

JÓZSEF HAJDÚ*

The Four-Day Work Week as a Complex Relationships Among Time, Work, Competition and Wellbeing

Introduction

When Henry Ford¹ gave his workers a five-day week² in 1926, having Saturdays off was seen as a revolutionary shift to the typical workweek.³ Another example to mention, in the 1990s, a number of organizations went with a 9/80 schedule, where people work nine hours Monday through Thursday and eight hours every other Friday in exchange for getting alternate Fridays off.⁴

There was another societal experiment approach in the 1960s and 1970s: the idea of a ‘leisure society’. It was predicted that the pattern of falling working hours which had been experienced in Western societies in the first half of the twentieth century would continue indefinitely. The leisure society has clearly not been realised. On the contrary: contemporary industrial societies seem to be characterised by a shortage of time, experienced as ‘time squeeze’ and stress. The leisure society idea can be seen as the modern version of the age-old dream of a ‘life of ease and plenty’.⁵

* professor of law, University of Szeged Faculty of Law

¹ Henry Ford had been contemplating the idea of a five-day workweek since at least 1916 before implementing it in 1926. (Source: Don Lee (1994) *Finding the Week that Works: For Many Employers the Four-Day Schedule Hasn't Panned Out, but Alternatives Are Succeeding*; Retrieved from: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-11-13-fi-62226-story.html> (29. 09. 2022.))

² It began as an experiment at some Ford Motor Co. plants in July 1926 and became company policy by September that same year.

³ RICH BARLOW: (2022) *Is the Four-Day Workweek the Next Frontier?* Retrieved from: <https://www.bu.edu/articles/2022/pros-and-cons-of-the-four-day-workweek/> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁴ DON LEE (1994) *Finding the Week that Works: For Many Employers the Four-Day Schedule Hasn't Panned Out, but Alternatives Are Succeeding*. Retrieved from: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-11-13-fi-62226-story.html> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁵ ANTHONY J. VEAL: (2020) *Whatever Happened to the Leisure Society?* Routledge, 2020 pp. 36–52.

There is an argument to be made that modern technology has significantly speed up the way of many types of work, and that the five-day week is no longer necessary.^{6,7} With the evolution of technology and the increase in office jobs, the rule that longer hours equal more productivity is not necessarily true anymore. And with the 4-day week pilot running in countries across the world, there is a clear sense that this change in working practice could become the norm for some organisations.⁸

A 4-day workweek is a relatively new concept, brought about largely due to recent advancements in technology. Nowadays numerous countries⁹ have launched tests of four-day workweek to see if five days is too long and four days makes more sense. A four-day workweek is, ideally, a 32-hour workweek with no loss in productivity, pay, or benefits. Depending on the company and the industry, the most spread pattern of the FDWW is that everyone might work Monday through Thursday and have Fridays off (fixed day-off).¹⁰ Other possibilities include allowing each employee to choose their extra day off or having a company-wide policy of a different third day off, such as Monday or Wednesday (flexible day-off¹¹).¹² A FDWW may seem like a radical idea, but we have gradually reduced the number of hours worked within a typical workweek since the late 19th century.¹³

The main hypotheses of this paper are: 1. technical developments are the necessary precondition of the FDWW; 2. one size does not fit for every employer; 3. employee engagement itself does not improve with a FDWW, but there is a potential for enhancing

⁶ Whilst the five-day week used to be a great model that got the most out of its workers, it was born in an era where factory work was the norm. In a 19th century factory, a 5-day week was ideal.

⁷ ANDREW BARNES: “*The 4 Day Week, How the Flexible Work Revolution Can Increase Productivity, Profitability and Well-being, and Create a Sustainable Future*,” Introduction and Page 3. Brown Book Group, 2020.

⁸ Welcome to the 4-day work week pilot program! Retrieved from: <https://www.4dayweek.com/pilot-program> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁹ For example, 60 North American (USA plus Canada) companies switch to a four-day week, with over 4,000 employees cumulatively participating in the trials by 2022. This is based on the 100-80-100™ model, meaning workers get 100% of the pay, for 80% of the time, in exchange for a commitment to maintaining at least 100% of the output.

¹⁰ A fixed day-off helps maintain a consistent routine: everybody – co-workers, customers, business partners, etc. – knows exactly what to expect, and it is easy to schedule cross-functional meetings. Of course, a FDWW with a fixed day-off can be challenging for customer support and customer-facing teams who want (or need) to be available throughout the week. This is why many customer success teams end up taking a staggered approach, in which some team members cover one part of the week and others cover the remaining days to ensure continuous availability.

¹¹ With a flexible 4-day workweek, team members can choose their free day flexibly and spontaneously. This approach is ideal for companies and teams that prioritize flexibility above anything else. But the flexibility that is great on an individual level can bring its own challenges for the larger team: if everyone takes different days off, and schedules change from week to week, this approach can be confusing and complicated. Scheduling meetings with different team members can become difficult, as it is harder to stay on top of who is available when. Plus, team members who prefer predictable schedules to optimize their deep work times may find this approach disruptive.

¹² 4 Day Week Global. “Moving to a 4 Day Week; Retrieved from: <https://www.4dayweek.com/get-started> (29. 09. 2022); BETTINA SPECHT: (2021) *4-day workweek: which day should you take off?* Retrieved from: <https://wildbit.com> (29. 09. 2022.)

¹³ For example, in 1890, the United States government estimated that a full-time employee within a manufacturing plant worked an average of 100 hours a week. By the mid-20th century, manufacturing employees only worked 40 hours a week.

employers' competitiveness; 4. work-life balance and wellbeing of employees does improve with FDWW; 5. it might help to overcome the forthcoming 2022-23 energy crisis.

The article introduces the main features of the FDWW, including its positive and negative factors, its influence on competitiveness, the link between FDWW and automation and some decisive countries' (including Hungary) and/or companies' experiments.

1. Definition of four-day workweek

The brief definition of the four-day workweek (hereinafter: FDWW): The idea is simple – employees would work four days a week while getting paid the same and earning the same benefits, but with the same workload. (in sum: four-day working week of around 32 hours, with no less pay).¹⁴

A four-day workweek can be defined in two ways: the first is when an employee compresses their full-time hours (typically 35 hours) over a four-day period. And the second is reducing an employee's hours (typically to 28 hours) over four days, so they are then able to have a three-day weekend.

The basic aims of FDWW are twofold. On the one hand, it serves companies to operate with fewer meetings and more independent work. Furthermore, the following pragmatical strategies might be followed by the companies engaged in FDWW: 1. Prioritize and re-evaluate tasks; 2. Minimize interruptions and distractions; 3. Increase automation; 4. Emphasize human creativity; 5. Limit work-based social events; 6. Reduce and shorten meetings; 7. Spend less time on email and messaging apps; 8. Define clear goals; 9. Set goals that are achievable within a shorter workweek; 10. Measure outcomes, not hours; 11. Implement asynchronous work; 12. Maintain employee trust; 14. Solicit regular employee feedback; 15. Learn from trial and error; 16. It is an effective way to promote worker productivity and wellbeing (reduced employee burnout and improved employee retention); 17. Lower operating costs for an office (unless the company is already all-remote); 18. Larger applicant pool for open positions. etc.

On the other hand, the fundamental goal of a FDWW is to improve workers' quality of life. By working fewer hours overall and having three full days off, people have more time for personal priorities like these: 1. Spending quality time with family, friends, and pets; 2. Caregiving; 3. Doctor appointments; 4. Personal development; 5. Education; 6. Travel; 7. Hobbies; 8. Home maintenance and improvements and 9. Household management, etc.¹⁵

One of the important guarantees to introduce FDWW is the *new technological developments* (AI and robot coworkers), which could make it possible for employees to accomplish the same amount of work in less time and still ensure customers are supported. AI technology will significantly disrupt every aspect of every industry in every country

¹⁴ However, the long-standing debate over the FDWW poses a deeper question about the nature of work itself. The real problem is that most employees are poorly managed. Globally, eight in 10 employees are not engaged or are actively disengaged at work. These people are either watching the clock or actively working against their employer. And the desire to escape work is symptomatic of unhappy workplaces.

¹⁵ THERESA AGOVINO: (2020) *The Phenomenon of the Four-Day Workweek*. Retrieved from: <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/all-things-work/pages/four-day-workweek.aspx> (29. 09. 2022.)

including how and when we work. Within the near future, we are likely to see an increase in remote and more flexible work schedules like the 4-day workweek. The FDWW could become a reality within this century if businesses are forced to share the benefits of new technology with their employees.¹⁶

In general, the shorter working week can be envisaged or accomplished in a number of different ways: 1. For employees: In areas of the labour market benefiting significantly from automation and productivity gains, worker-led sectoral initiatives have demanded the right of employees to enjoy a share of the benefits, in the form of more free time. 2. At the firm level, progressive businesses have been implementing shorter working weeks, often finding that the initiative brings significant improvements for productivity, reputation and staff well-being. 3. At the state level, there have been calls for statutory measures and public spending to enable shorter working weeks by increasing the head-count in over-stretched areas of the public sector.¹⁷

The key ideas behind a four-day workweek is 1. to achieve the same results in fewer hours so people have more time to pursue other interests, spend time with loved ones, and manage their lives. 2. Companies could benefit through increased sales, decreased worker burnout, and lower turnover, among other positives. 3. Emphasizing results instead of hours logged means that there's no need to cut pay or benefits.

