

# Unlocking Productivity and Well-Being: Exploring the Four-Day Workweek and Design Thinking for Its Implementation

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## Abstract

*Work life balance is the most important factor for employees of this generation in keeping their jobs. Meanwhile, the five-day workweek working system that is implemented today is raising concerns as the workload increases which leads to work life imbalance, declining productivity, also burnouts and mental-health issues of the employees. To overcome it, this study proposes a four-day workweek system as a possible solution. The study aims to explore the potential benefits of a fourday workweek as well as the usage of design thinking method in enabling a successful implementation of the system. By examining factors like work scheduling, business needs, and employee satisfaction, this study also seeks to optimize the four-day workweek model. The study finds that four-day work week can increase employees' well-being, mainly in improving work-life balance and decreasing fatigue and stress with more day off, also increases job satisfaction and employee's motivation to contribute more to their jobs. Using design thinking method may help the implementation of this system with understanding employee needs and preferences, identifying potential challenges and develop solutions, optimizing collaboration and communication, and evaluating and iterating the whole process. By prioritizing human-centered solutions and iterating based on feedback, organizations can create a work model that benefits both employees and the organization's overall goals.*

**Keywords:** Design Thinking, Four-Day Workweek, Work Life Balance

## Introduction

The concept of a five-day workweek has become a cornerstone of work cultures worldwide. Introduced in the 20th century to improve working conditions and employee well-being, it has since become the standard. However, concerns are rising regarding its impact on modern work life. Increasing workloads and work-life imbalance are leading to employee burnout, declining productivity, and mental health issues (Topp et al., 2022). Work life balance is generally related to balancing or maintaining harmony in life (Fidyani and Prasetya., 2018). Ganapathi (2016), defines work life balance as an ability in which employees can freely use flexible working hours to balance their work or with other nonwork commitments such as family, hobbies, art, studies. According to a survey from jobstreet, work life balance becomes the main priority of the majority of the job seekers from Southeast Asia and Hongkong with the value of 71%. And in the same

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survey, about 43% of respondents from Indonesia states that work life is the most important factor they take careful consideration in seeking jobs (ANTARA., 2023). Some research has studied work life balance regarding its' impact, such as on employee performance (Maslichah and Hidayat., 2017; Rondonuwu et al., 2018; Ramdhani and Rasto., 2021), job satisfaction (Pratama and Wardani., 2017; Lusri and Siagian., 2017), and work quality (Adiawaty and Bernhard., 2023). This also highlights the importance of work life balance for employees.

In response to the raising concerns of the current five-day workweek system's impact, the four-day workweek concept is gaining traction as a potential solution. This model proposes condensed workweeks with longer daily hours, granting employees an additional day off for rest and rejuvenation (Hamermesh & Biddle, 2022). Research suggests this approach can yield positive outcomes, including increased productivity, reduced absenteeism, and improved employee satisfaction (Harika & Mansoor Pasha, 2019).

However, implementing a four-day workweek presents challenges. Potential drawbacks include reduced output and service quality in certain industries (Spencer, 2022). Careful planning and design thinking are crucial for successful implementation, ensuring both employee well-being and operational needs are met (Sng et al., 2021). This study aims to explore the potential benefits of a four-day workweek compared to the traditional five-day model. Additionally, it investigates how design thinking can facilitate the successful adoption of this alternative work schedule. By examining factors like work scheduling, business needs, and employee satisfaction, this research seeks to optimize the four-day workweek model for diverse work environments (Pringle & Bender, 2010).

The four-day workweek model is an attractive alternative to the traditional five-day work schedule. This concept involves redistributing working hours so that employees work for four days a week, with longer hours per day, but have three consecutive days off. This idea emerged in response to changes in work dynamics and employee needs. With technological advancements and changing cultures, more organizations are looking for ways to increase flexibility and work-life balance for their employees. The history of the four-day workweek can be traced back to various experiments and initiatives in the 20th century.

One of the most famous examples is the experiment in Gothenburg, Sweden in the 1970s, where some government employees were given the opportunity to work four days a week with full pay. This experiment yielded interesting results, including increased productivity and job satisfaction, although there is no clear consensus on its sustainability (Reidhead, 2022). In recent decades, interest in the four-day workweek model has grown, particularly in countries with high levels of well-being. Countries such as New Zealand, Iceland, and the Netherlands have adopted similar experiments with the aim of improving employee well-being and overall productivity.

