



HOW DOES A FOUR-DAY WORK WEEK IMPACT ON THE SELF-REPORTED WELLBEING OF EMPLOYEES?

Business and Management Research Report

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Abstract

Objective: There are many countries currently trialling or implementing a four-day work week (4DWW). This report investigates the impacts a 4DWW trial has on employee wellbeing (EW) in a Welsh based office.

Methodology: The report adopts a mixed methods research design by employing both self-completed questionnaires (SSQs) and semi-structured interviews (SSIs) as data collection. The questionnaire results were converted into visual bar graphs whilst the interviews were fully transcribed and subjected to a thematic analysis.

Results: The wellbeing SCQs indicate increases in EW. The SSIs provide insight as to how employees spend their additional spare time. The results of both methods indicate increases in EW. There is evidence of some minor negative impacts of the 4DWW.

Conclusions: There is a vast amount of evidence in both the quantitative and qualitative results to suggest that most employees have experienced some increase in at least one element of their wellbeing since the 4DWW trial started.

Four Key Words: four-day work week, working time reduction, employee wellbeing, primary data

Chapter 1- Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the research rationale and significance, research aim, objectives and question.

1.1 Research Rationale and Significance

Historically there have been various trends in working hours (Golden, 2008). In recent years, one of these trends has been the shift from a more traditional five-day work week, which would typically be 40 hours, to a shorter four-day work week (4DWW) which would often consist of 32 hours (Delaney and Casey, 2021).

Many countries globally are trialling and implementing 4DWW including Spain, Japan, New Zealand and Iceland (Reeder, 2021). However, very little literary evidence can be found for companies trialing the initiative in Wales, United Kingdom (UK).

Atlantic Pacific Marine Ltd (APM) implemented a 4DWW trial in January 2022 in their Welsh office. Previously, employees were contracted to 35 hours over a five-day period (Monday-Friday). In January 2022 this changed to 32 hours over a four-day period. The additional day off is either a Monday or a Friday in order to extend the weekend. Employees salaried pay has not been affected by the reduction in working hours and this has been trailed across three different departments involving a total of 16 employees.

Sakka and Ahammad (2019: 357) describe employee wellbeing (EW) as 'psychological, physiological and social well-being'. Developing EW is beneficial for the workforce and organisation (Kelly et al. 2021). Good levels of EW can increase employee engagement, productivity and performance (CIPD, 2022a). The World Population Review (2022) found countries with shorter working hours typically scored higher on the World Happiness report when compared with countries who averaged longer working hours.

Organisations are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of EW on business performance in areas such as absence management (Juniper, 2011). Another reason for this recent interest is due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Chung,

2022). Covid-19 has negatively impacted on EW mainly due to enforced homeworking, which has led to feelings of isolation and reduced human contact (Platts et al. 2022).

Consequently, since Covid-19, 81% of employers reported implementing additional policies in order to support the mental health of employees (CIPD, 2022b).

1.2 Research Aim

The aim of this research is to examine the effects a 4DWW has on EW in APM.

1.3 Research Objectives

Four objectives have been defined using specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound (SMART) criteria.

1. To identify any changes to EW after four months of implementation of 4DWW in APM.
2. To add to current literature on the relationship between EW and reduced working patterns.
3. To adopt a mixed method approach in order to examine the relationship between EW and a 4DWW.
4. To draw conclusions and make recommendations as to how APM can improve EW for individuals participating in a 4DWW.

1.4 Research Question

The research question asks, 'What are the effects of a reduced working pattern on EW in APM?'

Chapter 2- Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the literature review on wellbeing, the 4DWW and the relationship between reduced working patterns and EW.

2.1 4DWW Explained

The 4DWW can be implemented in one of two ways. The first is to compress hours worked across five days into four (Olito, 2021). For example, if the week was made up of five, eight-hour days, four days would consist of ten-hours each. Unison (2014)

suggests reducing the working week in this way can cause increased stress and longer working days. The second is to reduce the days worked as well as the total hours worked in the week without a reduction in pay (Chung, 2022). This strategy was used in the trial introduced at APM. Reducing hours as opposed to fitting typical hours into less days is the strategy, which is usually associated with benefits often seen in the media headlines, including increased productivity and wellbeing (Christian, 2022).

Numerous European governments have implemented temporary reduced working hours programs in a response to Covid-19, many of which have been successful (Jump et al. 2022).

