

Working like lions: How tech unicorn Bolt implemented a four-day workweek - and increased productivity.

When tech unicorn [Bolt](#) announced they were trialing a four-day workweek, everyone had questions. Being one of the first companies to do anything is an uphill struggle, but when it comes to fundamentally changing the ways we work, Bolt quickly learned that the biggest changes they needed to make are in behavior and beliefs.

How will this work? What about meetings? Will productivity go down? Will there be an impact on end users? Each new question raised throughout their four-day workweek experiment became an opportunity for Bolt to re-think the way they work. Through documenting the entire process on their blog and collecting data (statistical and anecdotal), we can see the journey that Bolt undertook to become a full four-day workweek company.

Who is Bolt?

Bolt is a San Francisco founded ecommerce SaaS startup who have been operating since 2014, with their mission to democratize commerce. With 600+ employees their team is based across North America and Europe. In 2021 Bolt achieved “unicorn” status - a name given to startups valued at more than \$1B.

Most of the employees at Bolt are knowledge workers: people whose capital in the workplace is based on their knowledge, as opposed to skills workers, whose capital is based on their output of labor.

Bolt also sits within the Silicon Valley tech bubble and as such many of their employees were hired as remote staff, and the company has experience with working across multiple time zones within North America.

So how did Bolt make the switch to a four-day workweek?

A dedication to Conscious Culture

As the founding member of Conscious Culture, Bolt’s dedication to building a better world of work for their employees has been evident throughout the growth of their business. When it came to thinking about what was next, trialing a four-day workweek was a no-brainer.

“I think it’s important to ask questions in all parts of our lives and work. It’s useful to look at something that has been done one way for so long that it’s become a default, and then shift it slightly, just to see what happens — and to see what might improve.” - Ryan Breslow, Founder and Executive Chairman of Bolt

Conscious Culture identifies the following as foundational principles:

Wellness Putting the team’s health and well-being first.	Trust Cultivating trust through transparency and candid collaboration.	Diversity Welcoming people of all personalities, backgrounds, beliefs, and philosophies.
Standards Keeping standards for execution high, but fair.	Results Focusing on results and prioritizing the right business outcomes.	Impact Caring deeply about both what the company does for the world and what it does for its people.

Conscious Culture believes it’s important to challenge assumed practices and explore new ways of working. Bolt took this to heart, rethinking work and putting team health and well-being first by exploring a four-day workweek.

Setting up for success

Before embarking on their four-day workweek experiment, Bolt knew that in order to be successful, the teams would need to prepare, particularly in considering customer commitments and ensuring customer success. The company offers a critical B2B/B2C product to end users who need, and expect, support throughout the week.

“Support are a customer facing team, and we need to make sure we’re providing coverage. Shifting to a four-day workweek meant that we had to think about scheduling and resourcing. I think of Support like a restaurant - you’ve always got to have enough waiters to cover peak service times.” - Kincy Clark, Director Support

Setting up a rotation for days worked was one of the changes the customer experience team made ahead of the four-day switch, to guarantee Bolt maintained service levels for customers.

Additional considerations ahead of the experiment were taken by teams across the board, with everybody in the company preparing themselves for a steep learning curve. In the announcement to the company, Breslow said *“It’ll take some time for us to get this new and innovative way of working just right. But if anyone can embrace this concept, it’s Bolters!”*

The questions from the internal team and the external team were similar. What if the experiment didn't work? What if four-day workweeks were just impractical for a company of Bolt's size? Will people end up working more, not less?

To ensure that the experiment was properly tracked, Bolt committed to communicating updates and learnings publically in a monthly blog, with metrics, and gathering feedback internally.

"Measuring productivity can be very subjective and we relied on a lot of self reporting, but from the nature of our business we were able to gather data on quantifiable metrics like performance velocity, and customer satisfaction as well." - Laura Levinsohn, Director Employee Experience

[Wondering how to plan for a four-day workweek? See our "Where to start" PDF guide →](#)

Rethinking the workday

Meetings

One of Bolt's earliest learnings was that some meetings could really be handled in writing via slack message or email.

"The always-on mindset can break you and kill the team. Working hard doesn't mean working more, it means being religious about your focus and working like lions with short bursts of energy. Implementing a four-day workweek has placed the emphasis on making every minute count. Meetings have been reduced, agendas are clear, and I'm having fewer but far more effective meetings as a result." - Tom Berger, VP of Marketing

Sharing an update in their first public blog, the Bolt team explained that they found themselves asking questions of each meeting:

- Does this meeting need to be this long?
- How could we streamline the agenda?
- Could we do some (or all) of this meeting offline/asynchronously?
- Can we combine two meetings into one?
- Could we meet every other week or even monthly?

These questions, alongside encouragement to group meetings for greater productivity, had a substantial result. From removing and streamlining meetings, the Bolt Executive Leadership team was able to **reduce time spent in meetings by 90%—from 12 hours a month to 1.5 hours.**

- **80% of employees have been able to eliminate unnecessary meetings**
- **90% reduction in meeting times for the Executive Leadership Team**

Working together

Bolt has always held asynchronous working as a key part of their culture, but the shift to a four-day workweek, and their recently announced global expansion, meant that this experiment was the perfect time to practice living their operational value of Writing > Talking.

The philosophy behind Bolt's Writing > Talking is that by giving everybody the context and the chance to contribute, the team avoids the common problem of the loudest voices becoming the authority voices. Writing > Talking combined with asynchronous work habits gave Bolt an advantage during the four-day workweek trial over other companies that may not already have these cultural habits in place.

