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## Four-Day Work Week Models: Global Experiments and Applicability in Emerging Economies

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### Abstract

The four-day work week (4DWW) has gained global prominence as governments and organizations explore new models to enhance productivity and employee well-being. This study synthesizes evidence from major international trials, systematic reviews, and policy analyses to assess the applicability of 4DWW models in emerging economies. Drawing on secondary data from influential experiments conducted in New Zealand, Iceland, Japan, and the United Kingdom, as well as comprehensive reviews and institutional assessments, the analysis identifies consistent improvements in job satisfaction, mental health, work-life balance, and organizational performance. Systematic evaluations highlight that reduced working hours without pay loss can maintain or increase productivity when supported by effective workflow redesign and management practices. While global findings provide strong empirical support for the 4DWW, their direct transferability to emerging economies requires careful contextualization due to structural challenges such as informality, sectoral heterogeneity, and uneven productivity baselines. The study concludes that, with tailored adaptation, the four-day work week presents a promising framework for promoting sustainable work practices, advancing gender equity, and strengthening long-term economic resilience in emerging markets.

**Keywords:** Four-day work week; Reduced working hours, Global work experiments, Productivity, Employee well-being, Emerging economies, Work-life balance, Organizational performance, Labor policy, Gender equity.

### Introduction

In recent years, the four-day work week (4DWW) has shifted from a novel organizational experiment to a globally debated policy proposition aimed at reshaping work, productivity, and employee well-being. Early empirical interest stems from foundational international reviews on working time and productivity (International Labour Organization, 2012), with momentum increasing following high-profile trials across different economic contexts.

Pioneering experiments such as Perpetual Guardian's implementation in New Zealand (Haar, 2018; Delaney *et al.*, 2018), Microsoft Japan's Work Life Choice Challenge (Microsoft Japan, 2019), and national-level pilots in Iceland (Autonomy & Alda, 2021; IZA, 2021) consistently demonstrated improvements in worker satisfaction, reduced burnout, and stable or enhanced productivity. These findings prompted more systematic evaluations, including the UK's large multi-industry pilot coordinated by Autonomy, 4 Day Week Global, and the University of Cambridge (2023), which reaffirmed the broad benefits of reduced working hours without pay cuts.

Academic literature has further consolidated insights through comprehensive reviews such as Campbell's (2024) chronological and systematic examination, which highlights how 4DWW research has evolved across labor economics,

organizational studies, and public policy. Policymakers and scholarly analyses have also emphasized examining variations in implementation models such as compressed schedules, reduced-hour formats, sector-specific adaptations, and phased rollouts (European Commission, 2023). Gender equity discussions are increasingly relevant, with Mukherjee (2021) emphasizing the potential of shorter work weeks to improve women's labor force participation and reduce unpaid care burdens.

While advanced economies provide substantial empirical evidence, emerging economies remain at an exploratory stage. Their socio-economic conditions, labor-market informality, and sectoral heterogeneity shape the feasibility and outcomes of 4DWW adoption. Nonetheless, global findings on well-being, organizational performance, and social outcomes indicate promising pathways for adaptation in diverse contexts. As international institutions evaluate the external validity of global pilots (European Commission, 2023; World Economic Forum, 2022), understanding how these models translate into emerging economies becomes increasingly important.

This paper synthesizes evidence from global 4DWW experiments and evaluates their applicability within emerging economies. Drawing on organizational trials, systematic reviews, policy analyses, and gender-focused research, the

study identifies lessons and enabling conditions essential for informed policymaking and context-specific adaptation.

## Literature Review

Research on the four-day work week has expanded considerably over the past decade, supported by organizational pilots, national experiments, and systematic reviews. Early insights into working-time reduction originate from broader examinations of productivity and firm performance. The International Labour Organization's (2012) review suggested that shorter working hours could maintain or boost productivity when supported by organizational redesign—an idea that laid the groundwork for subsequent 4DWW trials.

Comprehensive academic synthesis has been advanced by reviews such as Campbell's (2024) chronological and systematic study, which maps the evolution of 4DWW scholarship and highlights consistent evidence regarding improved employee well-being, reduced stress, and stable productivity outcomes.

Empirical trials remain the core evidence base for 4DWW evaluation. New Zealand's Perpetual Guardian pilot continues to be widely cited, with Haar (2018) reporting gains in work-life balance, job satisfaction, and perceived productivity, while Delaney *et al.* (2018) documented reductions in burnout and increased engagement. These studies demonstrate that reduced working hours paired with workflow adjustments do not compromise performance.

Large-scale national experiments in Iceland (Autonomy & Alda, 2021) showed stable or improved productivity, significantly better well-being, and strong public acceptance, outcomes also emphasized by IZA (2021). In Japan, Microsoft's Work Life Choice Challenge (2019) reported substantial productivity increases and reduced resource consumption, indicating diversified efficiency gains.

More recent large multi-industry pilots, particularly the UK trial led by Autonomy, 4 Day Week Global, and the University of Cambridge (2023), provided robust evidence of reduced stress, improved job satisfaction, and strong organizational performance. Most participating organizations elected to maintain the reduced-hours model post-trial.

Policy-level analyses further contextualize these findings. The European Commission's Joint Research Centre (2023) highlighted that while pilots show strong internal validity, broader national adoption must consider sectoral structures, regulatory frameworks, and levels of informality. The World Economic Forum (2022) similarly emphasized the consistency of positive outcomes across diverse contexts, strengthening interest from governments and international employers.

Gender-specific research also contributes significantly to the discourse. Mukherjee (2021) notes that reduced working hours can improve women's labor force participation by alleviating unpaid care burdens—particularly relevant to emerging economies facing gendered labor constraints.

