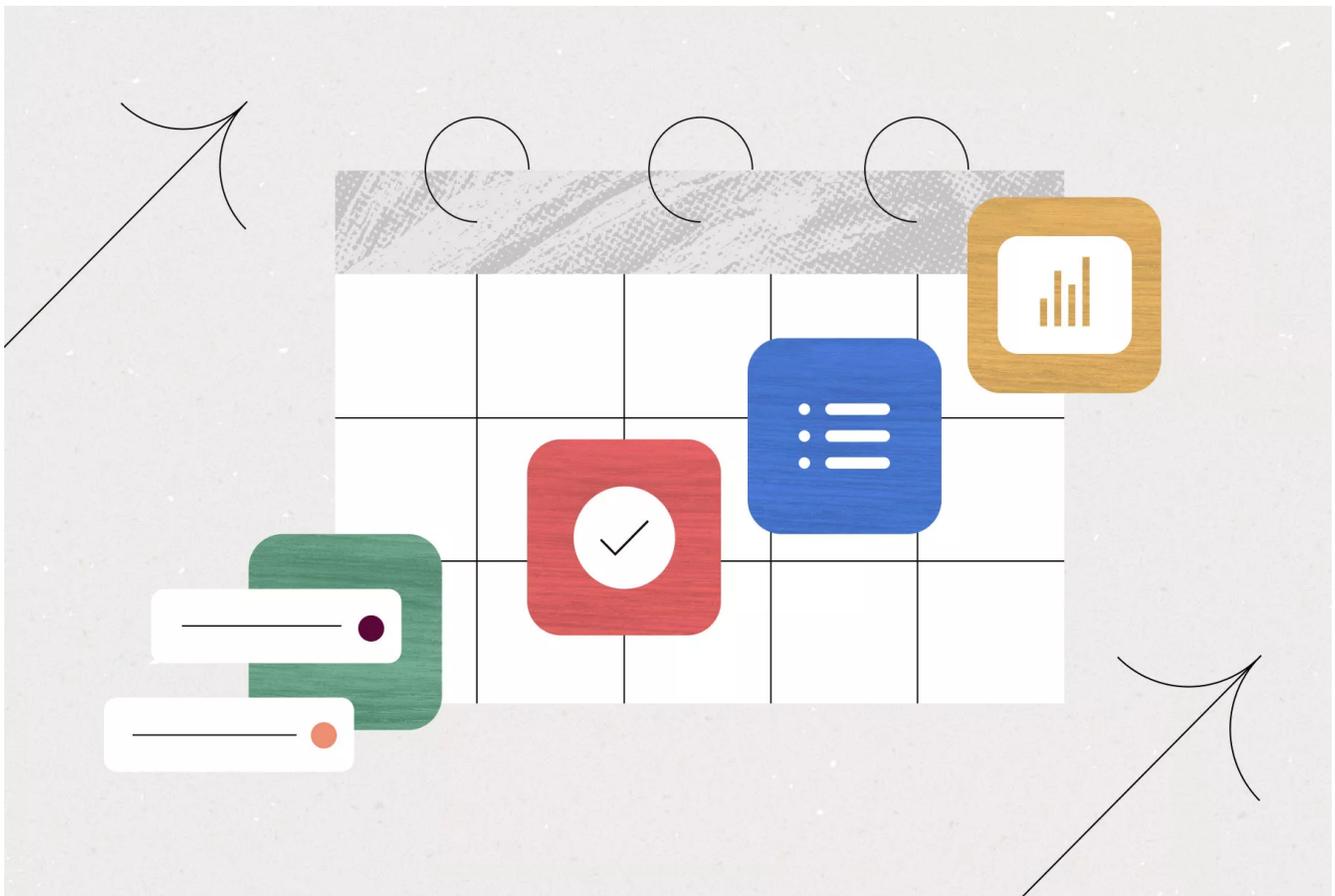


# Everything you need to know about the four-day workweek

 Whitney Vige • June 29th, 2022 • 10 min read



## Summary

Studies have shown that the four-day workweek, which allows employees to work fewer days without a change in benefits or pay, can increase employee productivity and overall happiness. But it's not the right fit for every company or team. Here's how to know if it will work for you.