"A big challenge [of adjusting to the four-day workweek was] when people would ask me a question and I'd say 'oh let's just hop on a call', but I realized that wasn't sustainable. So instead let me answer your question by actually writing an answer asynchronously. And even better, documenting it so if anybody asks me again I can just send them the document." says Namanh Kapur, Software Engineer. "I realized by doing things asynchronously I was actually getting more work done."

[Read more about Bolt's operating value Writing > Talking →](#)

Though not every team was able to work asynchronously, especially teams that were public facing, or who worked with companies outside of Bolt.

"It's a mindset shift. The traditions of how you work, and how you relax, are being challenged. We've got an opportunity to provide training opportunities and resources to the team focused on maximizing time and productivity." - Zainab Albedawi, Senior Manager, Learning & Development

Growing the team

Another key learning from their four-day workweek experiment Bolt needed to bring on extra support for their teams in order to meet customer commitments and provide a better work culture. In their blog, they shared the findings that "Several of our core teams (Engineering, Customer Support, Risk, etc) are 'on' 24/7. Even before our four-day trial, they were working on-call shifts on the weekends or holidays. When we started our trial, they needed to add an extra 'on call' day for their

team, and for some of those teams (especially the smaller teams) it also meant adding additional headcount to allow them all to only work four days.”

In order for everyone on the team to have the opportunity to unplug, the team realized they needed to be bigger.

“The Support department added resource to the team and changed processes to minimize their inefficiencies and maximize their effectiveness meant that our service levels remained the same for our customers.” - Kincy Clark, Director Support

Bolt were in a position to grow as a company, and building out resources across all departments was already in their road map, which helped contribute to the success of their four-day workweek trial.

- **87% of managers said employees maintained service levels for customers**
- **There was no noticeable loss of productivity due to four-day workweek**
- **87% of managers were happy with service levels from their employees**

Using your “extra day”

When surveyed, **86% of employees** were able to take advantage of the four-day workweek. Bolters (people who work at Bolt) were encouraged to share how they used their extra day on social media, alongside their honest opinions of the four-day experiment. Employees published [YouTube videos](#), [blogs](#), and social posts sharing how they were finding the four-day workweek.

Everybody took their extra day in a slightly different way. Team members shared that they were spending their Fridays:

- Volunteering
- Focused on family time
- Undertaking fitness hobbies
- Traveling
- Crafting
- Catching up on personal life
- Pursuing personal bests or amazing accomplishments
- Resting and wellness activities
- Deep thinking work in professional interests such as attending conferences
- And more

Building for the long-term

Making the four-day workweek experiment permanent

When the four-day workweek experiment came to an end, Bolters were overwhelmingly in favor of continuing.

- **94% of employees and 91% of managers are in favor of making 4-day workweeks permanent**

Looking at the data and hearing the feedback, the decision was easy. Bolt chose to make the four-day workweek experiment a permanent part of their embodiment of Conscious Culture.

“Bolt has always been conscious of putting employees first, and the extension of our 4 day work weeks is just one of the recent examples of that in action. Having Friday off means I’m able to prioritize my mental health and fully disconnect on the weekends, so that I come back Monday excited to work. It’s been game changing” - Teryn Stewart, People Ops Associate

“I get a three day weekend, and I can’t overstate how awesome that is. It’s really cool to get that time to focus on things that are important to me, like creative pursuits.” - Namanh Kapur, Software Engineer

However easy the choice to continue offering a four-day workweek was, the Bolt team knew that they had to make some changes based on learnings during the experiment as well as think through the long term implications across operational and strategic areas, including operating in multiple US states and countries.

“There are learning curves for us all in this process. For countries outside of North America there are different customs, cultures and laws around work that need to be considered. When we acquired European company Tipser during the trial, we had to start thinking about how a four-day workweek looks globally.” - Laura Levinsohn Director, Employee Experience

[Want to see more results from Bolt’s four-day workweek experiment? View the infographic →](#)

The four-day workweek movement

The announcement of Bolt's four-day workweek experiment becoming permanent caused a splash in January 2022, with major news outlets such as the Wall Street Journal, CNN, Forbes, CNBC, Business Insider, and Fast Company reporting on the news.

"The response from the press has been incredible. We've been featured in major publications, and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive - mostly people wishing their company would trial a four-day workweek too." - Stephanie Tan, Director of Communications

What's more, the [Bolt careers page](#) saw a **538% increase in traffic** in the week following the announcement, and it's becoming easier than ever to attract strong talent to Bolt.

"Bolt's four-day workweek is a huge asset when it comes to recruiting. The most talented candidates are in high demand and are choosing companies that prioritize work life balance. Having a benefit like the four-day week helps us show that Bolt is committed to that, as part of our total package. Candidates are even proactively bringing it up when we speak to them." - Tara Assari, Senior Recruiter

Bolt's experiment of challenging established work structures is in the spirit of Conscious Culture—seeking to create better work experiences for people while meeting and exceeding on business objectives. Conscious Culture has seen many companies, particularly in the technology industry, experiment with reduced work week schedules. At a national level, some countries have had work hour policies for decades or are currently exploring four-day legislation and Bolt is one of a growing number of companies practicing a four-day workweek.

"We see the four-day workweek as a bold experiment in meeting the need of placing people at the center of your work culture and asking if there are better ways to work, making use of technologies, asynchronous collaboration, focused prioritization, and perhaps shifting some of the concept of what an employer provides vs what communities provide. The four-day workweek isn't the answer for all companies across every industry and geography but it is a fabulous thought exercise for most and a solution for some." - Heatherly Bucher, Executive Director, Conscious Culture

To support this experiment and explore the questions, Conscious Culture has a special initiative to bring more discussion, resources, and industry stories forward on work schedules.

[Learn more about Conscious Culture and the four-day workweek initiative at conscious.org →](#)