2.2 Wellbeing

Wellbeing can be impacted by many elements. Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) suggests human behaviour and actions have the biggest impact. The New Economics Foundation developed five actions believed to be the main influencers on wellbeing (Aked et al. 2008). The 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' are to connect with people, to be physically active, to take notice and be present, continue learning and to give to the wider community (Aked et al. 2008).

The Mental Health Foundation (2017) conducted a survey on activities which promote positive mental health, the results of which are displayed in Figure 1.

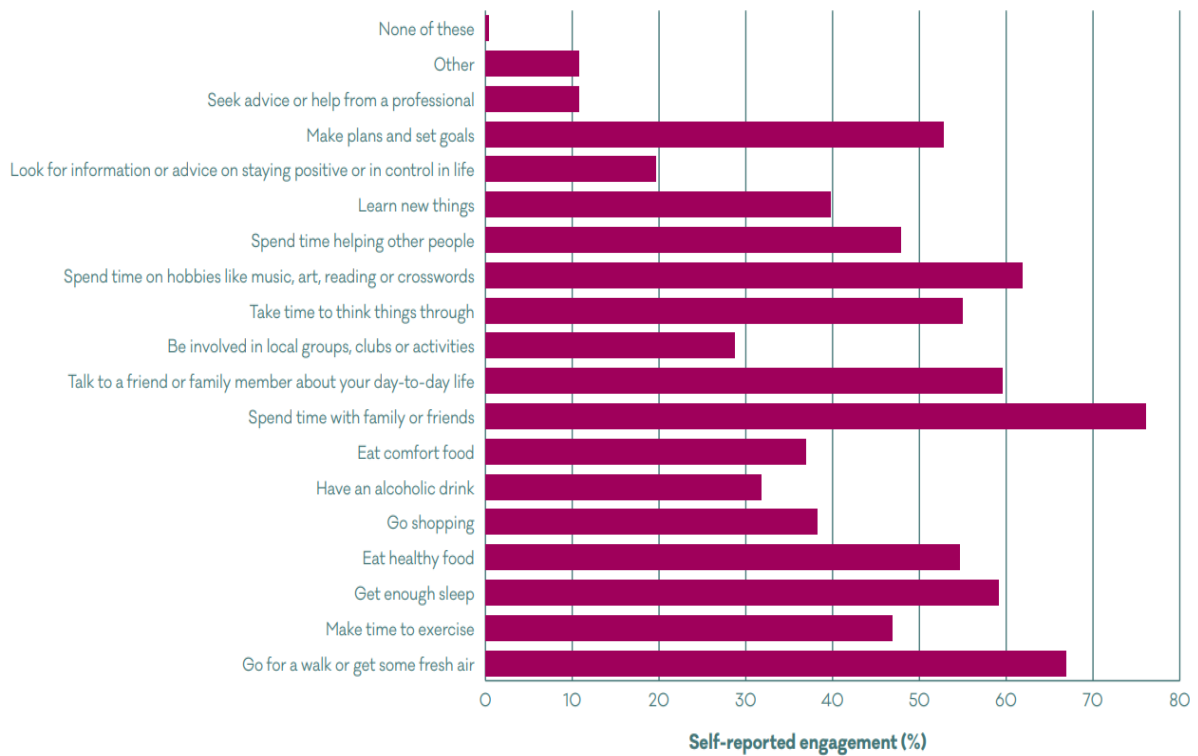


Figure 1: Activities for positive mental health (Mental Health Foundation, 2017)

The top three activities reported by participants to promote positive mental health were spending time with family and friends, walking and getting fresh air and doing hobbies.

2.3 4DWW- Global Comparison

‘4 Day Week Global’ (4DWG) is a not-for-profit collection of business leaders who believe in the benefits of a 4DWW for all stakeholders (4 Day Week Global, N.D.). 4DWG is running a pilot programme for companies within the UK to trial a 4DWW. The study began in June 2022 with data being collected and analysed from each of the participating companies by researchers from Cambridge and Oxford University, and Boston College (Javed and Whitehead, 2022). This pilot is also launching in various other countries including USA and Ireland (Cuadra, 2021). It is the first global research programme on 4DWW with workplace statistics (4 Day Week Global, N.D.). The scale of this project and international demand shows the current level of global interest for a 4DWW by major stakeholders.

