink has scored 7% higher in its wellbeing measures than those of world-class rated companies, and qualitative feedback demonstrates that these scores have been strongly associated with the four-day working week. This is particularly relevant to women, who are more likely to experience consistent workplace stress and burnout⁴ but with 79% of all UK employees having experienced burnout due to work, it is an important measure to keep track of across all genders.

Top tips for implementing a four-day week

1. Start with small steps

It's important to implement this change gradually to assess impact, both on your employees and on your business performance. In summer 2022, ElectraLink ran an internal six-week trial to see how people felt across a period of time where demands from external stakeholders and customers decrease slightly due to holidays. The HR team ran weekly mandatory pulse surveys as a condition of the trial in order to monitor stress levels and employees' feelings on how the trial was going. After this proved to be a success, the team returned to a five-day week for a short period before running a longer trial across winter 2022 to see if the same results emerged in a busier period. When this proved to still be a success, the model was implemented on a full-time basis.

2. Feedback is key

Staying in touch with employees beyond implementation is important to ensuring the model continues to work, so ElectraLink measures wellbeing through its engagement surveys and runs an annual full-company in-person meeting as part of the four-day work week agreement. This session is led by senior management and all employees break out into cross-team groups to discuss how the four-day week is working for them and share productivity methods from their own teams to help each other work more effectively.

On an annual basis, everyone must opt-in to the four-day week to make sure people have the choice to work in the way that works best for them. Over three years on from permanent implementation, employees maintain an 100% opt-in rate, but to provide authentic flexibility it's important to maintain the option to return to five days for anyone who wants it. This also allows the business to consider whether workloads have become

⁴ <https://employmenthero.com/uk/resources/the-state-of-wellbeing-at-work/>

unsustainable or assess the model's overall impact. To date, ElectraLink has experienced a positive impact on both wellbeing and business performance.

3. One size does not fit all

Different teams within the organisation will have different requirements to make a four-day week work. For example, ElectraLink has customer-facing operations teams who need to provide five-day cover, so some teams work on a rota system to ensure they can provide a seamless service. Consider how your teams work and keep in touch with how the model is working for them to find the best balance for everyone.

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ElectraLink is the first organisation in the energy industry to implement a full-time four-day week, but with an increasing number of businesses making the change to a four-day week across all sectors, there are many resources available to support others in starting this process. ElectraLink partnered with the Four Day Week Campaign during its first trials in 2022, which facilitated discussions with other companies to share best practice and resulted in 92% of participant companies planning on continuing the model⁵.

If your company is considering a four-day week, reach out to the team at ElectraLink – they are happy to share further details around their experience to support others in the industry to take on this change.

⁵ <https://www.4dayweek.com/uk-pilot-results>

Sources

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