However, a four-day workweek doesn't always mean that employees maintain their pay and benefits. Some organizations have reportedly used a four-day week as a cost-saving measure.¹⁸

It also should be underline that a four-day week model does not suit every business. It is an option that is only viable for companies who can re-adapt their whole business to a new way of working. However, adopting a different way of working is a big step, so employer management need to consider whether or not a four-day week is right for their company.

2. *Evaluative considerations of FDWW: pros and cons*

2. 1. Pros

On the positive side in general, employees might really welcome having only four days of intense work obligations a week, plus three days free to spend with family or just

¹⁶ The Pros and Cons of a 4 Day Working Week; Retrieved from: <https://www.changerecruitmentgroup.com/knowledge-centre/the-pros-and-cons-of-a-4-day-working-week>(29. 09. 2022.); A four-day work week: the pros and cons (2022) Retrieved from: <https://www.reedglobal.hu/en/blog/2021/12/a-four-day-work-week-the-pros-and-cons?source=google.com> (29. 09. 2022.)

¹⁷ ROBERT SKIDELSKY: (2019) *How to achieve shorter working hours*. Retrieved from https://progressiveeconomyforum.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/PEF_Skidelsky_How_to_achieve_shorter_working_hours.pdf (29. 09. 2022.)

¹⁸ AMY FONTINELLE: (2022) The Impact of Working a 4-Day Week Society for Human Resource Management. "Retrieved from: <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/all-things-work/pages/four-day-workweek.aspx> (29. 09. 2022.); DAVID FRAYNE and WILL STRONGE ed. (2022) *Future Fit For Wales, The roadmap to a shorter working week*. Report by the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, Retrieved from: <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/SWW-Full-report-English.pdf> (29. 09. 2022.)

more ‘me’ time.¹⁹ Going from the standard two days off to three days—statistically, that is a 50 percent increase. They might travel more, save more on commuting and parking, and get more time with friends and family. The mainstream form of FDWW means 100 percent pay for four days in exchange for maintaining 100 percent productivity.

2. 1. 1. Increased engagement and motivation or simple effective time management

The employees’ engagement and productivity vary by countries (working cultures²⁰), by sectors,²¹ by workplaces, by working groups and by individual employees. Increased productivity basically means to finish – minimum – the five-day workload within four days. This approach might be more clearly understood when the real (net) working hours of some sample countries are displayed. Data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) show that the average annual hours worked by employed people in 2020 were the lowest in Germany at 1,332 (25.6 per week). In the USA,²² employees worked an average of 1,767 hours (34 per week), while Canadians work 1,664 hours (32 per week). Among other places experimenting with four-day workweeks, those in the United Kingdom work 26 hours per week, Spaniards work 30 hours per week, and the Japanese work 31 hours per week.²³

However, the six-hour work day would be most effective in organisations – such as hospitals – where employees work for six hours and then they just leave [the workplace] and go home. However, this kind of solution might even increase stress levels given that employees might try to fit all the work that they have been doing in eight hours into six – or if they are office workers, they might take the work home.

Another experiment published by the Harvard Business Review²⁴ shows shorter work days, a decrease from the average 8-hour work day to a 6-hour work day, increased productivity. A 2018 survey of 3,000 employees by the Workforce Institute at Kronos found more than half of full-time workers thought they could do their job in five hours a day.²⁵

¹⁹ World Economic Forum (2022) This is what the 4-day workweek means for equal rights, productivity and climate change; Retrieved from: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/02/what-the-four-day-workweek-means-for-the-future-of-employment/> (29. 09. 2022.)

²⁰ According to Bengt Lorentzon, the concept of six-hour days also jars with the strong culture of flexible working approach; One concrete example: a bank employee worked in the UK and clients wanted to stay in touch on weekends and during the evening. When he relocated to Stockholm, it was mainly over. He argues that the environment might at times feel “frustrating” for those used to putting in longer hours or getting swift responses from clients, but he is convinced that the Swedish model brings far greater benefits than drawbacks. In Sweden there is a mutual respect. The clients will wait until office hours to call or email and at the same time he will not be phoned when he is on holiday.

²¹ For example, in a real estate company there is no need for managers to have all their agents (workers) in the office at the same time, they just want to get the results and people have to deliver. However, compare that to the assistant nurses in the operation room, they cannot just leave work after six hours to go home.

²² When someone looks at these numbers, it would seem that the average American who is age 16 or older already has almost the equivalent of a four-day workweek, and workers in some other countries have even more free time.

²³ OECD (2022), Hours worked (indicator). Retrieved from: <https://data.oecd.org/emp/hours-worked.htm> doi: 10.1787/47be1c78-en (29. 09. 2022.)

²⁴ STEVE GLAVESKI: (2018) *The Case for the 6-Hour Workday*. Retrieved from: <https://hbr.org/2018/12/the-case-for-the-6-hour-workday> (29. 09. 2022.)

²⁵ KARI PAUL: (2019) *Microsoft Japan tested a four-day work week and productivity jumped by 40%*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/nov/04/microsoft-japan-four-day-work-week-productivity>

In addition, the typical – including much *waste time* – employee day is characterized by: 1. Hour-long meetings, by default, to discuss matters that can usually be handled virtually in one’s own time. 2. Unplanned interruptions, helped in no small part by open-plan offices, instant messaging platforms, and the “ding” of desktop and smartphone notifications. 3. Unnecessary consensus-seeking for reversible, non-consequential decisions. 4. The relentless pursuit of “inbox zero,” a badge of honor in most workplaces, but a symbol of proficiency at putting other people’s goals ahead of one’s own. 5. Traveling, often long-distance, to meet people face-to-face, when a phone call would suffice. 6. Switching between tasks constantly, and suffering the dreaded cognitive switching penalty as a result, leaving one feeling exhausted with little to show for it. 7. Wasting time on a specific task long after most of the value has been delivered, and 8. Rudimentary and administrative tasks.²⁶ These types of wasting time shall be avoided to manage an appropriate FDWW work schedule.

Another issue is *deep work*, which concerns human tangible capacity. Three to four hours of continuous, undisturbed deep work each day is all it takes to see a transformational change in our productivity and our lives. It is just not true that if someone stays at the office longer, he/she gets more work done. The shorter workday forces the employees to prioritize effectively, limit interruptions, and operate at a much more deliberate level for the first few hours of the day. The law of nature that is the Pareto principle²⁷ stipulates that about 20% of someone’s tasks will create about 80% of the value, so it is about focusing on those high-value tasks.²⁸

The last issue raised under this point is the *autonomy* of employees. Basically, every manager wants employees to take ownership of their work. When they give employees autonomy to do their work in any allotted amount of time, they take that power and translate it into ownership and engagement. In case of FDWW, the management’s message is clear: employees are trusted to get their work done (increased autonomy).²⁹

2. 1. 2. Work and family life balance

This is mainly an equality issue. Reduced working hours given by the FDWW can also help towards the goal of more equality between female and male family members in household things and raising children.³⁰ The policy has been shown to generate greater

²⁶ ADAM GRANT: (2016) *Originals: How Non-Conformists Move the World*. Viking Publisher, New York pp. 47–64.

²⁷ MACIEJ DUSZYŃSKI: (2021) *Pareto Principle & the 80/20 Rule*. Retrieved from: https://resumelab.com/career-advice/pareto-principle?utm_source=google&utm_medium=sem&utm_campaign=6540517835&utm_term=%2Bpareto%20%2Bprinciple&network=g&device=c&adposition=&adgroupid=104311758447&placement=&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIprWvi52u-gIVowuiAx1WygBMEAAAYASAAEgLFbPD_BwE (29. 09. 2022.)

²⁸ CAL NEWPORT: (2016) *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World*. Grand Central Publishing pp. 78–92.

²⁹ JIM HARTER and RYAN PENDELL: (2021) *Is the 4 Day Work Week a Good Idea?* Retrieved from: <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/354596/4-day-work-week-good-idea.aspx#:~:text=In%20March%202020%2C%20during%20the,employee%20engagement%20and%20wellbeing%20data.> (29. 09. 2022.)