Additionally, many private companies have also started their own initiatives to implement this work model as part of efforts to create a more inclusive and balanced work culture. However, the implementation of the four-day workweek model is not

without controversy. Some critics worry about its potential negative impact on productivity and customer service, while others suspect that this change may not be suitable for specific business needs. Therefore, it is important to understand the historical context and development of this work model and to conduct a thorough evaluation of its impact on various aspects of the organization and employees (Bajaj et al., 2023).

The implementation of the four-day workweek model has shown significant benefits for employee well-being. One of the main benefits often associated with it is improved work-life balance. With three consecutive days off each week, employees have more time to relax, pursue hobbies, and spend time with family. This can help reduce stress levels and fatigue that often result from a busy work schedule (Deshpande, 2023). Furthermore, the four-day work model can also contribute to improved mental and physical health of employees. By having more time for rest and engaging in activities outside of work, employees can reduce work-related fatigue and regain their energy. This can reduce the risk of burnout and other mental health issues that often result from excessive work pressure (Lonez & Ganal, 2018).

Another benefit of a four-day workweek is increased job satisfaction and employee motivation. With a more flexible work schedule and more time to pursue personal interests, employees tend to be more satisfied with their work and more motivated to make the most of their contributions. This can have a positive impact on the overall productivity and performance of the organization (Jahal et al., 2024). It is also important to note that the four-day workweek model can help create a more inclusive and balanced work culture. By giving employees more time to balance their personal and professional lives, organizations can improve employee satisfaction and loyalty. Additionally, this work model can also be an effective tool in attracting and retaining top talent in an increasingly competitive industry (Irrawati et al., 2023).

However, it is important to remember that the benefits of the four-day workweek model can vary depending on the organizational context and employee characteristics. Therefore, it is important to conduct a careful and thorough evaluation of its impact on various aspects of employee well-being before adopting it widely in an organization. The four-day workweek model has been a subject of heated debate regarding its impact on employee productivity and creativity. There is an argument that a shorter work schedule can increase productivity because it provides employees with more time to rest. By reducing weekly working hours, employees have the opportunity to rejuvenate themselves and reduce fatigue, which in turn can increase focus and efficiency in their work (Oktavian et al., 2022).

However, there is also an argument that reducing working hours can reduce productivity because employees have less work time to complete their tasks. Moreover, when employees have a more concentrated schedule in four days, they may experience increased stress to finish their work within a shorter timeframe. This can lead to a decrease in productivity as the quality of work may be affected by greater time pressure.

In addition to productivity, the impact of a four-day workweek on creativity is also a concern. Some argue that a shorter work schedule can enhance employee creativity

by providing additional free time for reflection, allowing their minds to rest, and exploring new ideas outside of work. On the other hand, there are concerns that four denser workdays might limit opportunities for employees to collaborate and share ideas, potentially hindering the overall team creativity. Empirical studies on the impact of a four-day workweek on productivity and creativity are still limited and often yield mixed findings. Some studies show that a four-day workweek can improve productivity and creativity, while others find no significant or even negative impacts.

Therefore, it's crucial to consider contextual factors, such as the type of work, employee characteristics, and organizational culture, when evaluating the influence of a four-day workweek on productivity and creativity. The four-day workweek model has the potential to positively impact the environment by reducing carbon emissions and energy consumption. By cutting one workday per week, employees have the opportunity to reduce the frequency of commuting to work. This can lead to a significant decrease in greenhouse gas emissions generated by transportation, especially if employees use private vehicles or emission-producing public transportation.

This reduction contributes to global efforts to minimize carbon footprints and promote environmental sustainability. Furthermore, reducing working hours can help decrease energy consumption in the workplace. By shortening daily working hours or reducing workdays per week, organizations can lower their use of electricity, heating, and cooling in office buildings. This not only reduces energy costs for the organization but also helps conserve valuable natural resources and mitigates the environmental impact resulting from energy consumption.