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The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed how we work. It accelerated remote working trends and brought discussions about how to

best support teams to the forefront of the cultural conversation.

One such talking point is the four-day workweek. A pared down version of the traditional five-day workweek, the four-day workweek aims to give workers more flexibility and improve well-being by reducing the week by one day. Plus, the compressed schedule can actually cut down on work about work, resulting in fewer distractions and boosted productivity

If you're considering making a shift to the four-day workweek—or are looking for other ways to support your team's mental health and well-being through alternative work schedules—we'll walk you through how to decide what's best for your company and team.

## What is the four-day work week?

As the name suggests, the four-day workweek is a shortened version of the traditional workweek, in which workers work for four days a week rather than the standard five days, and have a three-day weekend instead of the traditional two days off.

The four-day workweek shortens both the days that employees work and the total hours. In a four-day workweek, workers log 32 hours per week rather than 40 hours per week. Benefits and pay, however, remain the same.

The four-day workweek certainly existed before the COVID-19 pandemic, but the pandemic increased conversations around and adoption of the alternative schedule. Let's dig into the rise in popularity of the four-day workweek model.

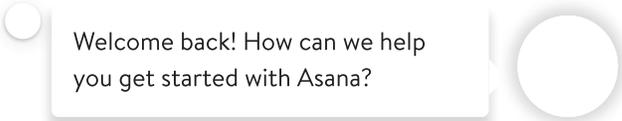
## What's behind the rise in the four-day work week?

According to LinkedIn's Workforce Confidence survey, which surveyed 19,000 workers in 2022, 54% of all workers surveyed said the four-day work week is among their top three priorities when it comes to workplace benefits. Support for the four-day workweek is especially strong among the younger generation of workers, with 62% of both millennials and gen Z supporting the shift.

The desire for shorter workweeks, especially among younger generations, isn't wholly surprising considering factors including:

### **The rise of burnout and work anxiety**

According to Asana's 2022 Anatomy of Work, 63% of all knowledge workers have



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experienced burnout in the last year. The experience is particularly prevalent among the generations that have signaled their support for the four-day work week, with 74% of millennials and 84% of gen Z saying they experience burnout.

While workers have found some balance as society—and offices—have reopened, the burnout phenomenon, combined with rising work anxiety, have led us to look for innovative solutions to improve overall employee well-being.

## **The desire for a better work-life balance following COVID-19 pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic did more than result in mounting burnout in the workplace. It also challenged the way we approach work, as well as what workers want from their employers. Following the pandemic, we've seen an increased desire for location flexibility and a better work-life balance among workers.

In fact, LinkedIn's 2022 Global Talent Trends report found that work-life balance is the top priority for professionals when choosing a new job—trumping even compensation. The four-day work week offers an opportunity to give workers an improved work-life balance, while also benefiting the companies they work for.

## Pros of the four-day work week

There are several benefits of the four-day work week, for both employees and employers. Let's take a look at some of the most notable pros of making the shift.

### Increased productivity and employee efficiency

Research on the importance of mental health days, PTO, workcations, sabbaticals, and more has demonstrated again and again that rested, recharged employees who prioritize their mental health are more likely to produce creative, high-impact work. The bottom line is that overworked, burnt out employees are stretched thin and their work is likely to reflect that fact.

The four-day workweek has the potential to combat this by improving employee's overall well-being and wellness, resulting in higher productivity. A study examining Iceland's trial found that worker productivity either remained the same or increased in 85% of workplaces that decreased worker hours. Microsoft Japan also reported a 40% increase in productivity after they launched: the employer tested a short-term four-day workweek and saw a 40% increase

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in productivity.

The thought process is straightforward—employees that have more time to focus on themselves, their families, and their hobbies have a greater sense of well-being, which translates into higher team morale, better employee engagement, and ultimately happier, more productive employees. And that’s a win for everyone.

## Improved worker well-being

Increasing—and maintaining—employee well-being is top-of-mind for employers. More than a buzzword, employee well-being has important implications for companies, as happier workers are more productive and more likely to stay at a company long-term.

