



Contents

- 1 Preface**
 - 1.1 Introduction**
 - 1.2 Trial Format**

- 2 Internal Team**
 - 2.1 Internal Questionnaire Format**
 - 2.2 Well-being**
 - 2.3 Productivity**
 - 2.4 Communication**
 - 2.5 Summary**

- 3 External Parties**
 - 3.1 External Questionnaire Format**
 - 3.2 Client & Collaborator Survey**

- 4 Financials**

- 5 Looking Ahead**

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1 Preface

1.1 Introduction

As the world undergoes a significant shift in work culture following the COVID-19 Pandemic, the traditional five-day working week appears increasingly misaligned with the expectations of a contemporary workforce.

The move towards a four-day week at Periscope seeks the following:

1. To enhance our team's well-being,
2. Improve productivity,
3. Provide opportunities for complimentary pursuits,
4. Embed longer rest periods, and,
5. Generally foster a more progressive, sustainable work environment

We understand that the quality of work is not merely measured by the labour of hours spent at our desk, but by the energetic contribution and creativity invested by the team. Through the trial, we aimed to understand any potential impact a new work arrangement might play in our daily operations.

Rationale for Trialling a Four-Day Week

Periscope has been offering increasingly flexible working over the past three years, before commencing the four-day week trial 50% of the design team was already working at 90% hours. We monitored the implications of this flexible working and decided that there was a need to trial a four-day working week. This need stemmed from an operational requirement to better align workflow between team members already working flexibly and reduce pressure being felt by individuals who didn't choose to work flexibly.

Expected Benefits

- Increased motivation and energy during the work week
- Reduce inefficiency in mini-handovers by aligning working days
- Reduction pressure to team members who previously have not chosen to work flexibly
- Improved work-life balance with additional time for personal projects and more recovery time of a three-day weekend

Expected Challenges

- Client and collaborator's expectations with communication and meetings on Fridays, due to the high tempo nature of the projects*
- Potential impact on coordination with consultants, which might pose resulting delays
- Potential increased pressure to complete tasks during the work week, which could also result in reduced time available for design development and production

* One of the principal reasons for deciding not to trial a nine day fortnight is for consistency in client experience. It was felt that if clients were to have their access to the Periscope team reduced by 20% this ought to at least be consistent 'week-by-week' so as to avoid frustration.

1.2 Trial Format

The trial originally ran from 1st September until 31st December 2023, with an extended period to 31st March 2024. During the initial period, the full design team adapted their hours to 90% over four days, Monday to Thursday, for 90% of their annual salary. In the trial extension in 2024 salaries were increased to 95% of their annual salary. The 90% working hours is expressed relative to 100% which was deemed to be 37.5 hours per week. The percentage of salary was reviewed in line with the practice actuals and finance forecast.

Between October 2023 and March 2024, a feedback questionnaire was sent out to the team on a monthly basis to evaluate the four-week trial under the following three themes of interest: well-being, productivity and communication. The responses were recorded anonymously to better assess the trajectory of the trial. Following the responses, there were regular internal group sessions to discuss progress and any present concerns.

Timeline

26th June 2023
Consultation letter and draft Contract Variation Agreement issued, consultation period commenced.

7th July 2023
Consultation period closed.

10th July 2023
Variation Agreements issued for signing, pending consultation outcomes and a decision to proceed.

17th July 2023
All Variation Agreements signed.

1st September 2023
Periscope four-week trial commenced.

31st December 2023
The initial phase of the trial concluded with the agreed extension period for three months.

31st March 2024
Second assessment of the four-day week trial period

2 Internal Team

2.1 Internal Questionnaire Format

Between October 2023 to March 2024, a series of Microsoft Forms were sent out to the Periscope team at the end of each month. The responses were recorded anonymously and the results are presented in the following pages. The adjacent image is an excerpt of the questions from a four-day week survey.

Survey for Four-day Week Trial 2024
Feedbacks and reflections on the 4-day week trial period

1. Date of Response *

Please input date (dd/MM/yyyy)

2. My work-life balance has improved during the 4-day week trial. *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

3. I have noticed a positive impact on my overall physical and mental well-being. *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

4. I have sufficient time for family and other personal interests. *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

5. I do not find the extended work hours more challenging. *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Four-day Week Trial Survey MS Forms



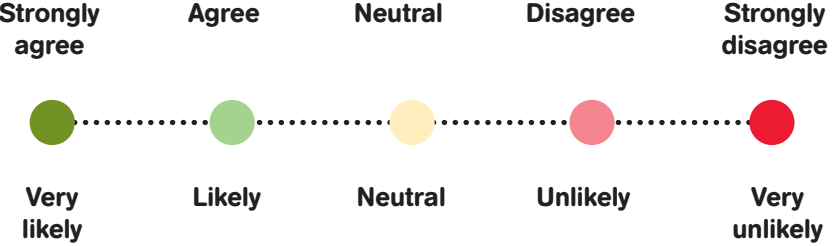
Periscope Office in Dalston



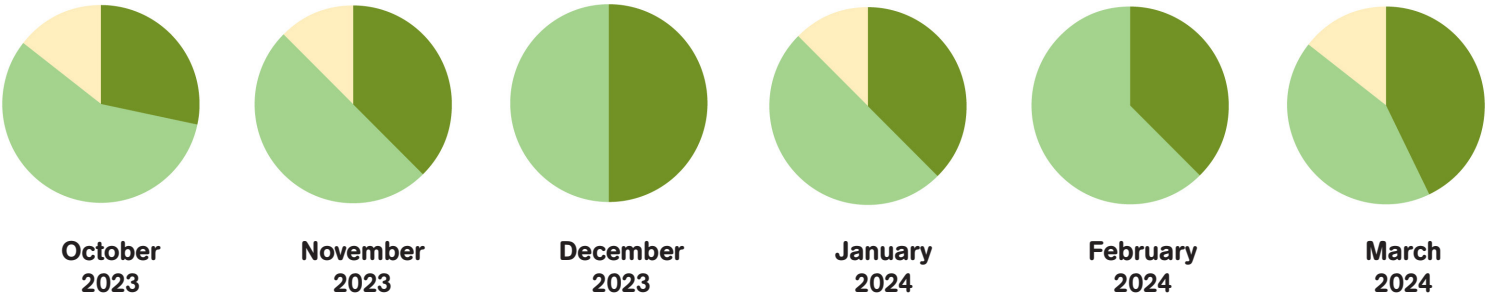
Office Trip to Sutton Hoo

2.2 Well-being

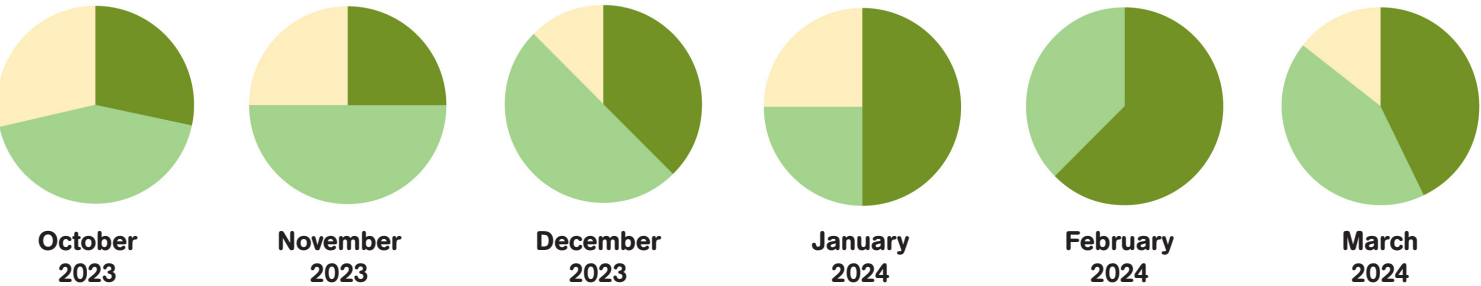
The following data show the results of the team's responses, collected from October 2023 to March 2024.