Implementing the four-day workweek model can also encourage the adoption of more sustainable work practices. Organizations adopting this work model might be more inclined to embrace other policies that support environmental sustainability, such as waste reduction programs, renewable energy use, or promoting sustainable mobility options. This reflects the organization's commitment to acting responsibly towards the environment and society, aligning with ever-increasing sustainability demands. However, it's important to remember that the environmental impact of a four-day workweek can vary depending on contextual factors, such as geographical location, type of work, and organizational practices.

For instance, organizations with remote workers or energy-intensive production needs might have a different environmental impact compared to organizations with a more flexible work model. Therefore, evaluating the environmental impact of a four-day workweek should consider various factors relevant to the specific organizational context. While the four-day workweek holds promise for various benefits, successful implementation requires careful planning and consideration of organizational needs and employee well-being. Here, design thinking emerges as a valuable framework for designing and implementing this work model effectively.

Design thinking is a human-centered approach to problem-solving that emphasizes empathy, creativity, and iteration (Rosch et al., 2023). It involves understanding the needs of stakeholders (both employees and the organization), exploring

innovative solutions, prototyping those solutions, and testing them in real-world settings (Brown and Wyatt., 2010). This iterative approach allows for continuous improvement and ensures the implemented model aligns with the specific context and needs of the organization. According to The Stanford University - Hasso Plattner Institute of Design (2010) the design thinking process is carried out in five steps, which are empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test (Carrol., 2015).

Empathize phase requires the designer to look at and understand the perspective of the user in facing the problem. In this phase data are acquired through interviews and observations and wrote down in an empathy map of the users. In the define phase, data that are acquired is analyzed and synthesized to reach the heart of the problem. And in the ideate phase, the idea for the solution to the problem is created. These first three steps in design thinking process from empathy to define and ideate are the crucial steps in fixating the solution to the problem (Putri et al., 2022). The solution that is created should meet all the needs and requirements of the stakeholders. In the prototype phase, the solution is then implemented to a model which resembles the intended working product. Then finally in the test phase, the model of the solution is brought to trial with the users. This phase can be done continuously until the solution can meet all the expectations of the stakeholders (Baskoro and Haq., 2020).

## **Research Methods**

This study uses a mixed methods approach to explore the impact of implementing a four-day work week on employee productivity and well-being, as well as the role of design thinking in its implementation. The research will begin with a literature study to understand the basic concepts and global context related to the four-day work week and design thinking. Then, a quantitative survey will be conducted of a number of companies that have implemented a four-day work week, to measure changes in employee productivity and well-being. This data will be analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Furthermore, in-depth interviews with managers and employees of the company will be conducted to gain qualitative insight into their experiences and challenges faced during the implementation process. Results from surveys and interviews will be analyzed using the triangulation method to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. Finally, the design thinking approach will be applied in several workshops with companies interested in implementing a four-day work week, to design an effective implementation strategy that suits their specific needs. This method is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the benefits and challenges of the four-day work week, as well as practical guidance for its implementation using the principles of design thinking.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Employee Well-being Benefits of a Four-Day Workweek Model**

Studies suggest that implementing a four-day workweek model can significantly improve employee well-being. Employees with shorter workweeks tend to experience

greater happiness and life satisfaction. This is because they have more free time to pursue hobbies, spend time with loved ones, and participate in social activities. These benefits extend beyond happiness, with the four-day workweek model also leading to improved physical and mental health due to increased rest time and reduced stress levels. Research shows that employees with a healthy work-life balance tend to have better overall health.

### **The four-day workweek can also boost employee productivity**

Employees who feel refreshed and emotionally fulfilled are typically more focused and efficient in their work. Additionally, they are more likely to stay motivated and dedicated, leading to potential gains in overall organizational performance. However, the impact on productivity isn't a one-size-fits-all scenario. Factors like the nature of the job, company culture, and individual work styles can influence how effectively tasks are completed within a shorter workweek. Careful consideration of these elements is crucial to ensure a four-day workweek maximizes benefits for both employee well-being and organizational performance.

### **Impact on productivity**

Studies on the four-day workweek show mixed results for productivity. While some suggest increased rest boosts focus and efficiency, others find less work time hinders task completion. Factors like work habits and job type likely influence the outcome. Though some research highlights improved productivity with a four-day week due to better rested employees, concerns exist about reduced work hours impacting task completion. Individual work styles and time management may also play a role. Additionally, work quality should be considered. While efficiency might increase, rushing tasks could compromise quality. Ultimately, the four-day workweek's impact on productivity varies based on context. Careful evaluation of job types, employee characteristics, and company culture is crucial to optimize work schedules and maximize both well-being and performance.