³⁰ The future is ours: Women, automation and equality in the digital age’ Retrieved from: <https://www.ippr.org/research/publications/women-automation-and-equality> (29. 09. 2022.)

gender equality in terms of the allocation of caring responsibilities.³¹ A FDWW would promote an equal workplace as employees would be able to spend more time with their families and better juggle care and work commitments. Employees are less likely to be stressed or take sick leave as they have plenty of time to rest and recover.³²

Working less would improve the elusive “work-life balance”, and help to restore employees’ mental health and physical wellbeing. It would also give more time to spend on social activities, to care for children and the elderly, and to engage with community volunteer activities. Experiments with reduced working hours at select workplaces in Sweden in 2015 reduced sickness and even increased productivity.³³

Research shows that 63% of businesses found it easier to attract and keep quality staff with a four-day working week. This work-life balance benefit is still a relatively rare offering and can be a great way to get the best talent through the door – and keep them engaged, too.³⁴

An important country case experiment is worth mentioning here. Lithuania will give a four-day workweek to parents with young kids. Under the new policy, which will take effect in 2023, public-sector employees with children under the age of three will be allowed to work 32 hours a week without any reduction in their pay. A standard workweek in Lithuania is 40 hours. The four-day workweek would help the public sector better compete for talent against private-sector companies that offer higher pay and it is also intended to address a persistent gender pay gap.³⁵ Considering that less than 30% of Lithuanian employees work in the public sector, the country’s four-day workweek trial is limited in scope. But the policy could be an important litmus test for working parents, and provide more data on the potential of the four-day workweek to improve gender equity.³⁶

2. 1. 3. A Smaller Carbon Footprint

There is an environment benefit if the working week is shortened to four days.³⁷ With a FDWW, huge amounts of commuting to and from work could be avoided, as well as

³¹ In Iceland, the Reykjavik public sector shorter working week trial found a marked improvement in male participants helping around the home and assisting with childcare.

³² The Pros and Cons of a 4 Day Working Week; Retrieved from: <https://www.changerecruitmentgroup.com/knowledge-centre/the-pros-and-cons-of-a-4-day-working-week>

³³ ALEX WILLIAMS: (2016) *Why three-day weekends could help to save the world*. Retrieved from: <https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/bank-holiday-three-day-weekends-climate-change-environment-working-hours-a7215421.html> (29. 09. 2022.)

³⁴ We are taking the 4 day week global, Retrieved from: <https://www.4dayweek.com/>

³⁵ Studies have shown that the gender pay gap tends to widen after women have children. This so-called “motherhood penalty” is driven by a number of factors, including the fact that women often cut back on hours when they have kids, and may take a step back from their careers to let a spouse devote more time to a higher-paying job. A four-day workweek like Lithuania’s has the potential to address this imbalance by giving both men and women the opportunity to spend more time at home with young kids.

³⁶ Courtney Vinopal (2022) Lithuania will give a four-day workweek to parents with young kids, Retrieved from: Retrieved from: <https://qz.com/work/2157973/lithuania-will-give-a-four-day-workweek-to-new-parents/> (29. 09. 2022)

³⁷ A trial conducted by the US state of Utah for government employees showed a significant ecological impact from reducing the average work week from five to four days using a compressed work schedule. During the

the energy outputs from running workplaces.³⁸ At a point when we need to massively cut back our carbon outputs, instituting a three-day weekend could be the simplest and most elegant way to make the business world economy more environmentally friendly.^{39,40}

For example, a study by Autonomy found that a four-day week across the economy would reduce UK carbon emissions by 117,000 tonnes per week (equivalent to removing 1.3 million cars off the road annually).⁴¹

2. 1. 4. Reduce costs and increase employee retention

A four-day week can cut costs for everyone. In the case of the employer, the obvious one is that, given the office would be closed for one extra day a week, running costs (e.g. heating or cooling, electricity, cleaning, etc.) would see a significant drop.

The most obvious beneficiary of the FDWW might be the employee. They would be paying less to commute and therefore gas or transportation expenses by one day, and would see cut costs in expenses like lunch and coffees during the day, too.⁴² For those employees with children, one less day at the office will mean one less day of childcare needed. Employees will also have more freedom to schedule important things outside of work, such as doctor's appointments. Working four days a week means for employees that every weekend is a long weekend, with more opportunities to spend with friends and family, more chances to relax and more time to focus on hobbies and interests outside of work. A four-day workweek allows the employee to continue to contribute on the job while gaining the time to pursue a long-neglected avocation, to help care for the children or grandchildren.

The FDWW can be used as an employee retention tool, regardless of what age bracket employees are in. Basically, few companies use this model. The key to retaining employees is avoiding burnout and focusing on wellness. A 2020 Gallup poll of over 10,000 workers found the lowest level of job burnout in employees who worked a 4-day week.

first ten months, the project saved over US\$1.8m in energy costs and a reduction of at least 6,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions from closing the large office building on Fridays. If employees' commutes are also included, Utah estimated that it could save 12,000 metric tons of CO₂, the equivalent of removing 2,300 cars off the road for one year, simply by working one day less a week

³⁸ ALLYSON CHIU: (2022) *How a four-day workweek could be better for the climate; How a four-day workweek could be better for the climate*. Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-solutions/2022/08/08/4-day-workweek-environment/> (29. 09. 2022.)

³⁹ ALEX WILLIAMS: (2016) *Why three-day weekends could help to save the world*. Retrieved from: <https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/bank-holiday-three-day-weekends-climate-change-environment-working-hours-a7215421.html>

⁴⁰ However, as usual, every coin has two sides, namely FDWW employees may well use their longer weekends to fly abroad, without the need to take any days off from work. It presumably diminishes savings and increases the carbon footprint.

⁴¹ Autonomy (2020), 'Sparking change: electricity consumption, carbon emissions and working time'. Retrieved from: <https://autonomy.work/portfolio/sparkingchange/> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁴² LAURA SANDS: (2022) *A four-day work week: is it really worth it?* retrieved from: <https://www.breathehr.com>

Additionally, FDWW employees reported the highest rates of ‘thriving wellbeing’ at 63% of those polled.⁴³

The future of work depends on creating renewable human energy⁴⁴ and solving the problem of human energy crises. As with climate change, warning signs abound. Just as we have seen melting ice caps, rising sea levels, and wildly swinging temperatures, on the human level we have seen languishing, depleted surge capacity and a global mental health crisis. According to Gallup, seven in 10 people globally report they are struggling or suffering.⁴⁵

In the face of the Human Energy Crisis, the latest Work Trend Index data shows workers around the world have a new “worth it” equation, with 53% of respondents – particularly parents (55%) and women (56%) – saying they are more likely to prioritize their health and wellbeing over work than before.⁴⁶ The FDWW might be one piece of the mosaic to fulfill this aim. It could give people permission to balance their lives in meaningful ways without feeling they must sacrifice career growth for personal priorities and vice versa. Inevitably, the future of human work depends on creating “renewable human energy”.⁴⁷

2. 1. 5. Shortening working week and saving jobs

Theoretically, the FDWW, which reduces the weekly working hours, might lead to saving jobs and cost.

A shorter working week could help towards creating a more equitable world of work by redistributing jobs and hours in a fair and rational way. By helping to iron out existent inequalities across the labour market, reduced working hours can alleviate harmful patterns of overwork and underemployment, as well as unemployment rates.⁴⁸

2. 1. 6. Improving health

Reducing working hours can be a strong, preventative step towards a healthier society. Working time reduction has been repeatedly shown to decrease stress levels and provide

⁴³ JIM HARTER and RYAN PENDELL: (2021) *Is the 4 Day Work Week a Good Idea?* Retrieved from: <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/354596/4-day-work-week-good-idea.aspx#:~:text=In%20March%202020%2C%20during%20the,employee%20engagement%20and%20wellbeing%20data.> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁴⁴ Since the World Health Organization categorized burnout as an “occupational phenomenon” in 2019, it’s only become more widespread and exacerbated thanks to the realities of the last few years. Source: Burn-out an “occupational phenomenon”: International Classification of Diseases; Retrieved from: [https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases.](https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases)

⁴⁵ JIM CLIFTON: (2021) *The Next Global Pandemic: Mental Health.* Retrieved from: <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/357710/next-global-pandemic-mental-health.aspx> (29. 09. 2022)

⁴⁶ Work Trend Index (2022) Great Expectations: Making Hybrid Work Work; Retrieved from: <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/great-expectations-making-hybrid-work-work>

⁴⁷ KATHLEEN HOGAN: (2022) *Why Leaders Can’t Ignore the Human Energy Crisis.* Retrieved from: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/why-leaders-cant-ignore-human-energy-crisis-kathleen-hogan> (29. 09. 2022)

⁴⁸ Autonomy (2019), ‘The shorter working week: a radical and pragmatic proposal’. Retrieved from: <https://autonomy.work/portfolio/the-shorter-working-week-a-report-from-autonomy-in-collaboration-with-members-of-the-4-day-week-campaign/> (29. 09. 2022.)