Anecdotal evidence shows that shifting to the four-day workweek could be one answer to improving long-term employee well-being. Iceland’s large-scale trials, which involved shifting more than 1% of the nation’s workforce to a four-day schedule, found that employees were happier overall, citing reduced stress levels and burnout and a greater work-life balance.

## Environmental impact

One surprising perk of the four-day workweek? The potential environmental benefits. Since employees would be commuting to work fewer times a week, there’s a potential for decreased carbon emissions and a reduced carbon footprint.

The shift to a four-day workweek could have a similar impact. One UK study found that shifting to the four-day workweek model could reduce the country’s carbon footprint by 127 million tonnes per year by 2025—the equivalent of taking 27 million cars off the road.

## Improved worker recruitment and retention

Increasingly, it’s become clear that flexible work options and a focus on employee well-being and work-life balance are important to today’s workers. In fact, recent research from Gallup shows that some workers are willing to walk away from jobs that don’t offer flexible work options, suggesting that both attracting and retaining talent link to such work arrangements.

That’s not to say that it’s all or nothing with remote work. Research shows they prefer the office for interpersonal meetings, and strategy development. Ultimately, workers want to feel valued at work—and have time to exist outside the office. Employers who provide working options that facilitate

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...these qualities in the workplace will have a happier, more engaged workforce—plus, they'll be able to grow *and* retain top talent.

## Cons of the four-day work week

While shifting to a four-day workweek offers several benefits for companies and workers, it might not be the right fit for every company. Below, we jump into some of the potential negatives of the four-day workweek—and how to know if it's right for your team.

### Difficulty scaling, leading to worker resentment

Depending on your industry, the four-day workweek may not be possible for some workers (or whole companies). For example, workers who are client-facing, work in customer service, or work in an arm of the business that can't shut down for an extra day (such as production) may not be able to work four days a week without impacting the business's bottom line or relationships.

So far, companies that have shifted to the four-day workweek—or are participating in pilot programs to test the shift—largely employ white-collar and knowledge workers, with an emphasis on the tech industry. This poses potential drawbacks for companies that employ a mix of knowledge workers and manual laborers, or full-time, salaried employees and hourly workers, as there's a potential the shift won't scale to all employees. Even at companies

without these restraints, certain departments may not be able to go offline for an extra day a week, leading to potential resentment among employees.

### Potential for disrupted customer relationships

Similarly, if your company is based on customer and client relationships, implementing a four-day workweek might be difficult. Keeping non-traditional working hours has the potential to impact relationships if clients need access to your services on the day your office is closed.

There are workarounds if you want to keep nontrad work schedule—without disrupting the relationships you could consider implementing alternating four-day workweeks for members of your team or stagger the days members of your team take off, so someone is available every work day.

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You'll want to think through the pros and cons of implementing such alternative schedules, for both your team and your customers. Fixed hours, for example, allows everyone on your team to work at the same time, building collaboration and facilitating connections. On the other hand, staggered days might be better for customers—since staggering the days your team members are off means there's no disruption to service—but it could have a negative impact on company culture and team collaboration.

## Increased risk for companies

Any big change to your company comes with risk, and a shift to the four-day workweek is no different. After all, there's no guarantee that the four-day workweek will work for your company—or your workforce.

For example, since you can't know for certain that a four-day workweek will increase worker productivity or engagement, there's always the possibility that you could see a decrease in overall worker output. If you employ hourly workers, there's also a possibility that you'll need to bring them in on days when the office is closed, leading to overtime pay and increased cost for the company.

Ultimately, it's up to your company to decide whether you can mitigate the business risks posed by shifting work schedules. Doing so before implementing the change is key, as rolling back the shift could discourage your team.

## Scheduling and implementation difficulties

Implementing the four-day workweek—and making the necessary adjustments to support it—might be easier said than done. If you're planning to stagger days off to ensure coverage for clients and projects, it could mean difficulty scheduling internal, cross-functional meetings given that different teams will be off at different times. Similarly, a compressed workweek could make it more difficult to find time to schedule meetings, or result in a schedule jammed-packed with them.