The Scottish Government plan to trial a shorter-working time strategy and have pledged a £10 million fund to the cause (Scottish Government, 2021). Other

governments and political parties in Spain, Finland, New Zealand, Germany, France, Ireland, and the Netherlands are implementing, or considering implementing, similar strategies and allocation of funds (Ashton, 2019; Jump et al. 2022).

There has been interest in 4DWW from large corporations such as Microsoft (Microsoft, 2019). Microsoft shared some of the results via an article on their news centre. Microsoft's Japan division implemented a 4DWW trial with 2,300 of its employees. The pilot reported a 40% increase in productivity as well as happier workers, with 92% of employees preferring the working pattern (Kelly, 2019). Kelly (2019) stated it is far easier to implement reduced working patterns in multinational companies where there are thousands of employees, in comparison to smaller companies, where the onus is on less employees to complete the responsibilities. However, Marks (2022) disagrees and suggests small business' can be particularly well suited to 4DWW as they have more flexibility when compared with larger corporations.

2.4 4DWW- Wales

Sophie Howe (2022), the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales recently commissioned a report named 'A Future Fit for Wales: The Roadmap to a Shorter Working Week'. The report suggests 76% of Welsh public are in support of a 4DWW in order to enable the population to achieve a better work life balance. Howe (2022) advised the Welsh Government to commit to a trial to instigate a change across Wales. This report is evidence of the interest in Wales to implement 4DWW initiative.

There are a handful of organisations trialing 4DWW across Wales, notably a hair salon named Slunks (Howe, 2022). Slunks is a small business with approximately 30 employees (Thompson, 2022). However, after a comprehensive review of all available literature there are few detailed case studies of Welsh companies trialing or implementing the initiative in comparison to other UK nations. Additionally, no companies could be found within the engineering industry which highlights a gap in the literature. This could be due to no Welsh engineering companies employing the 4DWW.

2.5 Relationship Between Reduced Working Hours and Employee Wellbeing

Currently, there is no widespread agreed criteria for good or normal wellbeing. There is also no widely used diagnostic criteria for poor wellbeing (Halbreich, 2021).

Jump et al. (2022) suggest 4DWW could enhance EW by providing more free time which leads to improved mental and physical health. Multiple studies have found that annual leave has a positive effect on wellbeing; however, this only lasts for around three days after the employee has returned to work (Westman and Eden, 1997; De Bloom et al. 2012). Furthermore, Jump et al. (2022) suggests a shorter working week is a practical way for employees to experience the positive impact on wellbeing for a prolonged period. Because it provides the opportunity for regular recovery so individuals can benefit from positive effects of resting (Jump et al. 2022).

Gash et al. (2012) conducted a study in Germany and UK and found that a decrease in working hours led to a significantly positive improvement on well-being of women. This research was only conducted on women, as in 2007 they performed the majority of part-time work (Gash et al. 2012).

Haraldsson and Kellam (2021) conclude from studies conducted in Iceland that a reduction in working hours leads to an improvement in EW. Big Potato Games (N.D.) based in London are a small business employing 14 people in 2018. Big Potato Games trialled a 4DWW for two months and interviews with the employees concluded nearly all employees described improved wellbeing due to feeling more relaxed and well rested (Fox-Leonard, 2020).

Likewise, Lepinteur (2019) found that when working hours were reduced, EW increased. This study conducted in Portugal was a longitudinal study over five years and improvements in wellbeing did not fade, showing the effects to be long-lasting.

Barnett (2006) suggests extreme working hours can have negative impacts on employee quality of life, including harm to health. Likewise, following two meta-analyses investigating current studies on the relationship between long working hours and poor mental health; Ganster et al. (2018) concluded there was a lack of strong evidence to prove there is a correlation between the two variables.

Kamerade et al. (2019) studied how much paid work is required to achieve optimum levels of wellbeing. In a longitudinal study from 2009-2018 with 84,993 individual

participants. Results showed similar levels of wellbeing in both men and women regardless of the length of their working week ranging from one hour up to a maximum of 48 hours. This study disagrees with the research of Jump et al. (2022), Gash et al. (2012), Haraldson and Kellman (2021), and Lepinteur (2019).