a range of physical and mental health benefits.⁴⁹ These could counteract the initial cost of implementing the policy by providing relief for the public health system.⁵⁰

In addition, a shorter working week would increase the possibility for workers to experience the positive effects that derive from periods away from work, and would equally decrease the time at work that makes this recovery so crucial in the first place. Unlike annual holidays that are few and far between, a shorter working week would provide a regular recovery period to benefit from the positive effects of rest.⁵¹

2. 1. 7. Preparation for automation

A shorter working week could contribute to relieving the technologically induced unemployment and underemployment. By spreading total available work-hours more equitably across society, a shorter working week can reduce the more acute effects of automation, such as job polarisation and casualisation. The FDWW is an opportunity for automation to be introduced in a kind of staggered approach, making sure that the benefits of that technology reach the employer and the employee, rather than it just being seen as a negative thing for employment.⁵²

2. 1. 8. Ease the recent energy crises

Not so long before the Covid-19 virus forced employees to stay at home and work remotely either in home-office or in telework. It seems that the Covid pandemic is over, but this time concerns over very high energy bills⁵³ could push people into co-working spaces to keep costs down. Employees are gratefully embracing their companies' adoption of four-day weeks in order to save money either on child care, food or gas needed for getting to work.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ A quite old comparative study of Swedish childcare and health workers investigated the effects of a reduction to a six-hour day, or 30-hour working week (reduced from 39 hours) on their health and well-being. The study compared an experimental group – who had a nine-hour reduction in their working week – with a second control group who retained their normal working hours. Most health related variables – including sleep quality, mental fatigue and cardiorespiratory symptoms – improved significantly more in the experimental group than in the control group. Source: Åkerstedt, T., Olsson, B., Ingre, M., Holmgren, M. & Kecklund, G. (2001), 'A 6-Hour Working Day-Effects on Health and Well-Being', *Journal of Human Ergology*, vol. 30(1/2), 197–202.

⁵⁰ Autonomy (2019), 'The shorter working week: a radical and pragmatic proposal'. Retrieved from: <https://autonomy.work/portfolio/the-shorter-working-week-a-report-from-autonomy-in-collaboration-with-members-of-the-4-day-week-campaign/>

⁵¹ DE BLOOM, J. et al., (2012), 'Effects(29. 09. 2022.) of Short Vacations, Vacation Activities and Experiences on Employee Health and Well-Being'. *Stress and Health*, 28(4), 305–318.

⁵² MATHEW LAWRENCE, CARYS ROBERTS and LOREN KING: (2017) *Managing automation, Employment, inequality and ethics in the digital age*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ippr.org/publications/managing-automation>.

⁵³ High energy prices are lashing European industry, forcing factories to cut production quickly and put tens of thousands of employees on furlough. The cutbacks, though expected to be temporary, are raising the risks of a painful recession in Europe.

⁵⁴ NICOLA SMITH (2022) *Why a 4-day week is proving more economical for employees as the cost of living rises*. Retrieved from: <https://www.worklife.news/talent/why-a-4-day-week-is-proving-more-economical-for-employees-as-the-cost-of-living-rises/> (29. 09. 2022.)

2.2. Cons of the FDWW

To avoid misunderstandings, the Cons by no means mean that FDWW is bad. On the contrary, they are more of a view into the practical difficulties of implementing a 4-day week schedule.⁵⁵

While business owners and some politicians might praise the positives, academics are more sceptical. For example, Allard Dembe, a professor of public health at Ohio State University, is uncertain about the shortened workweek. He states that, to achieve a 40-hour workweek in four days, the longer working days will increase fatigue and stress, especially if already working overtime. Another issue is communication; ensuring clear handovers between staff, and avoiding any favouritism or inequality between team members who may have vastly different work schedules.⁵⁶

While there has been a lot of talk about the shortened workweek, examples of its implementation (with well-recorded and conclusive data) are few. There are some known cons of FDWW enrolled here:

2.2.1. Customer satisfaction

Many business leaders worry there will not be adequate coverage for customers in the frame of the FDWW. Therefore, for some organizations, half of the 4-day workforce takes off on Mondays, while the other half takes off on Friday – providing coverage for clients. The need to have a given employer's products and/or services available for customers, or to assist other members of the group, may limit the possibility to compress the workweek.⁵⁷

For example, in the Utah study⁵⁸ the customers complained that they were unable to access government services with offices closed on a Friday.

2.2.2. Presenteeism

Indeed, economists have long been aware of the redundant hours contained in many working days, with employees effectively under-utilised in their workplaces, yet unable

⁵⁵ Autonomy (2019), 'The shorter working week: a radical and pragmatic proposal'. Retrieved from: <https://autonomy.work/portfolio/the-shorter-working-week-a-report-from-autonomy-in-collaboration-with-members-of-the-4-day-week-campaign/> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁵⁶ DEMBE, A.: (2016, September 3). *Why a four-day workweek is not good for your health*. The Conversation. Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com/why-a-four-day-workweek-is-not-good-for-your-health-64516> (29. 09. 2022)

⁵⁷ JIM HARTER and RYAN PENDELL: (2021) *Is the 4 Day Work Week a Good Idea?* Retrieved from: <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/354596/4-day-work-week-good-idea.aspx#:~:text=In%20March%202020%2C%20during%20the,employee%20engagement%20and%20wellbeing%20data.> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁵⁸ In 2007 the US state of Utah redefined the working week for state employees, with extended hours on Monday to Thursday meaning it could eliminate Fridays entirely. However, Utah abandoned the experiment in 2011 after residents complained they were unable to access services on Fridays.

to leave due to the persistent issue of “presenteeism”⁵⁹ – where workers are valued by managers for hours logged in the office rather than productivity. Unlike absenteeism,⁶⁰ presenteeism is not always apparent. Employers know when someone does not show up for work, but they often cannot tell when – or how much – illness or a medical or psychological condition hinders someone’s performance in the workplace. Typically, studies show that presenteeism costs employers two to three times more than direct medical care, which is paid for by companies in the form of insurance premiums or employee claims. Presenteeism is clearly against the notion of FDWW.

Many of today’s organizations sabotage flow by setting counter-productive expectations on availability, responsiveness, and meeting attendance, with research by Adobe⁶¹ finding that employees spend an average of six hours per day on email. Another study found that the average employee checks emails 74 times a day, while people touch their smartphones 2,617 times a day. Employees are in a constant state of distraction and hyper-responsiveness.

To move to a FDWW, either compressed or reduced hours, can be a strong motivator for employees or they continue the similar amount of working time sabotage. Like any other benefit, it is perceived as a way the business can support its staff members on and off the job. The rarity of these programs may motivate employees to work hard to earn or retain the benefit.⁶²

2. 2. 3. Balancing shift patterns

One of the most common mentioned disadvantages of FDWW is that, if the employer runs a Monday to Friday business, staying that way gets a bit more complicated. In the practice, certain days of the week might be more hotly contested than others. Maybe everyone wants Monday or Friday off, or everyone decides they want a mid-week break. Having too many or too few people in the office can bring things grinding to a halt.⁶³

⁵⁹ Woody Allen once said that 80% of success in life can be attributed to simply showing up. Turn more seriously, employers are beginning to realize that they face a nearly invisible but significant drain on productivity: presenteeism, the problem of workers’ being on the job but, because of illness or other medical conditions, not fully functioning. Employers know when someone does not show up for work (absenteeism), but they often cannot tell when, or how much, poor health, mental condition, smoking, hangover, postpartum blues, depression, etc. hurts on-the-job performance.

⁶⁰ According to the Journal of the American Medical Association studies, for example, on-the-job productivity loss resulting from depression and pain was roughly three times greater than the absence-related productivity loss attributed to these conditions. That is, less time was actually lost from people staying home than from them showing up but not performing at the top of their game. (Source: Wayne N. Burton, Alan Morrison, and Albert I. Wertheimer, “Pharmaceuticals and Worker Productivity Loss: A Critical Review of the Literature,” *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, June 2003.)

⁶¹ KRISTIN NARAGON: (2015) *Subject: Email, We Just Can’t Get Enough*. Retrieved from: <https://blog.adobe.com/en/2015/08/26/email> (29. 09. 2022)

⁶² RITA O’DONNELL: (2022) *The 4-Day Workweek: Pros and Cons*. Retrieved from: <https://www.zenefits.com/workest/the-4-day-workweek-pros-and-cons/> (29. 09. 2022)

⁶³ CHRIS SHENTON: (2021) *The considerable challenges of a four-day work week*. Retrieved from: <https://www.weekly10.com/disadvantages-of-a-4-day-work-week/> (29. 09. 2022)

2. 2. 4. Squeezing a bigger size balloon into a smaller box

One option for a FDWW is to reduce the number of hours that employees work. Theoretically, FDWW does suggest that it can increase productivity, but asking employees to meet the same targets in less time is a pretty tough challenge. In line with this issue, compressed hours can turn up the pressure.