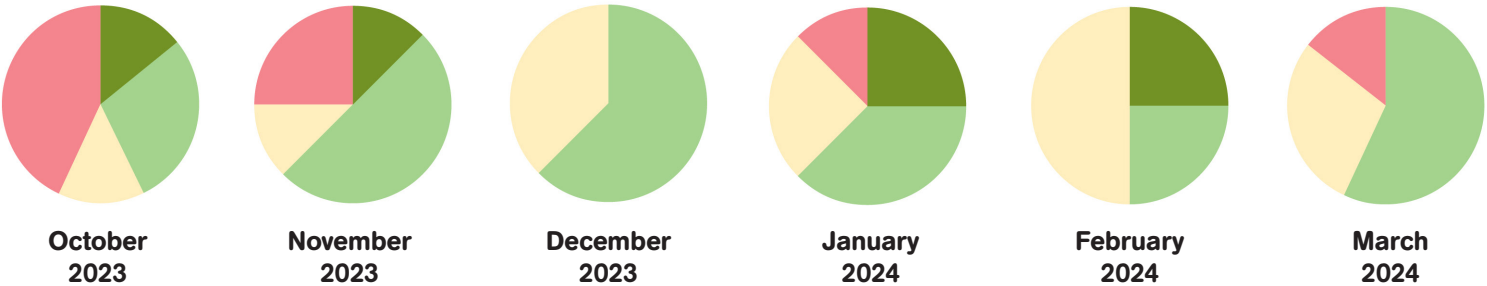
I have sufficient time for family and other personal interests.



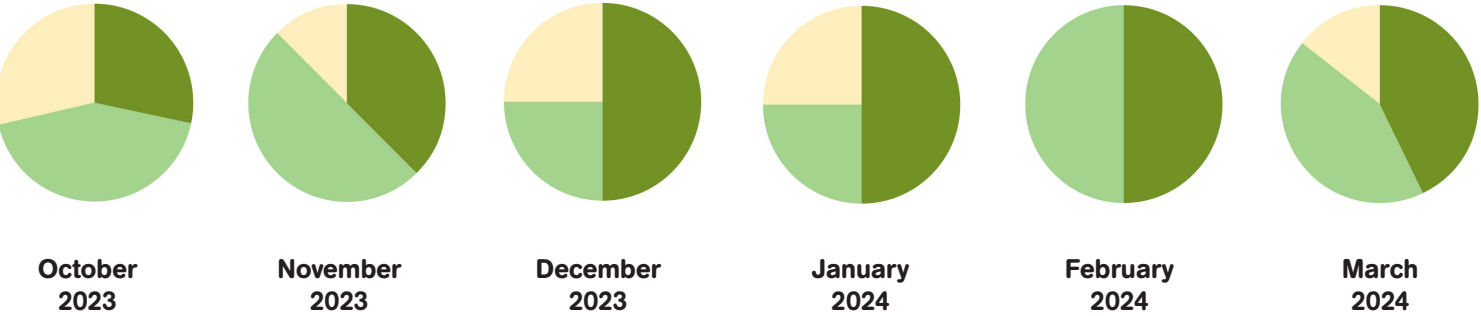
My work-life balance has improved during the four-day week trial.



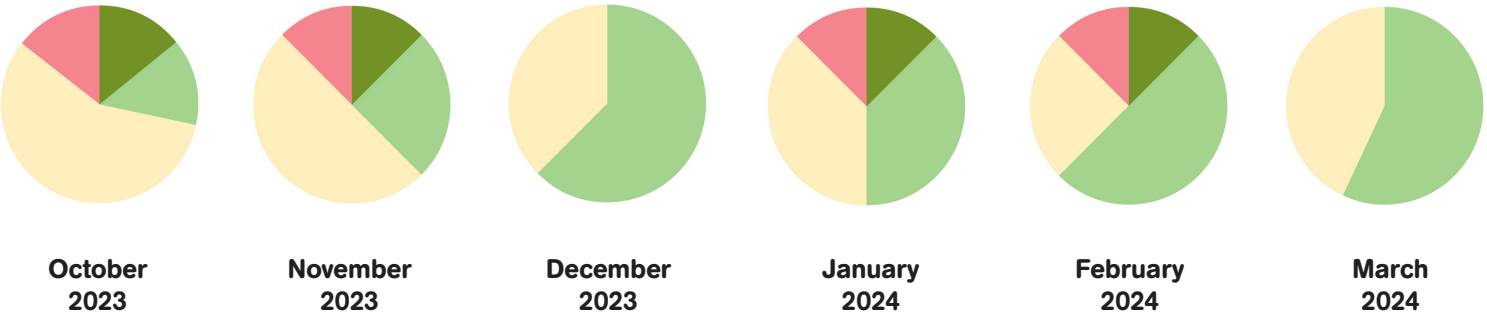
I do not find the extended work hours more challenging.



I have noticed a positive impact on my overall physical and mental well-being.



I do not feel more work stress and pressure.



Reflection

Over the course of 6 months, an average of 85% of collected responses had either agreed or strongly agreed that their well-being and work-life balance has improved during the trial.

Whilst the extra rest day had been beneficial for recovery and consolidated personal time, the length of the working day was a challenging aspect for some in the winter months as the team adjusted to longer working hours over the course of four days. The fluid nature of ‘the end of the working day’ was more impactful in the beginning of the trial but improved as the time progressed; a rhythm set in both for individuals and those collaborating internally.

Due to the relatively fast pace of Periscope’s projects there was generally more pressure to complete tasks within shorter time periods to meet pre-agreed deadlines. Work intensity varied each month according to different project work-flows and programmes - this is not unusual for the practice but some intensity was amplified in the early stages of the trial.

The team was asked if they had experienced or noticed any challenges related to their well-being. Here are some responses:

October
2023

- + Initially I feel more pressure with the shorter week but overall is improving as trial progresses.
- I do feel my well-being has marginally suffered from the length of the 4-days. This is especially true on weeks with overtime as longer days become even longer and it is very tiring.
- I tend to work longer hours towards the end of the week as the cut-off time is more fluid.

November
2023

- + I feel that my well-being and health has improved. Having an extra day to the weekend is very helpful for rest and completing other daily tasks.
- If the time/deliverables pressure increases to what it has been in the past this will most likely put significant strain and require abundant overtime as it has on occasion throughout the trial.

