

## *Perpetual Guardian*

### *Emerging Diversity and Inclusion*

A New Zealand company is testing the boundaries of the 40-hour work week, experimenting with a four-day week for its employees in an attempt to improve productivity and explore different paradigms for the traditional work timetable.

Perpetual Guardian employs around 245 people in offices all around the country, from Whangarei to Dunedin. The company helps its clients create wills and living trusts, and as such does a large amount of customer-facing work.



After the company's founder Andrew Barnes read research on workplace productivity that suggested that the number of productive hours in the average workplace can be as low as 90 minutes a day, he sought to find some solution to improve it within his own organisation.

In February 2018, Andrew announced a six-week trial that would allow employees to work 30 hours a week but be paid for 37.5. Teams were given a month to prepare for the trial.

A critical part of our trial was that the business needed to remain operational five days a week as per normal, and continue to provide the same service to clients.

Implementation was largely staff led, with teams collaborating to impose effective productivity measures and arrange appropriate rosters for days off. The trial sought to explore whether a normal week's worth of work could be done in 30 hours and is believed to be the first of its kind anywhere in the world.

Perpetual Guardian also engaged academics from Auckland Business School and AUT to undertake quantitative and qualitative analysis of the employees in terms of wellbeing and stress levels. Surveys were sent to all employees before and after the trial, and focus groups with employees and managers were also conducted.

The trial was supported at the highest level of the company, with Andrew acting as a spokesperson, and most members of the executive team taking part. This helped to dispel a common misconception that flexible work reflects a poor work ethic or lack of loyalty to the company. Employees could feel comfortable engaging with the trial without reservations, and many spoke with the media about their experience of the trial.

The trial has caused staff to reconsider how they work. A number of teams embarked on intensive cross-training in preparation for the trial, which helped improve the overall capabilities of the team. Employees say that the trial helped their awareness of work styles and has helped them to be more conscious and respectful of others working around them. This feedback has provided a mandate for Perpetual Guardian to put in place more permanent workplace flexibility arrangements going forward.

The trial has also shown some unforeseen benefits, with employees reporting more confidence in their work, and managers reporting that they are getting to know their team better and are able to better identify how individuals and teams can work better together based on their specific abilities.

While the full results of the academic trials are not yet finalised, early indications suggest that it was successful measured against Perpetual Guardian's objectives. Perpetual Guardian's Head of People & Capability Christine Brotherton says, "The trial has sparked conversation internally and outside the company about flexibility and productivity, and about whether the standard model of work is best for businesses and people. We are asking how we get the best out of people by empowering them to live their best lives."



Founder Andrew Barnes adds: "There must be a broader conversation about modern working hours and conditions. The four-day week challenges all sorts of issues, from gender equality in the workplace to work-life balance and productivity."

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