The disadvantages of a FDWW vary depending on whether hours are compressed or reduced. In reality, most employees on a four-day week will most likely be expected to work the same 40-hour weeks, but in four days instead of five. In this case, shifts might be extended to 10 hours.⁶⁴

Longer days could have a significant effect on your employees' stress levels and therefore their overall wellbeing and productivity. And although the theory is that more time away from work benefits an employee's work-life balance, by working extra hard during their new 'working week', they may find that their work-life balance actually takes a hit. Plus, an overclocked schedule is a fast-track to burnout.⁶⁵

According to the opinion of Harter and Pendell, employee engagement⁶⁶ certainly does not improve with a four-day workweek, but wellbeing does. Even so, moving from working five days a week to working four could increase an organization's percentage of actively disengaged employees. In other words, by working fewer days per week, employees who already feel disconnected from their employer, team or manager are more likely to drift even farther away – from tolerating their jobs to hating them. Anyhow, if the goal is to build an engaging workplace culture, reducing the workweek may not be the place to start.⁶⁷

2. 2. 5. Compensating employees for reduced hours can be expensive

This is perhaps the most obvious disadvantage of FDWW to any shrewd employer. Giving staff the same pay for fewer hours. It is a hidden pay rise. The main question is whether cutting hours could increase productivity or not.⁶⁸

There is another approach here. Salaried workers on compressed time – 4 days at 10 hours per day – should be expected to perform and produce at the same level as their traditional schedule. However, hourly workers who work this schedule may put the employer at risk of overtime pay if there is a need for them to come in on their typical day off. Conventionally, many states require overtime after employees work 8 hours per shift.

⁶⁴ Laura Sands (2022) A four-day work week: is it really worth it? Retrieved from: <https://www.breathehr.com> (29. 09. 2022)

⁶⁵ CHRIS SHENTON: (2021) *The considerable challenges of a four-day work week*. Retrieved from: <https://www.weekly10.com/disadvantages-of-a-4-day-work-week/> (29. 09. 2022)

⁶⁶ Gallup defines employee engagement as the involvement and enthusiasm of employees in both their work and workplace.

⁶⁷ JIM HARTER and RYAN PENDELL: (2021) *Is the 4 Day Work Week a Good Idea?* Retrieved from: <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/354596/4-day-work-week-good-idea.aspx#:~:text=In%20March%202020%2C%20during%20the,employee%20engagement%20and%20wellbeing%20data.> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁶⁸ CHRIS SHENTON: (2021) *The considerable challenges of a four-day work week*. Retrieved from: <https://www.weekly10.com/disadvantages-of-a-4-day-work-week/> (29. 09. 2022.)

Compressing these non-exempt workers to four 10-hour days could mean 8 hours of overtime pay per week.⁶⁹

2. 2. 6. One size does not fit for everyone

Basically, almost everyone loves a 3-day weekend. This is typically how businesses structure a 4-day week (Monday or Friday off). Holding on to that benefit may mean additional stress during ‘on’ days to ensure employees do not lose their ‘off’ day. Most employees believe that a 4-day week helps with work-life balance. That is a plus, but if the work portion adds more stress, the alternative schedule might be a losing proposition.⁷⁰

However, it is easy to forget that not everyone can benefit equally from the FDWW schedule. Retail, hospitality, health, public transportation and other service industry workers cannot have FDWW.

Until the above-mentioned professionals cannot also take FDWW, it will never be universal the way people want it to be.⁷¹

The other side of the coin is that not all individuals like the idea of a four-day workweek, for a number of reasons. For example, they may enjoy the social aspects of their jobs or find their work so engaging that they do not want to do less of it. And some workers might find that a compressed week gives them a constant pre-vacation-type pressure to get more work done in less time – a level of stress that is unsustainable.

Gallup found that for employee engagement, the quality of the work experience was more important than the number of days worked. Simply shortening the workweek is not enough to improve employee engagement in a poorly managed organization. Still, workers do place a high value on schedule flexibility, which can lower stress levels and help them manage other aspects of their lives more effectively, allowing them to be more engaged at work.⁷²

There may be sections of a company that can shift to a 4-day workweek, while others cannot. Unless the employer plans to shut down the production line and live with the ripple effects that causes, office workers may have the option but not front-liners. This might become a pain point for any business: it might result in resentment. If an employer is considering a FDWW change, it must be sure that it can apply equally to all departments.

More employees are requesting their companies to consider compressed workdays or shortened workweeks. It will be essential to review all the plusses and minuses of making the shift before deciding to change.⁷³

⁶⁹ RIIA O’DONNELL: (2022) *The 4-Day Workweek: Pros and Cons*. Retrieved from: <https://www.zenefits.com/workest/the-4-day-workweek-pros-and-cons> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁷⁰ BEN LAKER: (2022) *What Does the Four-Day Workweek Mean for the Future of Work?* Retrieved from: <https://www.zenefits.com/workest/the-4-day-workweek-pros-and-cons> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁷¹ CHRIS SHENTON: (2021) *The considerable challenges of a four-day work week*. Retrieved from: <https://www.weekly10.com/disadvantages-of-a-4-day-work-week/> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁷² JIM HARTER and RYAN PENDELL: (2021) *Is the 4 Day Work Week a Good Idea?* Retrieved from: <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/354596/4-day-work-week-good-idea.aspx#:~:text=In%20March%202020%2C%20during%20the,employee%20engagement%20and%20wellbeing%20data.> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁷³ RIIA O’DONNELL: (2022) *The 4-Day Workweek: Pros and Cons*. Retrieved from: <https://www.zenefits.com/workest/the-4-day-workweek-pros-and-cons>

In sum, supporters say that the four-day workweek boosts productivity, but critics say it is impractical in certain sectors.⁷⁴

2. 2. 7. More work for managers

Four-day workweeks obviously can add tasks for the employers as well. Managers will spend more time scheduling meetings, client contacts, and group tasks when some staffers are not on the clock. They will need to keep a closer eye on: 1. Overtime; 2. Project management and 3. Performance.

Administrators will have to monitor schedules and productivity to assure the program does not cost more than it is worth.⁷⁵

3. *Four-day workweek pioneers*

In this sub-chapter, the FDWW pioneer countries – including Hungary as well – will be introduced briefly.

3. 1. Iceland

Iceland is one of the leaders in the four-day working week.⁷⁶ Between 2015 and 2019, Iceland conducted the world's largest pilot of a 35 to 36-hour workweek (cut down from the traditional 40 hours) without any calls for a commensurate cut in pay. Some 2,500 people took part in the test phase.⁷⁷

To ensure quality control, the results were analysed by British think tank Autonomy and the Icelandic non-profit Association for Sustainability and Democracy (ALDA).

The pilot was dubbed a success by researchers and Icelandic trade unions negotiated for a reduction in working hours. Researchers found that worker stress and burnout lessened and there was an improvement in work-life balance.⁷⁸ However, not every government shared Iceland's success with the four-day working week.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ World Economic Forum (2022) The UK has begun the world's biggest trial of the four-day work week. What are the pros and cons? Retrieved from: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/06/four-day-work-week-uk-trial/> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁷⁵ RIIA O'DONNELL: (2022) *The 4-Day Workweek: Pros and Cons*. Retrieved from: <https://www.zenefits.com/workest/the-4-day-workweek-pros-and-cons> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁷⁶ Most of the workplaces ended up cutting back by only one to three hours a week, though they were able to maintain their productivity and provide the same level of service. The experiment did result in a nationwide decrease in hours worked, but only by 35 minutes in the private sector and 65 minutes in the public sector.

⁷⁷ Full results of this trial are published by Autonomy, Alda, and the BSRB separately at autonomy.work/research.; The city of Reykjavik trialled reduced working hours in the city council with around 70 employees taking part.

⁷⁸ Anthony Veal (2019) The success of Iceland's 'four-day week' trial has been greatly overstated Retrieved from: <https://theconversation.com/the-success-of-icelands-four-day-week-trial-has-been-greatly-overstated-164083>

⁷⁹ JOSEPHINE JOLY: (2022) *Four-day week: Which countries have embraced it and how's it going so far?* Retrieved from: <https://www.euronews.com/next/2022/06/06/the-four-day-week-which-countries-have-embraced-it-and-how-s-it-going-so-far> (29. 09. 2022.)

