

The Work-Leisure Balance

Work patterns, and their claim on our time, have historically moderated our ability to engage with regular, ongoing active recreation. However, the past couple of years have accelerated trends toward insecure employment and remote working signal the demise of traditional time patterns. The outcome is uncertain but could lead to more engagement in the recreation sector (for the time-wealthy) and/or a reduction in participation for those juggling multiple low-paid contingent roles.

What we're seeing

The Accidental Revolution: Remote Working

The pandemic disrupted a living pattern that has been stable for decades. With the commercial areas of cities remaining quiet, will the normal pattern return, or are new forms of working here to stay?¹ An Australian study estimated that 39% of all jobs could be done from home.² It's highly plausible then that new norms may be established that redefine work life and personal life boundaries.³

The Hybrid Disruption

Microsoft believes hybrid work is the next disruption as significant as that wrought by the pandemic.⁴ A recent AUT study tends to bear this out and suggests hybrid workers are the happiest and the most innovative.⁵ The shift has been made practical by technology that enables more flexible, communal and collaborative forms of working.⁶

Reducing the Working Week

Another emergent trend that the pandemic seems to have encouraged is reducing the working week to assist both businesses and workers. Research indicates that with effective planning, companies can prosper if staff work fewer hours for the same pay.⁷ Successful trials (e.g. Iceland⁸) could have lessons for NZ where working hours continue to exceed the OECD average.⁹

The Trend Away From Full-Time

A more negative trend is the shifting to more contingent workforces as employers respond to more uncertain conditions.¹⁰ Around 40% of NZ businesses employ from 11 to 50% of their staff on this basis. In the past five years, there's been a 20% increase in the number of people holding down two jobs.¹¹ Remote work has also seen the rise of those secretly juggling two full-time roles.¹²

Leaving Work Behind

Studies that point to a reduced working week may also align with previous research highlighting 'presenteeism'. These note that salaried employees only do around three hours of 'real' work each day.¹³ This suggests that we squander a considerable amount of potential leisure time. Could future wellbeing be considerably enhanced if we moved beyond the idea that employment is a fundamental necessity?¹⁴ Arguably, the pandemic-triggered 'great resignation' suggests this is now a serious question.¹⁵

Future Leisure Pursuit

The pandemic has also changed many people's preferences for how they spend their non-working, leisure hours. Studies suggest a continued decline in the appeal of static entertainment experiences that don't offer ever-changing and highly social and communal experiences.^{16, 17}

Potential implications

Create (e.g. technology & processes to produce goods & services)

- A rebalancing of the working day could unlock greater innovation and diverse services.

Relate (e.g. social structures & relationships)

- Altered working patterns have implications for family relations and social interaction.
- Alternatively, multiple, insecure jobs, add greater pressure on family activities.

Consume (e.g. how we acquire goods & services)

- Altered commute patterns would lessen transport pressure, both public & private.
- Additional time pressures (always on) would encourage online shopping.
- Greater remote working may encourage social leisure.

Degrade (e.g. waste, social disruption, challenge to norms)

- Mental health negatively affected by juggling work demands for those with insecure employment
- Fragmentation of society between the time-wealthy and time-poor.

Connect (e.g. practice of connecting people, places & things)

- A reduction in the need to remain work-place proximate could encourage greater movement, domestically and potentially internationally.

Define (e.g. changing ideas used to define ourselves & the World)

- International experience indicate moves beyond work as the defining component of individual identity.

More information (links)

¹ [Remote-first work is taking over the rich world](#)

² [The suburbs are the future of post-COVID retail](#)

³ [Ten emerging trends shaping our new future](#)

⁴ [The Next Great Disruption Is Hybrid Work—Are We Ready?](#)

⁵ [The Key To Happy Employees? Hybrid Working](#)

⁶ [Changing economic life and work](#)

⁷ [Four-day week would be affordable for most UK firms](#)

⁸ [Shorter working week trial in Iceland an 'overwhelming success'](#)

⁹ [Kiwis work more hours, produce less GDP](#)

¹⁰ [Post-Covid Work Trends and the Future of Work](#)

¹¹ [Bad Jobs](#)

¹² [How Remote Workers Are Secretly Juggling Two Full-Time Jobs](#)

¹³ [How Many Productive Hours in a Work Day? Just 2 Hours, 23 Minutes...](#)

¹⁴ [The Desire to Work as an Adaptive Preference](#)

¹⁵ [Resignations Have Increased Every Year Since 2010](#)

¹⁶ [The post-pandemic future of out-of-home entertainment](#)

¹⁷ [25 Leisure & entertainment trends post COVID-19](#)