

Extended workdays: Effects on performance and ratings of fatigue and alertness

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The present investigation provided a laboratory test of long workdays and served as an initial step in developing a field-test battery that is sensitive to fatigue. Six subjects worked both a 12-h/4-day workweek and an 8-h/6-day week at a data-entry job simulation. Before and after the first and last days of each week, they completed a battery of brief tests measuring cognitive, perceptual-motor, task-sharing, motor, and sensory capacities, as well as subjective feelings. Results suggest that the 12-h/4-day week was more fatiguing than the 8-h/6-day week. In the data-entry job, it was easier to improve performance across the 8-h/6-day week. This result suggested that the fatigue of the 12-h days slowed the rate of improvement across the week. With respect to the test battery, two cognitive tasks (grammatical reasoning and digit addition) and several self-report scales also reflected greater fatigue in the 12-h/4-day week. Performance efficiency decreased and reports of drowsiness and lack of concentration increased from the beginning to the end of the final 12-h workday. On the basis of these results, it was concluded that the test battery has utility for the assessment of the potential fatigue effects of long workdays in actual work settings.

Employee demands for increased "usable" leisure time and evolving industrial needs for longer work shifts have stimulated interest in alternatives to the common 8-h/5-day workweek (e.g., Hedges, 1971). Alternative schedules often include work shifts longer than 8 h because the 5-day week is "compressed" into 4 days or fewer or because overtime is required. The increased use of longer workdays under such schedules has led to concerns about reduced job efficiency and related problems involving safety and health hazards attributable to cumulative fatigue. The literature on work scheduling (see Alluisi & Morgan, 1982, for a review) provides only a few clues about the effects of long workdays on performance efficiency or individual well-being.

Studies examining the effects of the compressed workweek have reported inconsistent changes (i.e., increases in some cases and decreases in others) in absenteeism (e.g., Campbell, 1980), worker satisfaction (e.g., Nord

& Costigan, 1973), and productivity (Ivancevich, 1974; Ivancevich & Lyon, 1977). Furthermore, it has been suggested that, in situations in which production levels have been maintained following conversion to a compressed schedule, this may have been at the expense of increased fatigue as reported by workers (Hodge & Tellier, 1975). In addition, there are few data on how the workers' subjective reports related to actual behavioral measures of work efficiency or safety. There are some reports (e.g., Ellingstad & Heimstra, 1970; Grandjean, Wozka, Schaad, & Gilgen, 1971) of demonstrated declines in performance across a work shift of 8 or more hours, but these studies have not systematically compared different work schedules in terms of days worked or hours worked per day. Other researchers (see Alluisi & Morgan, 1982, for a review) have compared performance during various work schedules requiring 12 or 16 h of work per day. However, these studies usually have involved atypical work-rest cycles, such as 4 h on duty/4 h off duty, 4 h on/2 h off, or 6 h on/2 h off, which were designed to simulate military operations. The alteration of the normal sleep routine during such short work-rest schedules makes it difficult to apply the results of these studies to the long work-rest cycles, such as 10 h on/14 h off, common in some civilian occupations.

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Effects Of Extended Workdays

Jiyuan Zhang



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Table of Contents Effects Of Extended Workdays

1. Understanding the eBook Effects Of Extended Workdays
 - The Rise of Digital Reading Effects Of Extended Workdays
 - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Effects Of Extended Workdays
 - Exploring Different Genres
 - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
 - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
 - Popular eBook Platforms
 - Features to Look for in an Effects Of Extended Workdays
 - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Effects Of Extended Workdays
 - Personalized Recommendations
 - Effects Of Extended Workdays User Reviews and Ratings
 - Effects Of Extended Workdays and Bestseller Lists
5. Accessing Effects Of Extended Workdays Free and Paid eBooks
 - Effects Of Extended Workdays Public Domain eBooks
 - Effects Of Extended Workdays eBook Subscription Services
 - Effects Of Extended Workdays Budget-Friendly Options
6. Navigating Effects Of Extended Workdays eBook Formats

- ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
 - Effects Of Extended Workdays Compatibility with Devices
 - Effects Of Extended Workdays Enhanced eBook Features
7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
 - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Effects Of Extended Workdays
 - Highlighting and Note-Taking Effects Of Extended Workdays
 - Interactive Elements Effects Of Extended Workdays
 8. Staying Engaged with Effects Of Extended Workdays
 - Joining Online Reading Communities
 - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
 - Following Authors and Publishers Effects Of Extended Workdays
 9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Effects Of Extended Workdays
 - Benefits of a Digital Library
 - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Effects Of Extended Workdays
 10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
 - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
 - Minimizing Distractions
 - Managing Screen Time
 11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Effects Of Extended Workdays
 - Setting Reading Goals Effects Of Extended Workdays
 - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
 12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Effects Of Extended Workdays
 - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Effects Of Extended Workdays
 - Distinguishing Credible Sources
 13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
 - Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
 - Exploring Educational eBooks
 14. Embracing eBook Trends
 - Integration of Multimedia Elements
 - Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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