The experiment also led to a significant change in Iceland, with nearly 90 per cent of the working population now having reduced hours or other accommodations.⁸⁰

The initial small trial inspired both wider support and take-up of a shorter working week across Iceland.⁸¹ After its success, several Icelandic state departments outside of Reykjavik began their own trials.⁸²

3. 2. Belgium

The labour law reform package agreed by the country's federal government grants employees the ability to request a four-day week. This has to be done at the request of the employee, with the employer giving solid reasons for any refusal. Another significant portion of Belgium's new labour reforms impact the work-life balance of employees in both the public and private sectors. It is closely linked to FDWW.

Employees would be able to ask to work four days a week for a period of six months. After that, they could choose to continue the arrangement or return to a five-day week with no negative consequences. The period of six months was chosen so that an employee would not be stuck for too long in the case of a wrong choice.

Workers will also be able to request variable work schedules. The minimum notice period for shifts is also changing, with companies now required to provide schedules at least seven days in advance. This would benefit those who wish to spend more time with their children. It would be especially helpful for divorced or separated parents who share custody of their children.⁸³

In Belgium the FDWW for employees is optional.⁸⁴ In February 2022, Belgian employees won the right to perform a full workweek in four days instead of the usual five without loss of salary. Employees are able to decide whether to work four or five days a week, but this does not mean they will be working less – they will simply condense their working hours into fewer days.

Belgium hopes that the agreement will help to make the country's notoriously rigid labour market more flexible and will make it easier for people to combine their family

⁸⁰ Going Public: Iceland's Journey to a Shorter Working Week, June 2021. Retrieved from: <https://autonomy.work/portfolio/icelandsww/> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁸¹ Iceland Review (2019), 'Collective agreement opens possibility for shorter work week'. Retrieved from: <https://www.icelandreview.com/news/collective-agreement-opens-possibility-for-shorter-work-week/> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁸² NEF (2019), 'Achieving a shorter working week across Europe'. Retrieved from: <https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/workingtime-newsletter1.pdf> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁸³ TOM BATEMAN: (2022) Belgium approves four-day week and gives employees the right to ignore their bosses after work; Retrieved from: <https://www.euronews.com/next/2022/02/15/belgium-approves-four-day-week-and-gives-employees-the-right-to-ignore-their-bosses> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁸⁴ The goal is to give people and companies more freedom to arrange their work time. (Alexander de Croo, Prime minister of Belgium)

lives with their careers, and will create a more dynamic economy.⁸⁵ The basic goal is to give people and companies more freedom to arrange their work time.

There is one more important issue in Belgium. Beyond approving the four-day week, it gives employees the right to ignore their bosses after work (right to switch off).

However, the perspective of a four-day workweek is not appealing to all. Some full-time employees will indeed be working very long days if they choose to condense their hours, and others, such as shift workers, will simply not have the option of that flexibility.⁸⁶

3. 3. The United Kingdom

The five-day week has been part of UK working life for more than a century so an alteration to FDWW would be considered a radical shift. A six-month pilot programme – the biggest of its kind – was launched on June 6, 2020 to study the impact of shorter working hours on businesses' productivity and the wellbeing of their workers, as well as the impact on the environment and gender equality.⁸⁷ More precisely in Scotland,⁸⁸ a government trial is due to start in 2023 while Wales is also considering a trial. Scotland pointed to Iceland and its strong results as a big reason for taking a chance with the four-day workweek. Therefore, some Scottish businesses have already started their own truncated workweeks, with Glasgow-based UPAC Group's employees enjoying a four-day week with the same salary after running a successful pilot programme. In Wales, Sophie Howe, the Future Generations Commissioner, has also called on the government to introduce a similar four-day working week trial, at least in the public sector.⁸⁹

Some 70 UK companies⁹⁰ and 3,300 employees have signed up for the programme.⁹¹ FDWW employees are expected to follow the "100:80:100 model" – 100 per cent of the pay for 80 per cent of the time, in exchange for a commitment to maintain at least 100 per cent productivity. Hence, workers will have their hours reduced by 20 per cent, but will not suffer any loss in compensation.

⁸⁵ Only about 71 out of 100 Belgians in the age group from 20 to 64 years have a job, fewer than the eurozone average of about 73 and a full 10 percentage points less than in neighbouring countries such as the Netherlands and Germany, according to Eurostat data for the third quarter of 2021.

⁸⁶ JOSEPHINE JOLY: (2022) Four-day week: Which countries have embraced it and how's it going so far? Retrieved from: <https://www.euronews.com/next/2022/06/06/the-four-day-week-which-countries-have-embraced-it-and-how-s-it-going-so-far> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁸⁷ UK Parliament (2020), 'Four Day Week in the UK: EDM 636 tabled on 18 June 2020'. Retrieved from: <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/57154/fourday-week-in-the-uk> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁸⁸ According to a poll conducted by Scottish think tank the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) in Scotland that showed 80 per cent of the people responding to the idea were highly positive of the initiative.

⁸⁹ JOSEPHINE JOLY: (2022) Four-day week: Which countries have embraced it and how's it going so far? Retrieved from: <https://www.euronews.com/next/2022/06/06/the-four-day-week-which-countries-have-embraced-it-and-how-s-it-going-so-far> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁹⁰ These 70 companies are across banking, hospitality, care, and animation studios are signed up to take part in FDWW pilot project. Source: https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/nri/work/worlds-biggest-four-day-work-week-trial-begins-in-the-uk/articleshow/92051543.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst (29. 09. 2022.)

⁹¹ It is started by the supervision of researchers at Cambridge and Oxford Universities and Boston College, as well as the non-profit advocacy groups 4 Day Week Global, the 4 Day Week UK Campaign and the UK think tank Autonomy.

Under the reform, employees will be allowed to work up to 9.5 hours a day – the equivalent of 9 am to 6.30 pm – meaning they will be able to squash a week of work into four longer days. This could be further extended to a 10-hour day through a workplace trade union agreement.

According to the survey by recruitment company Reed (2021), more than 80% of people in the UK would prefer a four-day working week. It lists the advantages of the four-day model as: a) Improved morale and fewer absences: A shorter working week leads to less burnout, making staff happier and more focused in their roles. b) Helps recruitment: Offering potential and existing employees a flexible working pattern will help attract and retain talented professionals. c) Employees have a longer time to recuperate before returning to work and have more time to spend with families and friends, and d) even the climate crisis.⁹²

According to Reed, there are also some potential disadvantages of the four-day workweek in the UK: a) It doesn't suit all industries: Some sectors require a seven-day-a-week presence, which could make a short working week impractical. Examples include emergency services, public transport networks and logistics. b) It does not suit all UK workers: Some employees prefer the structure of a five-day week, and some like working overtime. c) It can increase costs: Some sectors, such as healthcare, require staff to work long shifts. Companies in these areas may have to pay more overtime or draft staff in to make any shortfalls.

3. 4. Sweden

In Sweden,⁹³ a four-day working week with full pay was tested in 2015 with mixed results.⁹⁴

The proposal was to try six-hour workdays⁹⁵ instead of eight-hour ones without loss of pay, but not everyone was pleased with the idea of spending money on the trial.⁹⁶

⁹² EVIE BREESE AND LIAM GERAGHTY: (2022) *What is the four-day working week and how close is the UK to getting it?* Retrieved from: <https://www.bigissue.com/news/employment/what-is-the-4-day-working-week-and-why-are-uk-campaigners-calling-for-it/> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁹³ Across Sweden, only around 1% of employees work more than 50 hours a week, one of the lowest rates in the OECD, where 13% is the average. By law, Swedes are given 25 vacation days, while many large firms typically offer even more. Parents get 480 days of paid parental leave to split between them. Most offices are empty after 5pm. (Source: Maddy Savage (2015) *The truth about Sweden's short working hours*; Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-34677949>) (29. 09. 2022.)

⁹⁴ For example, from 2015 to 2017, Sweden conducted a trial study into a shorter work week. Nurses at a care home worked only 6 hours for five days a week. Results were largely positive with nurses logging less sick hours, reporting better health and mental wellbeing and greater engagement as they arranged 85% more activities for patients in their care. Source: Maddy Savage (2017) *What really happened when Swedes tried six-hour days?* Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-38843341> (29. 09. 2022.); One of the key researchers in this field, Mr. Lorentzon is keen to stress that the six-hour day is still a long way from becoming the working norm in the Scandinavian nation.

⁹⁵ For example, in a digital production company (called Background AB) the staff are at their desks between 8.30am and 11.30am, take a full hour off for lunch and then put in another three hours before heading back to their homes in the Swedish mountains. They are asked to stay away from social media in the office and leave any personal calls or emails until the end of the day. Salaries have not changed since the initiative started in September. (Source: Maddy Savage (2015) *The truth about Sweden's short working hours*; Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-34677949>) (29. 09. 2022.)