The four-day workweek could mean more upfront work for your project managers and team leads, since they're tasked with adjusting and managing their team's workload so everything fits—and gets accomplished—in four days. The new schedule could also end up adding additional tasks to their plates and result in more work and lower productivity.

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# How to decide if the four-day workweek is right for your company

There's no hard-and-fast answer on whether or not you should implement a four-day workweek at your company. You'll want to take different factors into account—like your industry, your company culture and, of course, your employees' opinions on the shift.

Here's what to think about when considering the shift:

- **Consider your business model and industry.** If your business model is based around functions like customer support, or if you're in an industry that works primarily with external clients, implementing the four-day workweek may not be feasible—or profitable. Think about how the shift might impact your company and customers to determine whether it's something that can be realistically implemented.
- **Determine if you can be profitable and ensure coverage.** Before you make any kind of announcement or move forward implementing any type of schedule change, you should first figure out if you can be profitable and provide coverage within the new model. Work with departments that might struggle with a four-day workweek, like customer service or IT, to map out hypothetical coverage plans. You should also work with teams like business and operations to determine what impact (if any) switching to working four days a week could have on business profitability.
- **Remember: One size doesn't fit all.** If your company isn't a perfect fit for the four-day workweek, that's ok. There's a lot you can do to shift schedules and prioritize employee well-being beyond simply cutting a day out of the workweek. Consider implementing workarounds to allow for a four-day week without impacting customer satisfaction or cutting into your bottom line, like staggered work schedules or alternating four-day workweeks. If changing up schedules doesn't work for your team, there are other alternatives you can offer to prioritize your team's work-life balance—we'll run through those in a bit.
- **Speak with stakeholders.** Work with stakeholders, both internal and external, to discuss expectations and any potential concerns. Meeting with stakeholders early will help give you a better understanding of specific work demands, and what may or may not be feasible to meet them.
- **Think about creating a business contingency and considering moving forward with a four-day work**

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contingency plan to help you mitigate potential risks, should they arise. This will help you

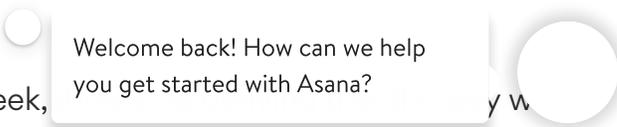
gain a better understanding of what potential challenges face the company should you make the move to a four-day workweek, as well as how to combat them.

- **Account for team and company culture.** You know your team and company culture the best—do you think a four-day workweek is right for them? It's important to consider your team's roles, how they work with cross-functional partners, and where they fall within the organizational structure.
- **Talk to your team.** Your team will be heavily impacted by the decision to shift to a four-day workweek, so it's important to make sure you have their buy-in. Are they excited about the possibility? Do they have any concerns about how the shift could affect their career growth or workload? Talking things through with your team will help you determine if the work schedule shift is right for you.
- **Consider alternatives to the four-day workweek.** Not sure that the four-day workweek is right for you? No problem—there are plenty of alternatives you can consider that won't leave your office shutdown one day a week. For starters, 9/80 schedules slightly increase their working hours over two weeks in exchange for a day off every other week, an alternative that would give workers additional days off without reducing the hours they work. You could also consider offering shorter working hours over a five-day workweek or more flexible working hours Fridays, to give employees breathing room without shutting the office down for a day. Implementing flexible work schedules, like the hybrid work model, can also increase work-life balance without implementing shorter weeks.
- **Roll out the process thoughtfully using change management.** Change management can help you prepare your team for any big organizational change and guide them through the process. If you do decide to roll out a four-day workweek, implement a thoughtful change management process to introduce the change, get buy-in from your team, and demonstrate the value of the shift. Change management can also help measure the success of organizational change, so it's an ideal process to implement when making a big shift.

## Support your team as work evolves

The four-day workweek is a hot work trend at the moment—in fact, 70 companies in Britain kicked off a large-scale, six-month trial of the model in June—but it'll take time to see if it endures long-term.