December
2023

- + It is generally improved as I have been able to focus on what is important.
- The evenings work week days are very squeezed. This sometimes means there is little time to wind down between work days.
- Shorter working week does put more personal pressure to deliver the outcomes/preparation for presentations, especially if the deadline is for early of the following week.

January
2024

- + I have more time for exercise and mindfulness.
- Longer days have been more impactful in January (i.e. feeling more exhausted during the week).

February
2024

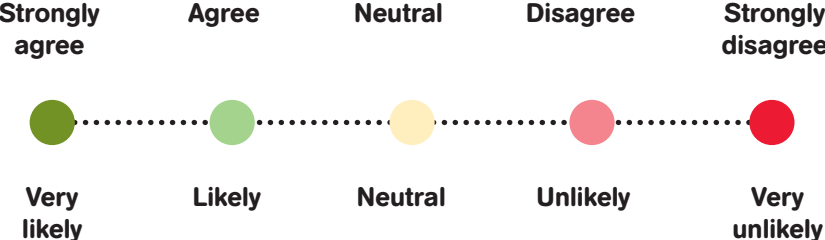
- + Less stress, better sleep, more time for hobbies and other interests.
- There is more pressure to complete tasks for the deadline at relatively fast pace. This creates generally more work stress.

March
2024

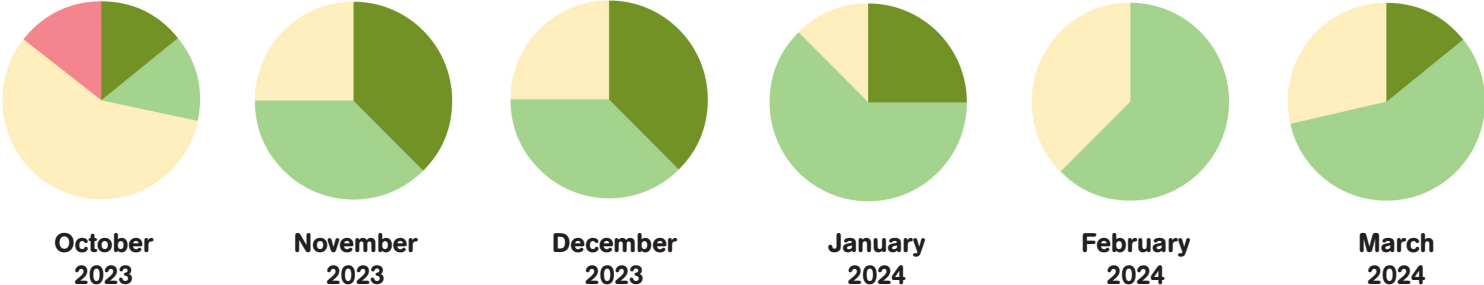
- + I haven’t experienced particular challenges in March aside from slightly more pressure due to project deadlines.
- March has been an intense month and chances to rest have been limited.

2.3 Productivity

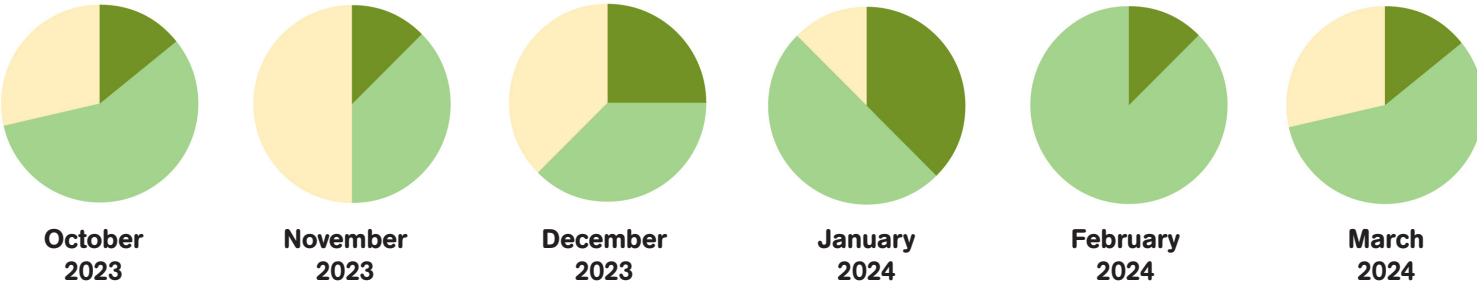
The following data shows the results of the team's responses, collected from October 2023 to March 2024.



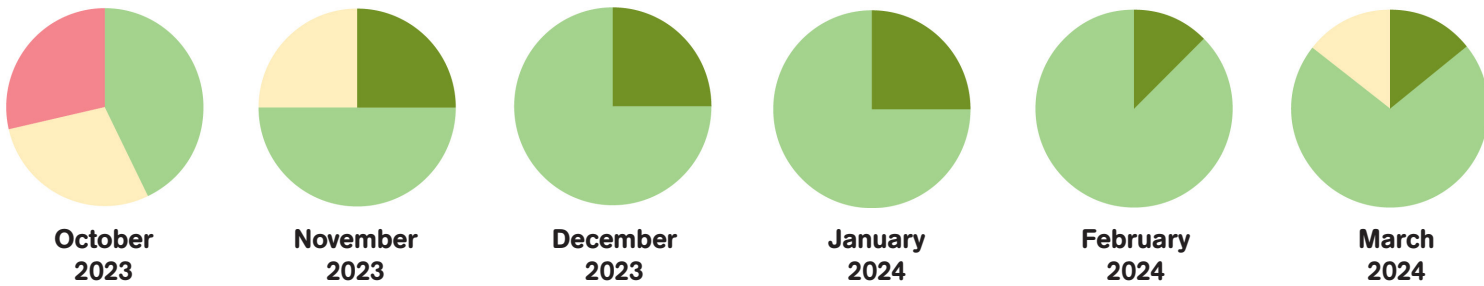
My responsibility and workload are manageable within the four-day week.



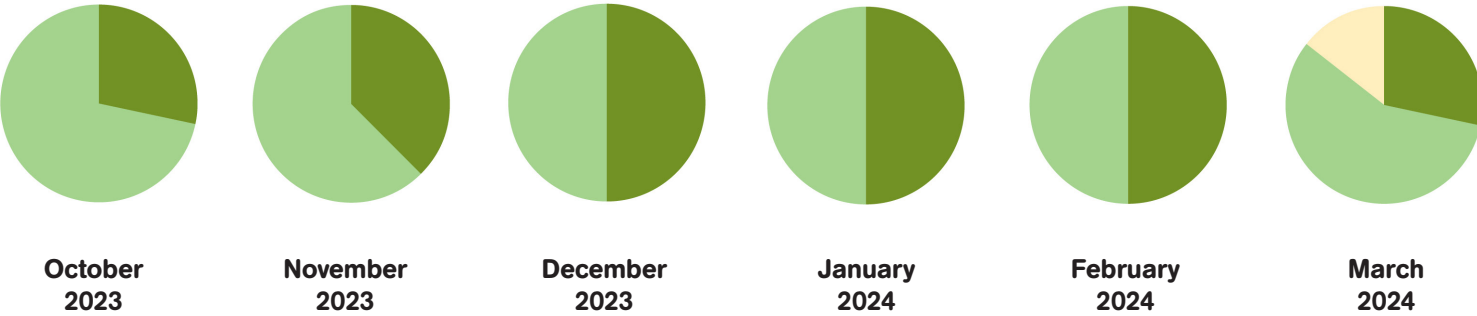
The four-day week has positively affected my productivity.