### **Impact on Creativity**

Studies investigating the four-day workweek's impact on creativity present a complex picture. Proponents argue the extra free time allows for reflection and exploration, potentially sparking innovation. Employees might use this time to experiment with new ideas outside the work context, leading to creative solutions for workplace challenges. However, this benefit is counterbalanced by concerns about reduced collaboration. Fewer work hours could limit opportunities to brainstorm and share ideas, which are crucial for creative teams. Additionally, a more condensed work schedule might lead to time pressure, hindering in-depth exploration and creative thinking.

The overall impact hinges on various factors beyond just work hours. A company culture that embraces innovation, openness, and experimentation fosters individual creativity. While a four-day workweek can contribute to this environment, it needs to be accompanied by practices that support effective creative processes. For instance, the nature of the job itself plays a role. Roles requiring high creativity might benefit more from a shorter workweek, while others might function better with a traditional schedule

that facilitates collaboration. Additionally, individual preferences matter. Some employees might value the extra time for personal creative pursuits, while others might prioritize collaboration opportunities within a five-day schedule.

### **Environment aspect**

Literature studies reveal interesting findings on its environmental impact. One key finding is the potential for significant reductions in carbon emissions and energy consumption. By providing one additional day of rest, this work model can reduce the frequency of employee commutes, resulting in a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from transportation. Additionally, the reduction in working hours can contribute to reduced energy consumption in the workplace. By reducing daily working hours or reducing the number of workdays in a week, organizations can reduce their use of electricity, heating, and cooling in office buildings. This not only reduces operational costs for organizations but also helps reduce the use of valuable natural resources and the environmental impact of energy consumption.

The implementation of the four-day workweek model can also encourage the adoption of more sustainable work practices. Organizations that adopt this work model are also more likely to implement other policies that support environmental sustainability, such as using renewable energy, reducing waste, or promoting sustainable mobility. This reflects the organization's commitment to social and environmental responsibility and contributes positively to global efforts to protect the environment. However, it is important to note that the environmental impact of the four-day workweek model can vary depending on contextual factors. Factors such as geographic location, type of work, and organizational practices can affect the extent to which this work model can have a positive impact on the environment. Therefore, careful evaluation is needed to understand the full impact of this work model and ensure that the steps taken are aligned with environmental sustainability goals.

### **Factors Influencing the Success of a 4-Day Workweek System**

To understand the success or failure of a four-day workweek system, it is important to consider several factors that influence it. First, cultural and structural factors within the organization play a significant role. Organizations with a culture that is open to innovation and change, as well as flexibility in structure and policies, are more likely to be successful in implementing this work model. A work culture that supports work-life balance can also increase employee acceptance of change. Next, effective involvement and communication from management are crucial. Management that provides active support, opens up two-way communication channels, and provides clear clarification of goals and expectations will help reduce resistance and increase acceptance of the new work model.

Employee involvement in the planning and implementation process is also important to create a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for change. In addition, technical and operational factors must be carefully considered. Changes in the work time structure can affect operational processes, including scheduling, task management, and collaboration between teams. Therefore, supporting information systems and technology

need to be adapted to facilitate change and ensure smooth day-to-day operations. Furthermore, the psychological and social factors of employees also play an important role. Employees may experience discomfort or anxiety related to changes in their work schedules. Therefore, support and training programs designed to help employees adjust to the new work model can be very beneficial.

Additionally, building an inclusive and supportive work culture can help reduce social tension and improve team collaboration. Finally, continuous evaluation and adjustment are key to the long-term success of a four-day workweek system. Organizations need to take the time to evaluate the impact of the new work model on employee well-being, productivity, work quality, and environmental sustainability. Feedback from employees and other stakeholders should be taken seriously and integrated into the ongoing planning and decision-making process. With an adaptive and responsive approach to change, organizations can optimize the success of a four-day workweek system and achieve the expected benefits for all stakeholders.

