

WORK TIME REDUCTION: THE 4-DAY WORK WEEK

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Research into work time has focused on multiple themes such as social struggles to reduce it, links with technological and organisational innovation and the emergence of new ways of reorganising it in economic organisations (Epstein and Kalleberg, 2001, van den Scott, 2014). In this context, the 4-day work week (4DWW) has become a topic of growing international interest (Bird, 2010; Fitzgerald, 1996; Gomes, 2021; Gomes & Fontinha, 2023; Kallis et al., 2013; Lepinteur, 2019; Lewis et al., 2023; Reidhead, 2022; Stagl, 2014; Veal, 2022), not only because it allows workers more free time and, at the same time, controls the negative effects of long working hours, promoting workers' well-being and performance (Chakraborty et al., 2022; Chung, 2022; Coote et al., 2021; Lepinteur, 2019; Stronge et al., 2019), but also for its potential to respond to some of today's contemporary challenges, such as technological innovation, environmental problems, gender inequalities and workers' health and well-being challenges (Chung, 2022; Coote et al., 2021; Delaney & Casey, 2021; Gomes, 2021; Veal, 2022). It can take different forms in terms of reducing working hours, and the day off is not necessarily Friday (Bird, 2010; Chung, 2022). Several companies and organisations in different countries such as Belgium, the USA, Scotland, Spain, Iceland, Japan, New Zealand,

the United Kingdom and Portugal have experimented with moving to a 4-day work week through pilot projects (Chung, 2022; Lewis et al., 2023; O'Loughlin, 2022; Sanchis, 2023; Shalders, 2023; Gomes & Fontinha, 2023b).

The literature reports different effects of implementing the 4DWW. On the one hand, it is suggested that managers positively associate it with productivity increases, self-evaluated performance, job satisfaction and reductions in absenteeism, turnover, commuting costs and levels of anxiety and stress, while workers relate it to more time for leisure, family and personal tasks and improvements in individual well-being (Bird, 2010; Coote et al., 2021; Delaney & Casey, 2021; Golden, 2012; Hartman & Weaver, 1977; Laker & Roulet, 2019; Lepinteur, 2019; Perpetual Guardian White Paper, 2019; Rafferty et al., 2022; Schor et al., 2022; Topp et al., 2022; Wadsworth & Facer, 2016). In addition, there tends to be greater employee engagement, largely explained by the increased motivation provided by better working conditions (Chakraborty et al., 2022; Lepinteur, 2019; Rafferty et al., 2022; Reidhead, 2022) and improvements in employee effort, in return for the flexibility granted by employers (Perpetual Guardian White Paper, 2019). Outside of work, environmental benefits are also mentioned, due to the reduction in commuting and energy use in organisations (Gomes, 2021; Schor et al., 2022), as well as the reduction of conflict between work and family (Chung, 2022; Lewis et al., 2023; Travis, 2010).

The scientific literature also suggests problems associated with work intensification, which leads to losses in terms of productivity and work-related stress (Delaney & Casey, 2021; Lepinteur, 2019; Rafferty et al., 2022; Topp et al., 2022), decreased opportunities for innovation through reduced interaction between workers (Delaney & Casey, 2021; Lewis et al., 2023), and also difficulties with the implementation itself, which can lead to the 4-day work week being withdrawn (Laker & Roulet, 2019; Wadsworth & Facer, 2016). In this sense, it is important to emphasise that the 4-day work week may not work equally for all companies or all sectors (Chung, 2022; Laker & Roulet, 2019; Rafferty et al., 2022). In addition to these arguments in favour and against, it should also be noted that recent literature (Campbell, 2023) reports that no longitudinal scientific research can provide a better perspective on how the results of the 4-day work week evolve over time.

This communication aims to critically assess the most frequently cited arguments in the scientific literature for adopting shorter weeks. The arguments in favour of implementing the 4-day work week can be clustered into the following four groups: increasing productivity,

improving general well-being, improve gender imbalances, and reducing environmental impact. This assessment is articulated with what can be learned about the design and reported results of the main 4-day work week (4DWW) pilot projects carried out over the last half decade and the limitations of these trials.

The arguments in favour of the 4DWW cover many fields and are ideologically diversified. The more ancient literature placed more emphasis on the revolutionary ideal of human emancipation. It considered the 4DWW as a way of freeing people from the burden of work and giving them more time for leisure and creative activities (Hunnicut, 1992). Proponents of the 4DWW now emphasise other potential outcomes rather than an increase in leisure time (Veal, 2023). Although the demand for a 4DWW is for shorter statutory working hours, its advocates often refer to the consequences of working long hours to make the case for the 4DWW. Existing literature proves that the hazards of working overtime may not necessarily apply to standard working hours. Therefore, it is argued that the impact of shorter working hours should be assessed regarding the existing statutory schedules. When researching empirical evidence on the positive effects of shorter standard working weeks on productivity, workers' well-being, gender inequality, and reducing environmental impact, some conclusions are somewhat limited and, sometimes, poorly robust.

It can be concluded that the discussion on working time reduction is timely, considering the stagnation of hours worked, the recent productivity gains driven by technological change and the positive effects on workers' well-being, and the sustainable development goals and the 2030 agenda. However, 4DWW trials should be based on sound and robust policy evaluation methods and identify the advantages, disadvantages, and challenges of implementing a 4DWW in the workplace over time.

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