Overall, the literature indicates a strong convergence around productivity gains, improved well-being, and wider social benefits, while underscoring the need for context-sensitive adaptation in emerging markets with unique structural challenges.

## Methodology

This study employs a secondary research methodology synthesizing evidence from global 4DWW experiments, systematic reviews, policy analyses, and institutional reports.

The approach is grounded in qualitative content analysis, consistent with established practices in work-time and productivity research (International Labour Organization, 2012).

The data set includes systematic reviews such as Campbell's (2024) analysis, which provides consolidated empirical and theoretical insights. Empirical case studies—including the Perpetual Guardian trial in New Zealand (Haar, 2018; Delaney *et al.*, 2018), Microsoft Japan's Work Life Choice Challenge (2019), and Iceland's national experiments (Autonomy & Alda, 2021; IZA Institute of Labor Economics, 2021)—were selected for their rigorous documentation and influence in shaping global discourse.

Large-scale multi-industry evaluations such as the UK 4DWW pilot (Autonomy, 4 Day Week Global, & University of Cambridge, 2023) were included to assess generalizable outcomes across sectors. Policy-level perspectives from the European Commission (2023) and global outlooks from the World Economic Forum (2022) were reviewed to understand structural and institutional considerations relevant to national-level implementation. Gender-based implications were examined through studies such as Mukherjee (2021).

The analysis followed an iterative thematic coding process to extract key insights across categories including productivity outcomes, employee well-being, organizational restructuring, sectoral variability, and socio-economic impacts. Comparative analysis was used to identify differences across countries, industries, and institutional frameworks, consistent with global assessments (European Commission, 2023).

This methodological framework supports a comprehensive synthesis of global evidence and enables identification of transferable lessons and adaptation challenges for emerging economies implementing the four-day work week.

## Findings and Results

The global evidence strongly demonstrates that four-day work week models consistently generate positive outcomes across productivity, employee well-being, and organizational performance. Nearly all reviewed pilots show that reducing working hours without pay cuts maintains or enhances productivity. The Perpetual Guardian trial in New Zealand, for example, reported increased job satisfaction, stronger focus, and stable output (Haar, 2018; Delaney *et al.*, 2018), supporting earlier findings on the productivity implications of shorter working hours (International Labour Organization, 2012).

Large-scale national trials in Iceland involving thousands of workers across both public and private sectors revealed improved well-being and work-life balance alongside stable or increased productivity levels (Autonomy & Alda, 2021). The IZA Institute of Labor Economics (2021) emphasized the broad success of these trials, underscoring their potential applicability beyond localized contexts. Microsoft Japan's trial (2019) recorded a 40% productivity increase and reduced resource use, highlighting organizational efficiency benefits.

Recent sectorally diverse trials such as the UK 4DWW pilot (Autonomy, 4 Day Week Global, & University of Cambridge, 2023) found reduced stress, burnout, and absenteeism, along with improved job satisfaction and overall performance. A significant proportion of firms chose to continue the model beyond the trial, illustrating strong practical feasibility.

Policy evaluations support these findings. The European Commission's Joint Research Centre (2023) confirmed that global pilots show recurring improvements in employee well-being, engagement, and productivity. Although external

validity considerations remain—including labor informality and productivity baselines—these analyses underscore the strength of the empirical evidence. Global assessments by the World Economic Forum (2022) echo similar conclusions.

Social and gender-related impacts also emerge prominently. Mukherjee (2021) argues that shorter working weeks can improve female labor participation and reduce unpaid care burdens—critical considerations for emerging economies striving for gender-inclusive growth. Many pilots also reported broad improvements in work–life balance, which have implications for societal well-being beyond organizational boundaries.

Overall, global findings indicate that 4DWW models consistently enhance well-being, sustain or improve productivity, and yield broader social benefits. The results highlight strong potential for adaptation in emerging markets, provided the model is aligned with local economic structures, labor markets, and institutional capacities.

### Conclusion

The global evidence reviewed in this study clearly demonstrates that the four-day work week is a viable organizational and policy strategy that yields consistent improvements in productivity, employee well-being, and broader social outcomes. Trials in New Zealand (Haar, 2018; Delaney *et al.*, 2018), Iceland (Autonomy & Alda, 2021; IZA, 2021), Japan (Microsoft Japan, 2019), and the UK (Autonomy, 4 Day Week Global, & University of Cambridge, 2023) show that reducing working hours without reducing pay does not compromise output and instead contributes to improved performance and satisfaction.

Institutional analyses further affirm that shorter working hours, when paired with effective organizational structures, can maintain or enhance productivity (International Labour Organization, 2012; European Commission, 2023). Systematic reviews, particularly Campbell’s (2024), reinforce the interdisciplinary strength of the emerging evidence base.

For emerging economies, the 4DWW presents both opportunities and challenges. Structural characteristics—such as high informality, sectoral diversity, and varied productivity levels—require adaptive approaches rather than direct policy transfer. Nevertheless, the model offers significant potential benefits, including enhanced work–life balance, improved organizational performance, and reduced gender disparities. Insights from gender-focused research (Mukherjee, 2021) highlight the transformative potential of shorter working weeks for addressing socio-economic inequities.

In conclusion, global 4DWW experiments provide a robust foundation for considering context-specific implementation in emerging economies. While direct replication may not be feasible, the fundamental principles of reduced hours, maintained pay, workflow redesign, and supportive management practices offer a powerful framework for modernizing work systems. With strategic adaptation and institutional support, the four-day work week holds promise for promoting sustainable productivity, equitable labor outcomes, and inclusive economic development.

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