### **Advantages and Disadvantages of a 4-Day Workweek System**

The advantages and disadvantages of a four-day workweek system need to be analyzed in depth to understand its implications and impact on organizations and employees. One of the most notable advantages of this work model is improved employee well-being. By providing additional free time, employees have the opportunity to restore their energy, maintain a work-life balance, and reduce stress and fatigue levels that are often associated with a busy work schedule. A four-day workweek model can increase employee satisfaction and improve workforce retention. Employees are more likely to be engaged and motivated when they feel valued and supported by their organization. By providing flexibility in work schedules and giving additional time for activities outside of work, organizations can create a more fulfilling work environment and build stronger relationships with employees.

However, there are also some disadvantages to consider in implementing a four-day workweek model. One frequently cited disadvantage is the potential for decreased productivity. While many studies show that this work model can increase productivity in the long term, there is also the possibility that reduced work hours can disrupt workflow and reduce employee focus in the short term. Reduced work hours can also lead to increased pressure on employees to complete tasks in a shorter amount of time. This can result in increased stress and performance anxiety, which can negatively impact employee mental and physical well-being. Therefore, it is important to ensure that this work model is implemented wisely and is accompanied by adequate support for employees.

Additionally, the environmental impact of a four-day workweek model also needs to be considered. While reducing work hours can reduce carbon emissions and energy consumption, this change can also lead to increased energy use in the workplace on remaining workdays. Therefore, organizations need to conduct a thorough evaluation of the environmental impact of this change and find ways to reduce their overall carbon footprint. By considering these factors holistically, organizations can create a balanced, fulfilling, and sustainable work environment for their employees. Therefore, a thorough



analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of this work model is important to ensure that the decision made is beneficial for all stakeholders.

### **The Effectiveness of a 4-Day Workweek System**

When evaluating the effectiveness of a four-day workweek system, it is important to consider several factors that affect organizational performance and outcomes. One aspect to consider is the impact of this work system on employee productivity. While reduced work hours can lead to additional rest time and improve employee well-being, it is important to ensure that this does not come at the expense of overall organizational productivity. Therefore, regular evaluations of productivity performance need to be conducted to ensure that the change in work schedule does not disrupt efficiency and overall performance.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of a four-day workweek system can also be assessed from the perspective of the quality of work produced. While reduced work hours can lead to increased well-being and work-life balance, it is also important to ensure that the quality of work is not negatively affected. Organizations need to closely monitor the quality of service or products produced in the context of this change in work schedule and take steps to improve or adjust work processes if necessary.

Next, the effectiveness of a four-day workweek system can also be assessed by the level of employee engagement and satisfaction. If the change in work schedule increases employee satisfaction and engagement, this can have a positive impact on morale, motivation, and workforce retention. Regular evaluations of employee engagement levels and their feedback on the change in work schedule can help organizations identify areas that need improvement or adjustment to maximize the effectiveness of the work system.

Additionally, the effectiveness of a four-day workweek system can also be assessed by its impact on environmental sustainability. If the change in work schedule results in a decrease in carbon emissions or energy consumption in the workplace, this can lead to long-term benefits for the environment. Organizations need to monitor and evaluate the environmental impact of this change and take steps to strengthen and broaden environmental sustainability across the organization.

Finally, the effectiveness of a four-day workweek system can also be assessed from the financial and operational perspective of the organization. Evaluating the costs and benefits of this change in work schedule, including the costs of reduced work hours, potential productivity gains, and the impact on revenue or profit margins, can provide valuable insights into the overall effectiveness of this new work system. By considering all of these factors holistically, organizations can evaluate and improve the effectiveness of a four-day workweek system to achieve their goals optimally.

### **Conclusion**

A four-day workweek can improve employee well-being by providing more free time, potentially increasing their happiness, life satisfaction, and productivity. Employees who have more time for hobbies, family, and social activities feel more refreshed and

focused in their work. In addition, the system can reduce carbon emissions and energy consumption. However, challenges including concerns about work quality, reduced collaboration, and time pressures need to be noted. Successful implementation depends on an organizational culture that is open to change, management support, employee engagement, and technology customization and training. Design thinking can help design these systems effectively, ensuring alignment with the needs of the organization and employees through an iterative and feedback-based approach. Continuous evaluation is important to assess productivity, quality of work, employee engagement, and operational aspects.

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