No matter what happens with the four-day workweek, work is evolving. Whether the future of work involves the four-day work week, remote work



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and hybrid working models, fully remote teams, or a combination of these work types, how we work—and what we want from work—has changed for good.

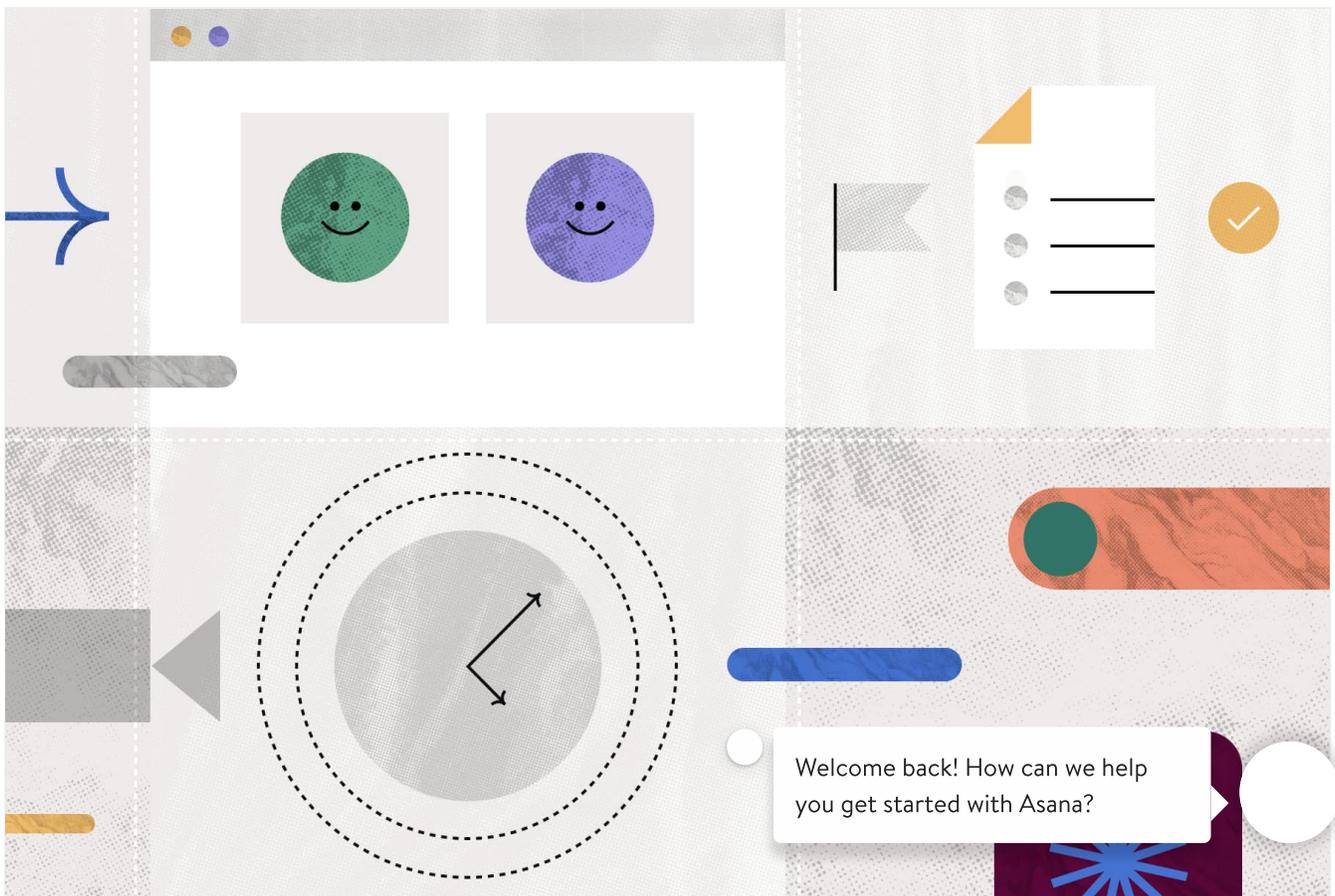
As you and your team navigate the evolving work environment, providing support and setting realistic expectations is key to setting your team up for success. Leading with empathy, communicating transparently, and providing flexibility will ensure you and your team evolve—together.