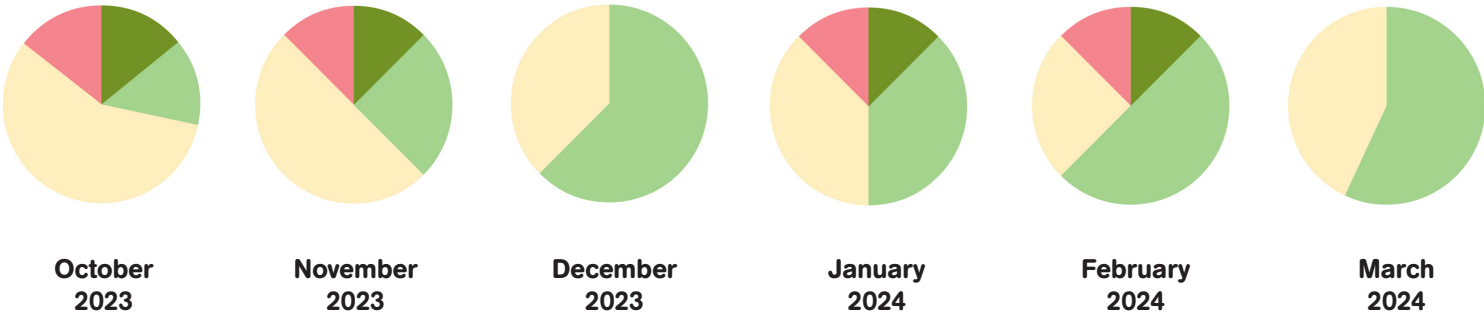
My team is able to meet deliverables and project deadlines within the four-day week



I am able to concentrate and stay focussed during work hours.



I do not need to work overtime to compensate for the compressed work week.



Reflection

The compressed hours resulted in more emphasis to complete collaborative work before the end of the week and maximise time efficiency throughout the week. The team was able to satisfy project deliverables and deadlines through faster decision-making processes and prioritisation of key meetings. However, delays from external parties were easily amplified, for example late issue of information on a Thursday delayed Periscope's work until the following Monday.

It is important to acknowledge that our internal processes such as design reviews, quality control, training and mentoring, were quietly compromised. Within four days it was demanding to maintain the quality of design and research. Whilst enrichment activities were less prominent during the trial than before, the team made concerted efforts to continue committing to social value programme such as Open Accelerate and other CPD sessions.

The team was asked if they had experienced or noticed any challenges related to their productivity. Here are some responses:

October 2023

- + Within the first couple of months, I haven't experienced any challenges related to productivity changes as an outcome of 4-days week trial.
- Delays from external third parties are amplified if it impacts our working hours earlier in the evening or morning. Delays on a Thursday mean that our information is often then delayed until Monday.
- There are expectations on deliverables in the initial programme and fee that we need to maintain. I find myself working after hours to compensate for meetings.

November 2023

- + No, if anything it seems to be easier for everyone to work together in a more aligned way. It is external programming from clients and other consultants that create the biggest challenges not the 4-day working week.
- With the shorter week, there is more pressure to be very efficient with time especially meeting with external consultants and client. There haven't been any significant difficulties so far but it is harder to compromise and engage in all conversations.

December 2023

- + December was good for productivity and efficiency, the need to do overtime varied from not at all to needed some weeks, which feels more reflective of the working patterns pre-trial (good thing).
- I have recently found some project work to require extra time. It sometimes can be difficult to conduct research, identify problems, design and produce drawings between meetings in a 4 day week.

January 2024

- + I think I am more efficient through the need to prioritise.
- As the work week is shorter, there is more emphasis on maintaining quality and level of understanding for the project. It is more challenging to immerse in a project when there is less time to get into background information.

February 2024

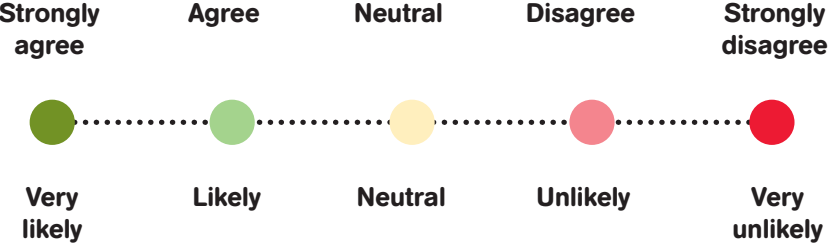
- + Efficiency and productivity has been good in the past month
- Productivity is more efficient but, time for design reviews, quality control, training and mentoring has been squeezed.

March 2024

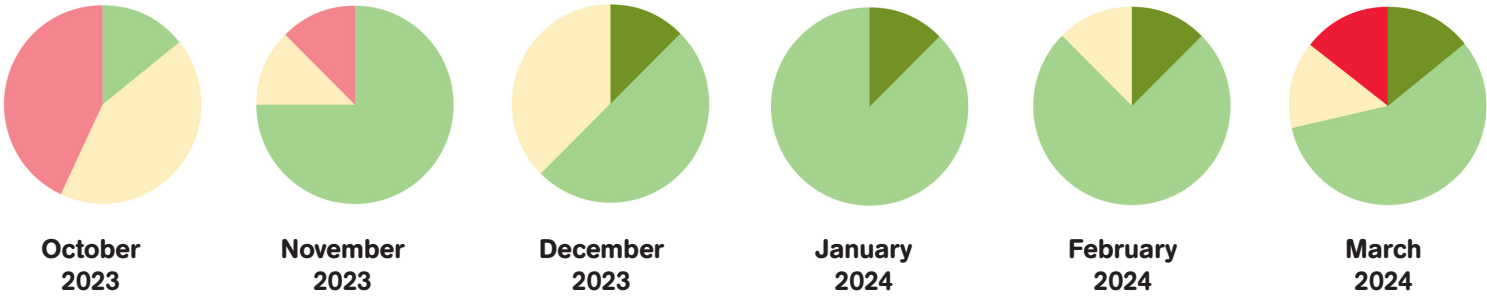
- + Overall, productivity was not discernible to external parties. There could be more clarity on project direction and streamlining of deliverables.