⁹⁶ The nursing home FDWW experiment still proved “successful from many points of view” by creating extra jobs for 17 nurses in the city, reducing sick pay costs and fuelling global debates about work culture. However, the experiment ultimately determined that the project was not cost effective. Implementing a four-day

As for positive experience, Sweden's trial of the six-hour work day is one of the more publicised examples, with optimistic employers hoping for higher morale, motivation and productivity in their employees, as well as encouraging a fuller private life outside of work⁹⁷. Companies like Toyota and Filimundus have both implemented the six-hour work day and stand firm on the positives. The car firm had already decided to do this for mechanics 10 years ago and stuck with its decision.

Positive results were observed within the orthopaedics unit of a university hospital, which switched 80 nurses and doctors over to a six-hour workday and hired new staff to make up for the lost time. The response from the medical staff was positive, yet the experiment also faced a lot of criticism and was not renewed.

As for the sceptical side, in Chapman's article,⁹⁸ it seems the costs may outweigh the benefits. A trial of 68 nurses at an aged care facility in Gothenburg has found that, while employees felt healthier, had reduced absences and improved on their patient care, an additional 17 staff had to be hired to make up for the loss of working hours, costing the city 12m kroner.

3. 5. Germany

The German Government has used a shorter working hours scheme intermittently since the 1980s to help bridge temporary shortfalls in labour demand. The Kurzarbeit⁹⁹ Scheme¹⁰⁰ (short time work compensation scheme) entails government subsidising a temporary reduction of regular working hours in response to substantial drops in labour demand in an organisation or firm. Its primary and most impactful use has been to combat mass unemployment during the 2008 financial crisis and more recently during the Covid pandemic.¹⁰¹

Germany is home to one of the shortest average working weeks in Europe. According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), the average working week is 34.2 hours.¹⁰² According to a Forsa survey,¹⁰³ 71 per cent of people working in Germany would like to have the

work-week can be difficult as it requires the right support, technology and workplace culture. (Source: Maddy Savage (2017) Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-38843341>) (29. 09. 2022.)

⁹⁷ MATHARU, H.: (2016, October 1) *Employers in Sweden introduce six-hour work day*. Independent. Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/sweden-introduces-six-hour-work-day-a6674646.html> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁹⁸ CHAPMAN, B.: (2017, January 4). *Sweden's six-hour working day is 'too expensive' and could be scrapped*. Independent. Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/sweden-six-hour-working-day-too-expensive-scrapped-experiment-cothenburg-pilot-scheme-a7508581.html> (29. 09. 2022.)

⁹⁹ Kurzarbeit allows companies to retain their employees during periods of low demand and quickly adapt to increased economic activity once demand returns. This has a preventative protective effect on both employment and consumer demand. Kurzarbeit has also benefited firms and organisations, which by adopting the scheme can avoid the costly process of separation, re-hiring and training. On a more general scale, keeping unemployment down has protected society against the negative effects of inequality and reduced community cohesion.

¹⁰⁰ According to the ILO Convention No. 168 on Employment Promotion and Protection against Unemployment, it is called "partial unemployment".

¹⁰¹ Autonomy (2020), 'Time for Change: a four-day week as an unemployment strategy'. Retrieved from: <https://autonomy.work/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Time-for-Change-REPORT.pdf> (29. 09. 2022.)

¹⁰² The world's most productive countries, like Norway, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands, on average work around 27 hours a week -- the same hours proposed for a UK 4-day workweek.

¹⁰³ Forsa (2020), 'A four-day week is an essential step forward'. Retrieved from: <https://www.forsa.ie/blog/a-four-day-week-is-an-essential-step-forward/> (29. 09. 2022.)

option to only work four days a week. Just over three-quarters of those surveyed said they are supportive of the government exploring the potential introduction of a four-day week. Among employers, more than two out of three supported this idea. A substantial majority (75 per cent) believe that a four-day week would be desirable for employees,¹⁰⁴ with a majority (59 per cent) feeling it should be achievable for employers as well. Almost half of the employers (46 per cent) said they see trialling a four-day week in their own workplace setting as “feasible”.

Yet, trade unions are calling for further reduced working hours.¹⁰⁵ Last year, IG Metall, the country's largest trade union, called for shorter working weeks, arguing it would help retain jobs and avoid layoffs.

However, whether such a measure will be implemented or discussed is yet to be seen. So far, it is mainly smaller start-ups that are experimenting with a shorter working week. Most of the FDWW oriented smaller companies in Germany have a 32-hour week at 100% salary and are hiring remotely. They are active mainly in software engineering, product management, data science or marketing execution.¹⁰⁶

So far, Germany has made less progress in implementing a shorter working week. There have been some pioneers in the business sector who have trialled the scheme in their own companies. For example, the Hamburg-based software firm Knowhere has announced that employees will switch to a four-day, 32-hour workweek from August for the same salary. Vereda, a marketing firm in Munster, has already implemented the same system.

The idea of extending working hours is not a new one: in 2004, Bavaria tried to introduce a 42-hour workweek for public sector workers but had to backtrack when large scale protests broke out. A similar scheme with a 44-hour workweek for public sector workers was attempted in North-Rhine Westphalia (in 2021), but once again, it was impossible to implement. So it seems there is no appetite among German people for increasing their weekly hours.

At the moment, the German government does not have any plans to make changes to the working week and is instead relying on employees to make their own arrangements with their employers. The introduction of a statutory four-day week is not planned in Germany. Instead, employers and employees are free to make their own decisions in this regard, subject to the provisions of the Working Hours Act.¹⁰⁷

However, when implemented, a four-day week sees worker satisfaction increase, and so does productivity.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ A survey (2022) from hotel chain Novotel found that Germans had the worst work-life balance of four European countries surveyed, with respondents reporting that 58 percent of their time was dedicated to their jobs and just 42 percent was dedicated to their private lives.

¹⁰⁵ The Times (2020), ‘*German Ministers Raise Hopes of Four-Day Week*’. Retrieved from: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/german-minister-raises-hopes-of-four-day-week-px6jjtm0r> (29. 09. 2022.)

¹⁰⁶ 4 Day Work Week Companies in Germany, Retrieved from: <https://4dayweek.io/companies/germany> (29. 09. 2022.)

¹⁰⁷ Public News Time (2022) Why Germany is debating a shorter working week, Retrieved from <https://publicnewstime.com/travel/why-germany-is-debating-a-shorter-working-week/> (29. 09. 2022.)

¹⁰⁸ JOSEPHINE JOLY: (2022) Four-day week: Which countries have embraced it and how's it going so far? Retrieved from: <https://www.euronews.com/next/2022/06/06/the-four-day-week-which-countries-have-embraced-it-and-how-s-it-going-so-far> (29. 09. 2022.)

3. 6. Japan

Asia is home to some countries with famously long working hours — South Korea, China, and Japan, for example. Even though Japan is in this list, some Japanese big corporations venture into the four-day workweek. They offer to their employees more free time and flexibility so they can improve their work-life balance to meet responsibilities at home or acquire new skills outside of their workplace. While companies can benefit from introducing the compressed work schedule, as it can help attract more talent or prevent employees from leaving, it remains to be seen whether the relatively new working style will gain attraction in Japan.¹⁰⁹

In Japan, it is larger companies that are venturing into FDWW, following the Japanese government's announcement in 2021 of a plan to achieve a better work-life balance across the nation.¹¹⁰

There are several reasons why FDWW could be good for Japan, where death by overwork (it is called “karoshi” in Japanese) claims many lives.

In 2019, tech giant Microsoft experimented with the model by offering employees three-day weekends for a month.¹¹¹ They found as a result that employees were not only happier – but significantly more productive. In addition to the increased productivity, employees took 25% less time off during the trial and electricity use was down 23% in the office with the additional day off per week. Employees printed 59% fewer pages of paper during the trial. The vast majority of employees – 92% – said they liked the shorter week.¹¹²

The four-day workweek is gaining ground in Japan as Panasonic joins the growing list of companies embracing the idea to not only improve work-life balance, but also promote retraining and attract talent.¹¹³

3. 7. New Zealand

Meanwhile, in New Zealand, 81 employees working for the consumer goods giant Unilever are currently taking part in a year-long trial of a four-day workweek at full

¹⁰⁹ CHARMAINE JACOB: (2022) *Four-day work weeks: The countries in Asia that are open to it — and the ones that aren't*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/03/02/is-a-four-day-work-week-catching-on-in-asia-it-depends-on-the-country.html> (29. 09. 2022.)

¹¹⁰ Basic Policy on Economic and Fiscal Management and Reform 2021, *Four Driving Forces that Open the Way to the Future of Japan - Green, Digital, Creation of Vibrant Local Regions, Measures against Declining Birthrate*, Retrieved from: https://www5.cao.go.jp/keizai-shimon/kaigi/cabinet/2021/2021_basicpolicies_en.pdf (29. 09. 2022.); The Asahi Shinbun (May 7, 2022) 4-day week catching on among firms in changing Japan, Retrieved from: <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14615608> (29. 09. 2022.)