### The right tools for however you work

No matter how you work, you need tools that can keep your team connected and organized. Work management software can connect your team across time zones and offices, and help you collaborate and coordinate across projects and processes, so you can get things done—no matter your working hours.

[Try Asana for work management](#)

## Related resources

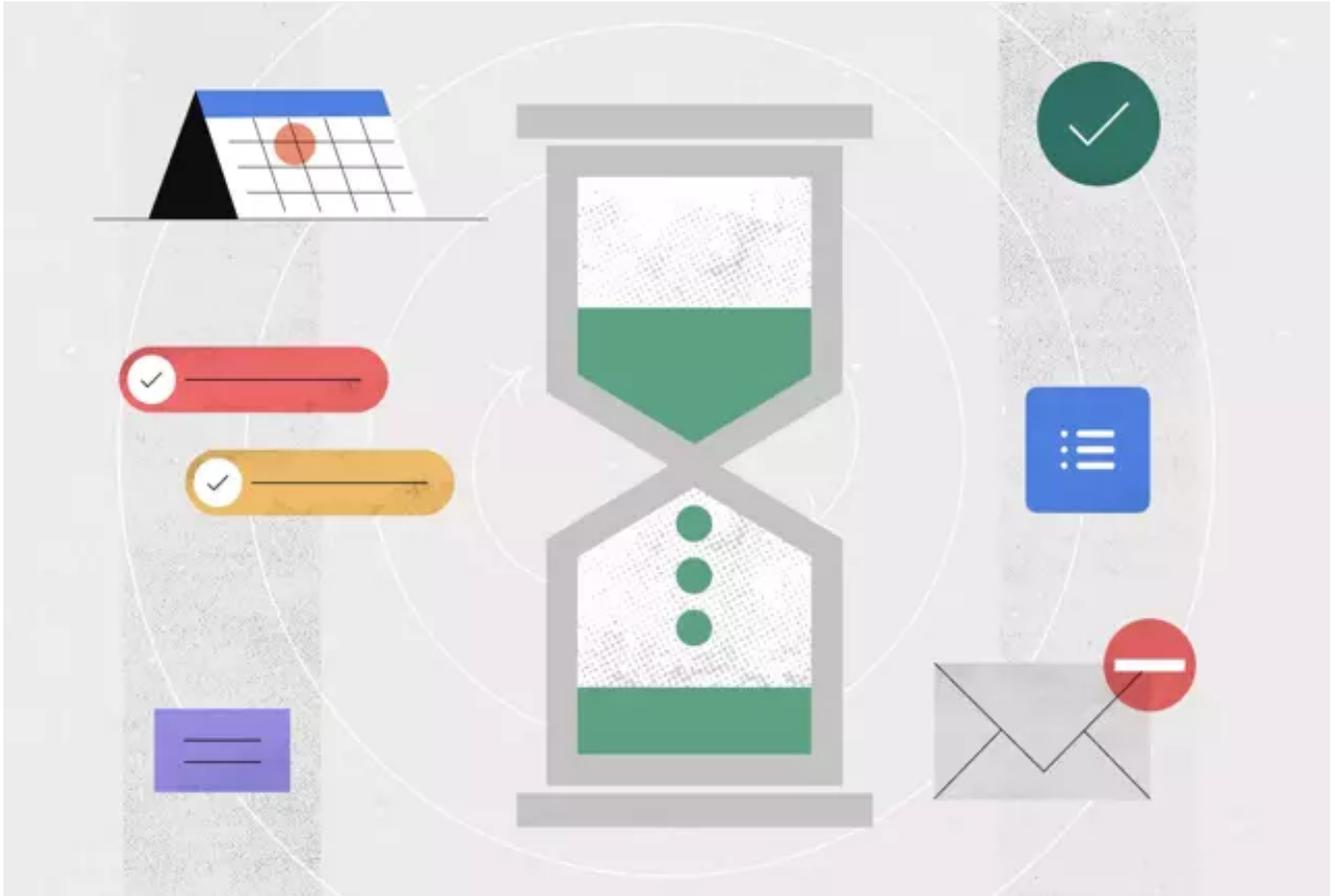




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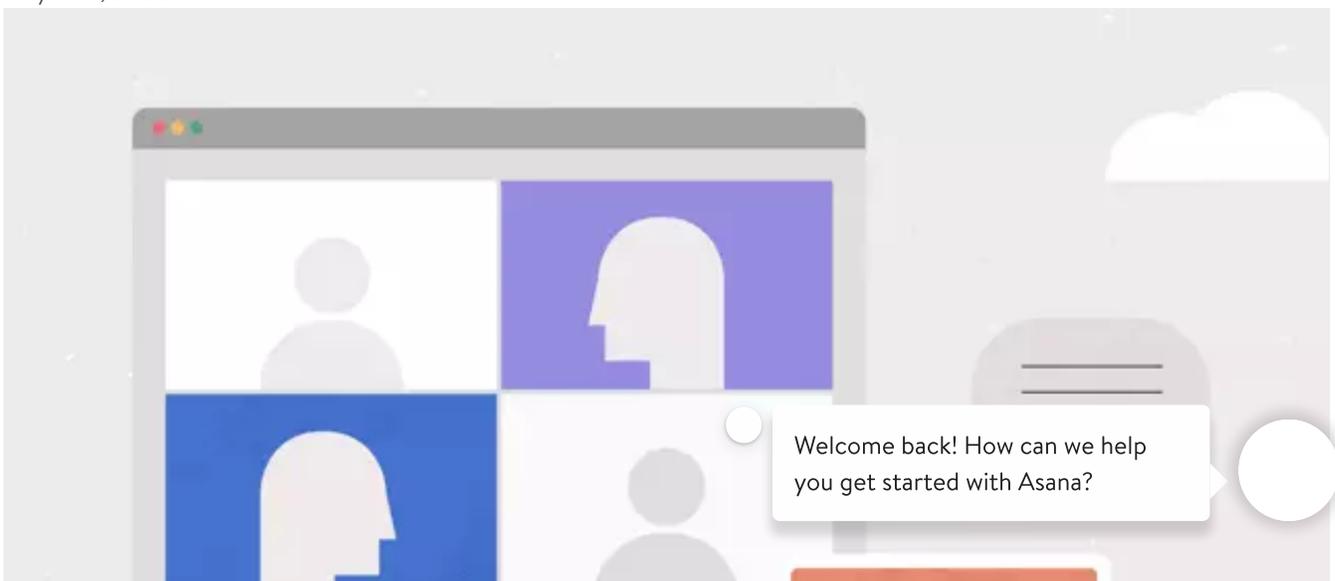
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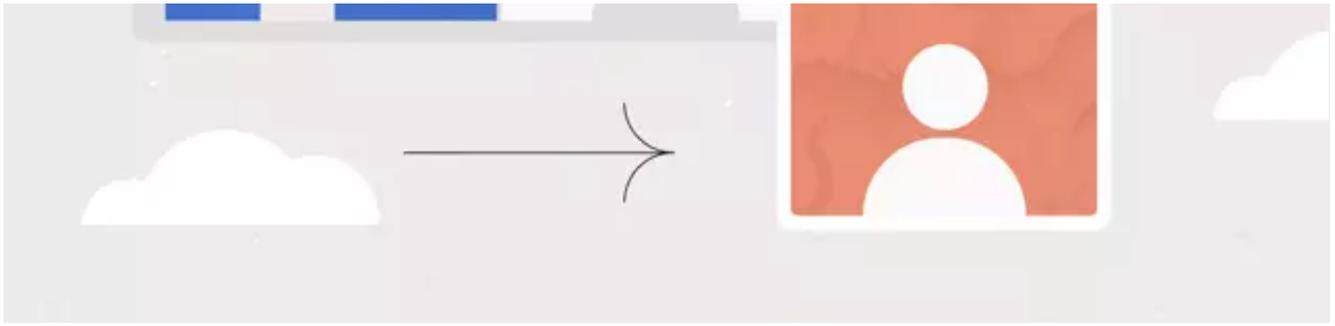