2.4 Communication

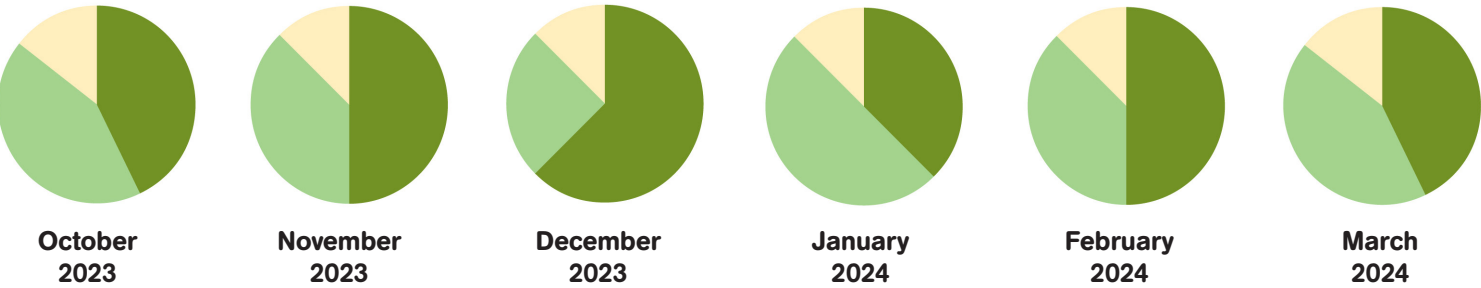
The following data shows the results of the team's responses, collected from October 2023 to March 2024.



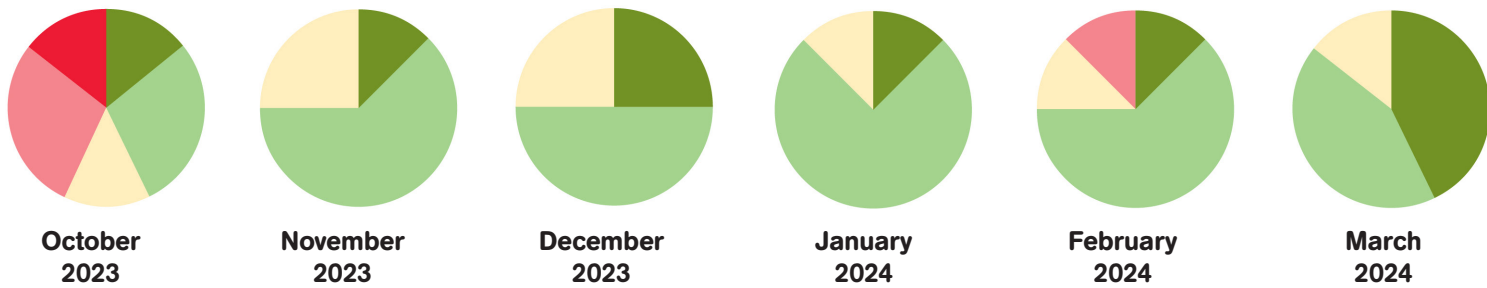
I have not experienced difficulty in communicating and collaborating with clients.



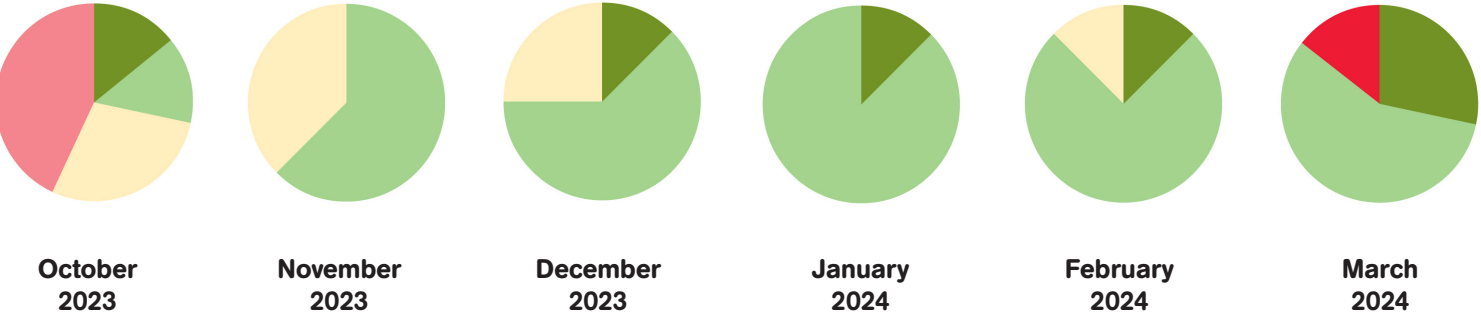
I have noticed a positive impact on communication and teamwork with my colleagues.



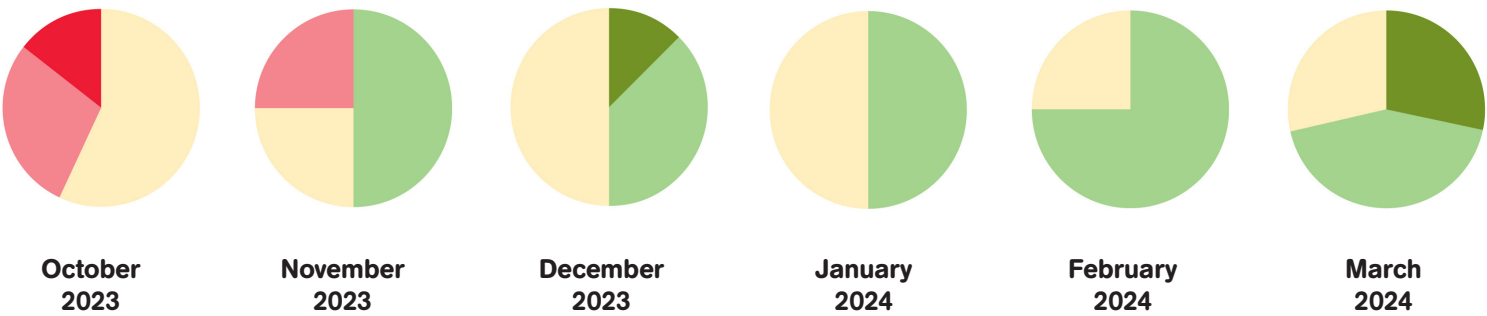
I feel external consultants and clients are respectful and cognizant of the four-day week schedule and I have not been contacted outside of Monday to Thursday.



I have not experienced difficulty in communicating and collaborating with external consultants.



I feel the expectations from external consultants and clients are aligned with the four-day week schedule.



Reflection

Communication within the internal team improved significantly with an aligned working week, especially with project task coordination; there was also less need for weekly handovers. The evident unequal distribution of workload between or team members who were previously not working flexibly and those who were was very quickly removed once the trial started.

Whilst wider external project teams have been broadly supportive and respectful of the trial. However, we found that, understandably, some meetings and decision making events in projects were still held on Fridays due to the pace of the projects. Over the course of six months, expectations from clients and external consultants gradually adapted to the new working pattern in a positive trajectory.

The team was asked if they had experienced or noticed any challenges related to communication. Here are some responses:

October
2023

- + Internal collaboration with colleagues is now more aligned as all of us are working on the same days and times (no handover meetings, aligned deadlines for all team members).
- + The wider design team are very understanding, even admiring, of our 4 day week.
- Meetings scheduled on Fridays are challenging, especially with the pace each project is running and information that needs to be coordinated and captured.
- External parties find challenges in providing updates on time to be included in our workflow. If a deadline is on a Thursday, we need to receive information from consultants in enough time coordinate and we should be strict with this.