¹¹¹ The new project called Work-Life Choice Challenge Summer 2019, giving its entire 2,300-person workforce five Fridays off in a row without decreasing pay.

¹¹² KARI PAUL (2019) *Microsoft Japan tested a four-day work week and productivity jumped by 40%*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/nov/04/microsoft-japan-four-day-work-week-productivity> (29. 09. 2022)

¹¹³ Motokazu Matsui (2022) Panasonic joins Japan's budding shift toward 4-day workweek, Retrieved from <https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Business-trends/Panasonic-joins-Japan-s-budding-shift-toward-4-day-workweek> (29. 09. 2022.)

pay.¹¹⁴ Their goal is to measure performance on output, not time. They believe the old ways of working are outdated and no longer fit for the purpose of current life. If the experiment in Unilever New Zealand turns out to be a success, it will reportedly be extended to other countries.¹¹⁵

Another New Zealand based company, Perpetual Guardian, conducted a trial study of a 4-day workweek.¹¹⁶ Not only did employees maintain the same productivity level, but they also showed improvements in job satisfaction, teamwork, work-life balance (78% of employees could more effectively balance their work and home life)¹¹⁷ and company loyalty. Employees also experienced less stress with a decrease of 45% to 38%.¹¹⁸

3. 8. USA and Canada

According to a survey by cloud-software vendor Qualtrics, a whopping 92 per cent of US workers are in favour of the shortened workweek, even if it means working longer hours. The employees surveyed cited improved mental health and increased productivity as the perceived benefits. Three out of four employees (74 per cent) say they would be able to complete the same amount of work in four days, but most (72 per cent) say they would have to work longer hours on workdays to do so.

In Canada, research from global employment agency Indeed found that 41 per cent of Canadian employers are considering alternative hybrid schedules and new work styles, following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Indeed's survey of 1,000 employers of office workers in Canada found that 51 per cent of large companies with 500+ employees would be "likely to implement 4-day workweeks".

Comparatively, 63 per cent of medium-sized organisations with 100-500 staff members say they would be prepared to implement a shorter workweek.

A majority of Canadian full-time workers (79 per cent) were also found to be willing to shorten their five-day workweek to four days, according to a new report by Maru Public Opinion.

Overall, the four-day workweek seems to be slowly but surely gaining traction across the globe, but whether governments will definitively adopt the idea is yet to be seen.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ The Pros and Cons of a 4 Day Working Week; Retrieved from: <https://www.changerecruitment-group.com/knowledge-centre/the-pros-and-cons-of-a-4-day-working-week> (29. 09. 2022.)

¹¹⁵ JOSEPHINE JOLY: (2022) Four-day week: Which countries have embraced it and how's it going so far? Retrieved from: <https://www.euronews.com/next/2022/06/06/the-four-day-week-which-countries-have-embraced-it-and-how-s-it-going-so-far> (29. 09. 2022.)

¹¹⁶ The Guardian (2020), 'Jacinda Ardern flags four-day working week as way to rebuild New Zealand after Covid-19'. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/20/jacinda-ardern-flags-four-day-working-week-as-way-to-rebuild-new-zealand-after-covid-19> (29. 09. 2022.)

¹¹⁷ ROBERT BOOTH: (2019) *Four-day week: trial finds lower stress and increased productivity*. <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2019/feb/19/four-day-week-trial-study-finds-lower-stress-but-no-cut-in-output> (29. 09. 2022.)

¹¹⁸ ADELE PETERS: (2018) *The four-day work week is good for business*. <https://www.fastcompany.com/90205776/the-four-day-work-week-works> (29. 09. 2022.)

¹¹⁹ JOSEPHINE JOLY: (2022) Four-day week: Which countries have embraced it and how's it going so far? Retrieved from: <https://www.euronews.com/next/2022/06/06/the-four-day-week-which-countries-have-embraced-it-and-how-s-it-going-so-far> (29. 09. 2022.)

3. 9. Hungarian preliminary experiments

In fact, there is little experience with the introduction of the four-day workweek in Hungary. Working time is not only an economic, but also a legal, political and social issue. In Hungary workers have little influence on the length and schedule of working hours, and there is a lack of data monitoring.

However, there have already been Hungarian examples where employees are explicitly looking for opportunities with flexible working hours; therefore, there is a great chance that by the passage of time, this model might become more widespread in Hungary, resulting in a win-win situation.¹²⁰

In Hungary, there are already jobs in the market sector where employees only have to work four days a week. One of the first companies was the Hungarian unit of *General Electric (GE)*, which shortened the workweek of thousands of its workers to avoid layoffs.¹²¹

A more recent example is the *Magyar Telekom Group*, which has been testing the introduction of the 4-day workweek.¹²² In Hungary, Magyar Telekom is the first company in the modern corporate sector to launch a 4-day workweek project. Amid the fall in orders that the deepening economic crisis (2008) caused, the four-day workweek is crucial in preserving the jobs of our employees.

The Hungarian city, *Szombathely*, is planning to introduce the FDWW. The justification for the proposal is that the introduction of a 4-day workweek would increase the efficiency of workers.¹²³ Szombathely has raised an innovative idea. Fewer working days, the same job, the same salary. It is about giving local government employees one more day of rest while doing the same amount of work, so that they can work more productively and efficiently in those four days.

According to the proposal, the new work schedule would be introduced for a six-month period at the municipality, after which a decision could be made on its continuation. At the moment, it is in the preparatory phase, which means they are looking at the legal, work organisation and other possibilities to see if this idea is a good one and if it can be implemented. The proposal itself is to look at a six-month trial run from September, 2022.¹²⁴

However, FDWW is not about only the number of hours and days; it's about employees desiring trust, independence, competitiveness (work productivity, flexibility, automation and time. If all conditions are met, it's an easy challenge to finish (what was thought to be a) five-day workload in four days. Still there are many steps ahead.

¹²⁰ KITTÍ TORDAI: (2021) *Four-day workweek model to become more widespread in Hungary?* Retrieved from <https://dailynewshungary.com/four-day-workweek-model-to-become-more-widespread-in-hungary/> (29. 09. 2022)

¹²¹ MÁRTON DUNAI: (2009) *GE Hungary unit tries 4-day workweek to save jobs.* Retrieved from: <https://www.reuters.com/article/br-ge-labour-cutback-idUSLB38461720090311> (29. 09. 2022.)

¹²² They are switching to the FDWW between July and October in 2022. Source: dailynewshungary.com Retrieved from: <https://dailynewshungary.com/4-day-working-week-coming-at-magyar-telekom/> (29. 09. 2022.)

¹²³ FAZEKAS KIARA BARBARA: (2022) *Szombathelyen bevezethetik a négynapos munkahetet.* Retrieved from: <https://liner.hu/szombathelyen-negynapos-munkahet/> (29. 09. 2022.)

¹²⁴ HETZMANN MERCÉDESZ: (2022) *This Hungarian city may introduce the 4-day workweek.* Retrieved from: <https://dailynewshungary.com/this-hungarian-city-may-introduce-the-4-day-workweek/> (29. 09. 2022.)

HAJDÚ JÓZSEF

A NÉGYNAPOS MUNKAHÉT KOMPLEX VISZONYRENDSZERE:
IDŐ, MUNKA, VERSENY ÉS JÓLÉT

(Summary)

A négynapos munkahét bevezetése szükséges lehet, ezt egyre több szempont indokolhatja, bár ágazatonként eltérően valósulhat meg. A négynapos munkahét hívei elsősorban a munkavállalók hatékonyságát és a munka-magánélet egyensúlyát üdvözik a rövidebb munkahét bevezetésében – munkavállalók elégedettsége és a termelékenység is nő. Nemzetközi szinten egyre többen próbálják ki a 4 napos munkahetet. Például az Egyesült Királyságban már 70 vállalat teszteli ezt a működtetési formát, de Belgiumban is bevezették azt, hogy amelyik munkavállaló kéri, dolgozhasson a szokásos 5 helyett csak 4 napot, fizetéses csökkenés nélkül, ugyanazokkal a juttatásokkal. Magyarországon is találunk már példát hasonló működésre, azonban ez eddig inkább a kivétel, mintsem az általános gyakorlat. Ráadásul komoly kockázatai vannak a négynapos munkahétnek. Némely teljes munkaidőben foglalkoztatott munkavállaló nagyon hosszú napokat fog végig dolgozni, ha úgy dönt, hogy sűríti a munkaidejét. Másoknak pedig, például a váltott műszakban dolgozóknak egyszerűen nem lesz lehetőségük erre a rugalmasságra. A cikk a négynapos munkahét főbb jellemzőit, előnyös és hátrányos vonásait, versenyre gyakorolt hatását valamint a mintaadó országok gyakorlatát mutatja be, kitérve Magyarországra is.