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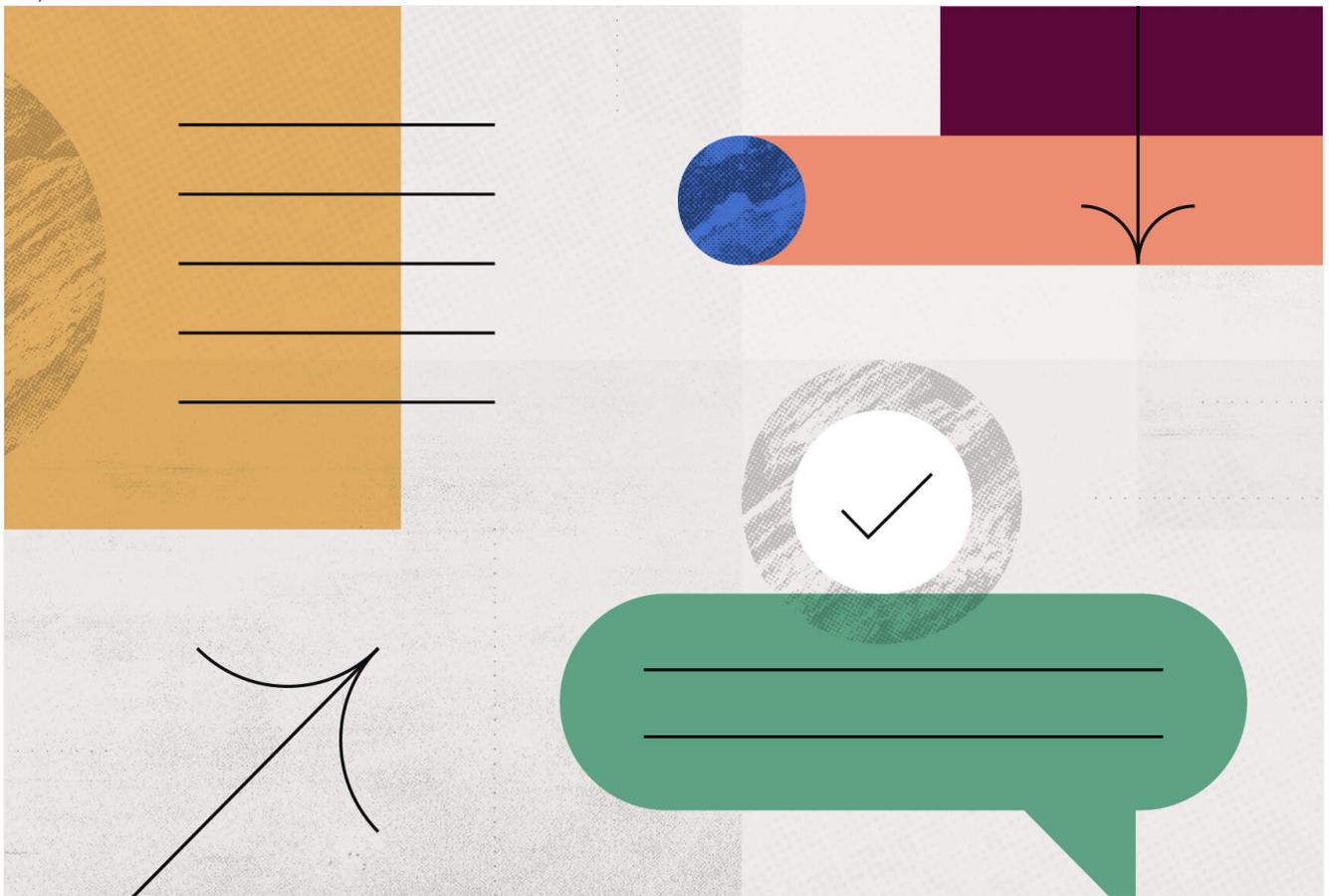
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