November
2023

- + The communication between team members has been improved. There are no weekly handovers, we are working together towards deadlines, and my impression is that there is a better spirit of workload sharing and teamwork.
- Externally, clients have taken time to adjust to the Periscope working the four day week and continue to place pressure on the team to deliver at short notice.

December
2023

- + Communication and collaboration with colleagues has been clear and efficient during this period.

January
2024

- + Some forget now and again but have had some positive interest with external parties wanting to know if we would recommend it.

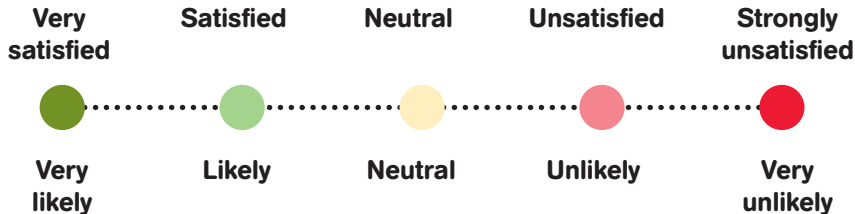
February
2024

- + Good communication internally - there still seem to be emails coming externally on Fridays, but they don't seem to require immediate action.
- We can get better at pushing back when clients and collaborators ask for more than the agreed scope.

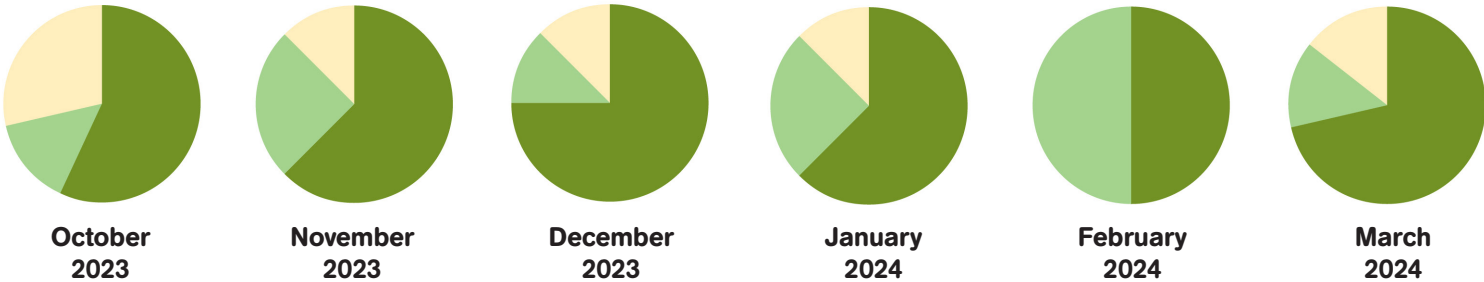
March
2024

- + No particular challenges with communication, but clients' expectations are still to be reconciled.

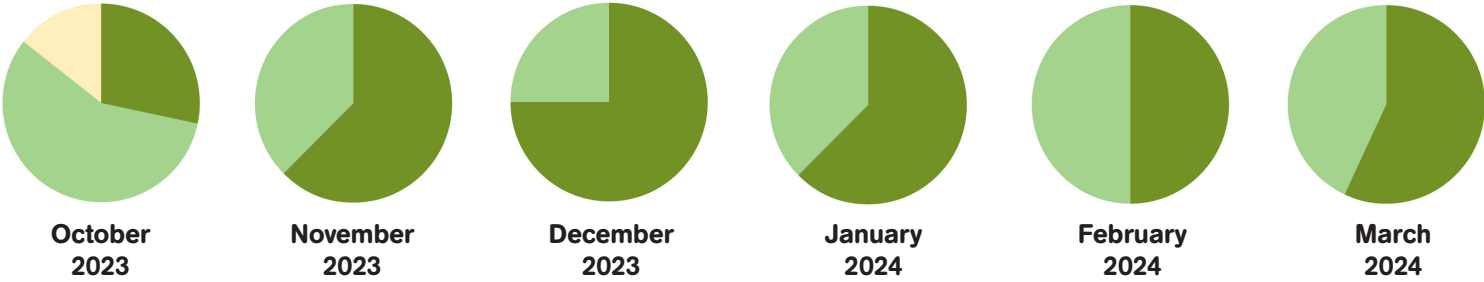
2.5 Summary



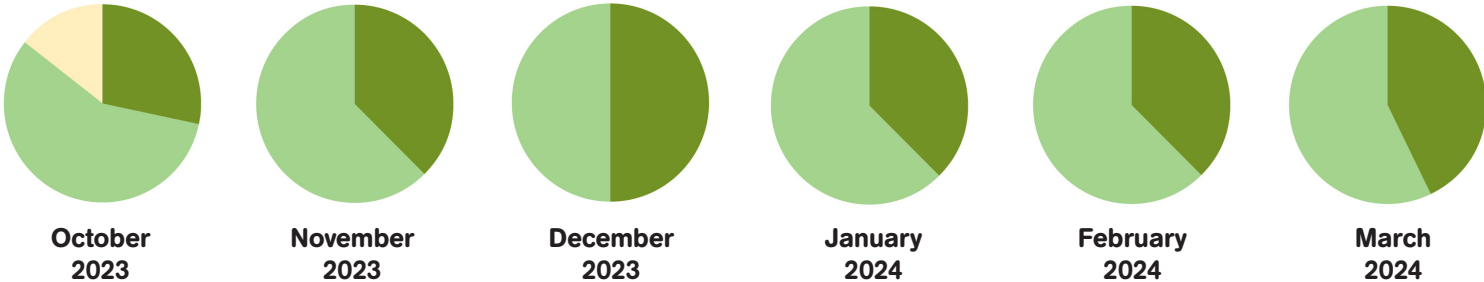
If possible, would you choose to continue with the four-day week schedule or return to a traditional five-day work week?



Would you recommend the four-day week to friends and other professionals in the industry?



Overall, how satisfied are you with the four-day work week trial?



The following timeline shows progression of lessons learnt and continued improvement from the monthly feedback sessions.

- October 2023**
 - Internal project planning needed improvement to anticipate when external information was required and to mitigate complications around deadlines and coordination with the wider team.
 - It is important to balance activities such as CPD and training, which can take up significant time within the week and impact the workflow.
 - Building more resilience around work methodologies and internal processes would be critical in order to efficiently meet quality of production and deliverables.
 - External communications with the project team/ client would need to be better managed to avoid meetings overspill to Fridays.
- November 2023**
 - Financial constraints around the reduced salary was a general concern shared by the team especially with the cost of living crisis, which the practice continued to closely monitor for future adjustments.
 - Budgeting time wisely and adhering to initial scope of deliverables had become necessary with the shorter week. Managing clients' expectations is important to relieve overtime working and stress.
 - The precision and quality of outcomes would need to be reviewed more closely, as well as development of the various process manuals for new staff members.
- December 2023**
 - Internal and external communications had drastically improved over the last few months, with clients and collaborators understanding and accommodating the rhythm of the working pattern.
 - There were a few queries regarding the future format of the trial, whether there was an option to work extended hours on Friday to alleviate stress during the week/weekend.
- January 2024**
 - Following the initial feedback from the first trial, salaries were uplifted to 95%.
 - As the trial continued, the team felt a greater benefit of having an extra day to the weekend, which had been very positive for mental and physical health.
 - Whilst most clients and external consultants and clients remained supportive, some concerns were raised about availability and turnaround times for projects. However, proactive communication and adjustments of deadlines helped mitigate these issues.
 - The trial necessitated a re-evaluation of internal processes, leading to the streamlining of meetings and adoption of more efficient collaboration tools.
- February 2024**
 - Initial concerns about productivity had markedly decreased. Most project teams were able to adapt by prioritising tasks more effectively and reducing time spent on non-essential activities.
 - The challenges around less time for briefing, design development, QA, training, mentoring, pro-bono and other enrichment activities continued.
 - Personal feedback was also captured during annual reviews. This was mostly positive.
- March 2024**
 - The first Client and Collaborator survey was sent out to assess external impact. The practice continued to maintain open lines of communication with clients, offering transparency about working arrangement.
 - Pressure on internal processes such as design and training began to be identified.

3 External Parties

3.1 External Questionnaire Format

In March 2024, a Client and Collaborator Microsoft Forms survey was sent out to our current clients and collaborators totalling 127 people including:

- Capital&Centric
- Ealing Council
- Expedition Engineering
- Haworth Tompkins
- Human Nature
- Jas Bhalla Architects
- Kjellander Sjöberg Architects
- Latimer Development (Clarion Group)
- Lewisham Council
- London Legacy Development Corporation
- Mikhail Riches
- Mission Street
- Redbridge Council
- TOWN

We received 24 anonymously-recorded responses. The adjacent image is an excerpt of the questions from the survey.

periscope
Client & Collaborator Survey

4-Day Week September 2023 - March 2024

Most client facing team members at Periscope have been compressing their hours into four days, Monday-Thursday between September 2023 and March 2024. We wish to understand whether this has had any impact on your experience of working with us.

This survey should take no more than 3 minutes of your time, we'd appreciate any feedback you can give as it will inform future decisions on working patterns.

1. Have you been able to reach and gain a response Periscope team members in an acceptable timeframe? *

Yes

No

N/A

2. Has Periscope been able to keep to agreed project programmes? *

Yes

No

N/A

3. Have you noticed any quality impacts as a result of Periscope's compressed working hours against previous experience you may have of working with the practice? *

Yes

No

N/A

4. Has Periscope been able to operate with agility when compared to previous experience you may have of working with the practice? *

Yes

No

N/A

5. Has communication been as fluid or comprehensive against previous experience you may have of working with the practice? *

Yes

No

N/A

6. Would you recommend the 4-day week to friends and other professionals in the industry? *

Yes

No

N/A

Client and Collaborator Survey MS Forms



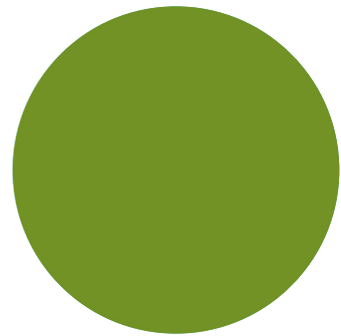
St Raphael's Estate Co-design Workshop

3.2 Client & Collaborator Survey

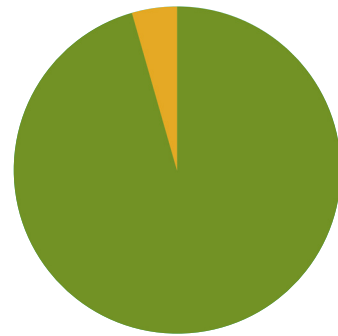
Yes No N/A

● ● ●

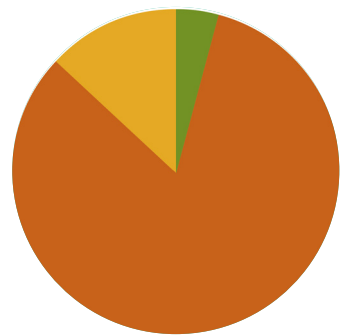
Have you been able to reach and gain a response from Periscope team members in an acceptable timeframe?



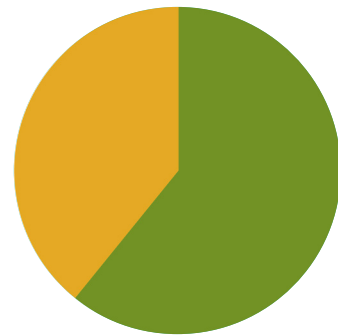
Has Periscope been able to keep to agreed project programmes?



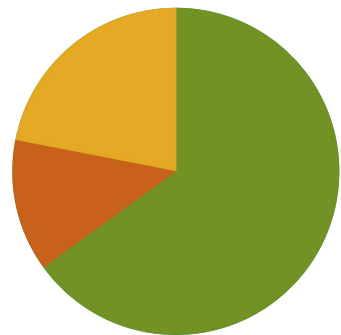
Have you noticed any quality impacts as a result of Periscope's compressed working hours against previous experience you may have of working with the practice?



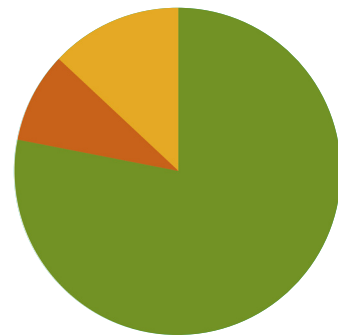
Has Periscope been able to operate with agility when compared to previous experience you may have of working with the practice?



Has communication been as fluid or comprehensive against previous experience you may have of working with the practice?



Would you recommend the four-day week to friends and other professionals in the industry?



Here are further comments and insights from our clients and collaborators:

- The only tangible impact that we have noted has been the need to avoid scheduling meetings on a Friday - which is not a bad discipline to have anyway!
- Any impact on our project appears to have been mitigated as we've been able to get hold of Dan on Fridays in any event (I know that's not the point!). I do struggle to see how our particular industry can successfully adopt a 4 day week (unless we allow contractors to do the same?) I applaud the effort though!
- Whilst no drop in service has been identified there are occasional challenges with scheduling meetings with a 20% availability drop. Will note the team have been flexible and made this work when they can.
- Agree with 4 day week in principle but can sometimes be an issue when we have to meet very tight timeframes. Perhaps need more review of practicalities and also some flexibility in how it's implemented, especially as Fridays often set as deadlines.
- In my experience of working with Periscope over these last few months, working a 4 day week has not impacted their ability to coordinate and deliver work in a timely manner. I have experienced clear communication and I hope that working a 4 day week has led to greater employee well being!
- 4-day working weeks are good, however in my experience they work best where there is an agreement that there is flexibility - i.e. if there's a deadline, you might have to work that day. This was my experience in a previous company.
- Periscope have always been excellent and providing pro-active input to projects and masterplans and this is no different. I had no idea they were working a 4-day week!
- Well done Periscope. I didn't really see any change in my interactions with Periscope! That said I do not interact day to day with Periscope.
- We hadn't worked with Periscope prior to the trial but it hasn't affected things as we often work 4 day weeks within our practice as individuals. Appreciate that some communication is still covered on Fridays for urgent matters (e.g. bids)
- I found the biggest issue was trying to find slots for meetings ruling out Friday reduced available slots for workshops/ meetings etc.

4 Financials

4.1 Financials

The data opposite shows turnover, gross and net profit variance over the past three years. The purpose of analysing and presenting this data is to understand whether the 4-day week trial has had an impact on turnover and profit.

It may be that the 4-day week has had an impact on profitability, however the nature of Periscope’s diverse business model means that it is effectively impossible to deduce a trend in the figures.

There appears to be no discernible trend in gross/net profit (beyond it being affected by turnover changes) and therefore the 4-day week trial is deemed to have not had a significant impact.

Specific factors affecting turnover and profitability in the time period include:

- 1 COVID-19 (2021)
- 2 Variable sub consultancy requirements (2022-2023)
- 3 Significant increases in salary costs (2023-2024)
- 4 Variable costs including investment in R+D (general)
- 5 Project type variance (general)



Summary Table showing Periscope Financials from Q1 2021 to Q1 2024

5 Looking Ahead

5.1 Looking Ahead

While the trial has generally been successful, it has surfaced challenges, particularly around the nuance of ‘productivity’. A symptom of reduced working hours has been that external commitments have been met but internal process time has become more pressured, especially on design, training, mentoring, and pro-bono work.

The trial also has limits, we expect to encounter scenarios that were not captured in the trial as we move forward. However, for Periscope we judge seven months as sufficient to form a view on whether it is feasible to formalise the four-day week.

Financial Year (FY) 2024-2025:

In FY 2024-2025, the four-day week will run from 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025, with quarterly monitoring and iterative review. During this time, the full design team will adapt their hours to 90% over four days, Monday to Thursday, for 100% of their annual salary. If necessary, the team will consider flexing their hours to hit deadlines, allowing time for internal processes while generally protecting Fridays.

Lessons Learnt:

Seven months of observing and recording has shown us that the notions of productivity and fulfilment are deeply intertwined with well-being and work-life balance.

Looking ahead, we understand that the non-linear nature of innovative design processes does not always adhere to a strict schedule. An intrinsic part of who we are and our mission is to let seeds of creativity flourish through discovery.

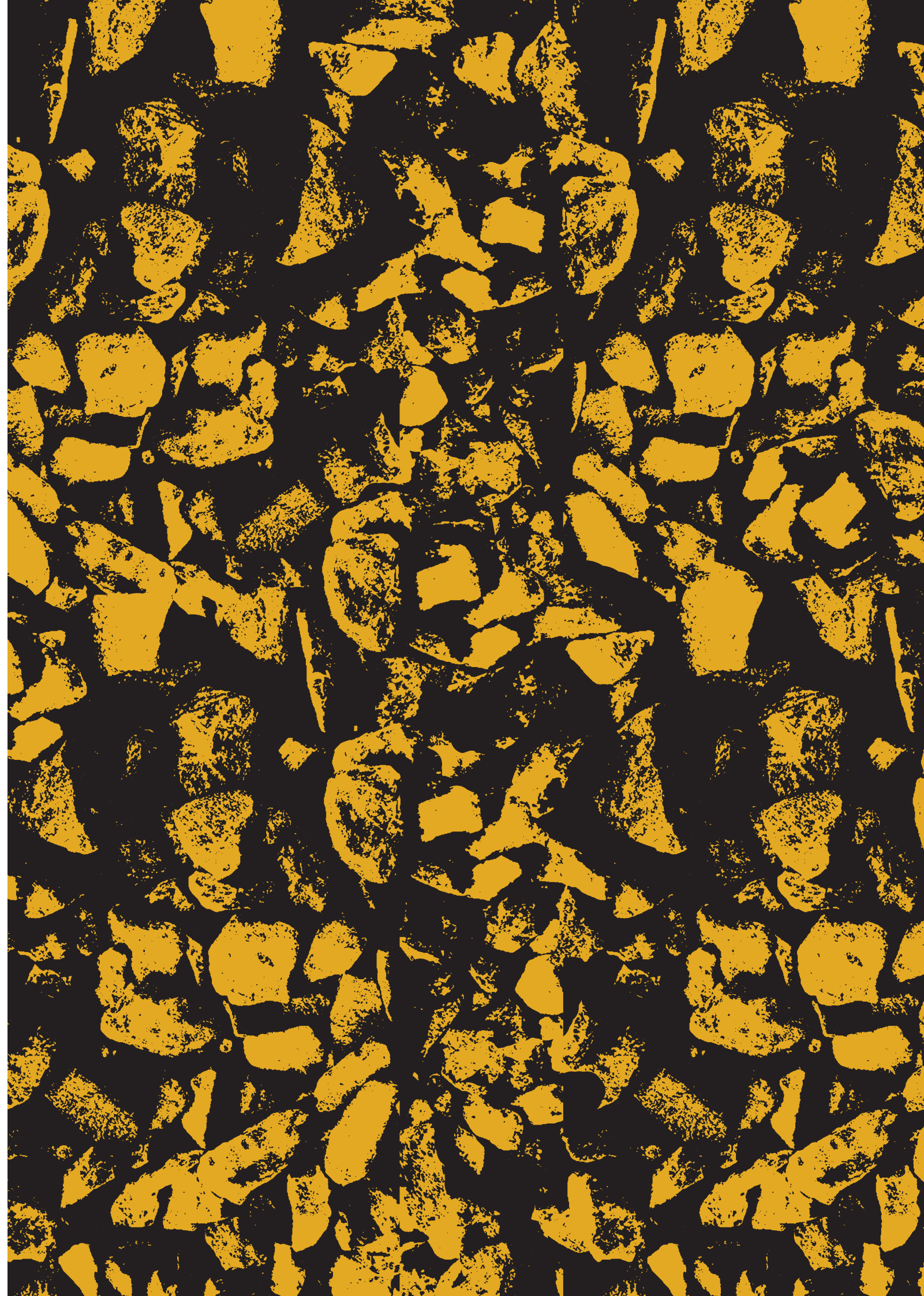
To safeguard design efforts in the practice there are plans to start ‘show and tell’ project presentation projects, formalise design reviews and an intensify a rolling programme of internal CPDs on Periscope’s design processes and research. Below are some key points for how challenges can be navigated going forward.

External

- Periscope team members attend meetings if there is a clear agenda
- Periscope team members will not stay for the entire meeting if it is clear that their presence is not required
- Programmes will be revisited if external material is late or changes are late in instruction

Internal

- Some flexibility in working hours will be required of the team in order to achieve quality of work and quality of life
- Prioritise design and training over spurious internal processes



Periscope is a spatial design agency focused on regenerative design and public architecture.

We design and deliver resilient projects that work for people and the planet, grounding our interventions within their greater ecological, topographic and social fabric. In valuing meticulous research, technical rigour and plural voices we seek to meet the challenges of our own and future generations.

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