One of the main objections for 4DWW is the same amount of work is compressed into a shorter time which can lead to an increase in stress (Delaney and Casey, 2021). Rudolf (2014) also describes how reduced working hours can lead to a change in working procedures, which can result in intensification for employees resulting in lower wellbeing and an increased chance of burnout (Russell, et al. 2022). Rudolf (2014) concludes by stating it would be naive to assume that a reduction in working hours alone will lead to an increase in EW and additional factors would have to contribute to lead to increases. Jump et al. (2022) suggest this can be combated by streamlining operations, creating quieter workspaces and the natural increase in productivity caused by a 4DWW.

McGleenon (2022) claims 4DWW has led to an increase in burnout as well as individuals needing to work outside their agreed hours in order to complete required tasks. However, in trials in Iceland no evidence of burnout was seen due to the consideration taken when designing the trial (Haraldsson and Kellam, 2021).

Chapter 3- Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the research philosophy, approach, strategy, and design as well as sampling. It introduces the data analysis, reliability and validity, ethics of data collection and research limitation.

3.1 Research Design

There are three main types of research design quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods where both types of data are collected (Bryman et al. 2018).

Mixed methods research combines both quantitative and qualitative data collection into one study (Hesse-Biber, 2010). There are different ways in which research can incorporate both methods of data collection into one study. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) suggest there are four basic method designs, convergent parallel design,

exploratory sequential design, explanatory sequential design, and embedded design. Bryman et al. (2018) suggest some academics disagree with mixed methods design as the philosophies for each of the methods do not align. However, Bryman et al. (2018) argue whilst an epistemology may have an affinity to certain methods of data collection this does not always have to be the case and is not sustainable.

A study by Adamson et al. (2004) concluded qualitative and quantitative data collection can be complementary in research. Adamson et al. (2004) established standardised questionnaires followed by qualitative interviews as an effective way in which to gather information in the area of health service research. This study is particularly relevant because similarly they were researching complex and personal issues relating to health.

This research used a similar method of data collection to Adamson et al. (2004) and applied a mixed methods design. The data collection was in two phases, a self-completed questionnaire (SCQ) followed by semi-structured interview (SSI).

3.1.1 Data Collection by SCQ

De Vaus (2014) describe a questionnaire as a method of data collection whereby participants answer a set of questions which have been presented in a fixed order. Saunders et al. (2019) describe a SCQ as a questionnaire which the participant enters their own answers. SCQs can be beneficial when the participants are geographically scattered (Snowball and Willis, 2011) Participants are often more honest when compared with face-to-face questionnaires, although response rates can be lower (Snowball and Willis, 2011).

SCQs were inspired by The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) which measures wellbeing and evaluates policies (Warwick Medical School, N.D.). Each question was worded positively and the selection covers feeling and functioning characteristics of wellbeing (Stewart-Brown, N.D., as cited in Warwick Medical School, N.D.). The WEMWBS scale has high levels of reliability and is impervious to bias (Tennant et al. 2007).

The Independent Variable (IV) in this study was the reduction in employee working days and hours. The Dependent Variable (DV) was the effect the change in IV has on the employee's perception of their wellbeing.

3.1.2 Data Collection by SSIs

There are three types of interviews: structured, unstructured, and semi-structured (Weller, 1998). Structured interviews have a strict standardised format, SSI's have a thematic format and ordering of questions is participant led, and unstructured interviews have a loose format where the themes are participant led (Roulston and Choi, 2018).

SSIs were used in this study as they offer a degree of flexibility within questioning which enables the interviewer to gain further insights into topics as they arise (Cachia and Millward, 2011). However, SSIs are more difficult to conduct and require more skill when compared with structured interviews (DeJonckheere and Vaughn, 2019).

The first half of SSI questions were developed from the SCQ to allow participants to explain answers more fully. The second half of questions were more general to allow participants to explain their thoughts on 4DWW and describe how they spend their additional time. Activities participants take part in was of particular interest because of research by The Mental Health Foundation (2017) linking particular activities to improved mental health.

3.2 Ethics of Data Collection

Saunders et al. (2019) explain that often in business and management research human participants are involved, this is when ethical concerns are at their highest.

The risk assessment identified disclosing information about sensitive topics could be harmful to the participants mental health (Labott et al. 2013). In order to reduce these effects, the participant was given a participant information sheet. This advises of the topic of questioning, so the participant was pre-warned of the themes. The information sheet advised of the process for withdrawal if required. Post interview participants were issued with a participation debrief sheet. This informed the participant of various organisations which could be contacted if they had any feelings of distress following their involvement in the study.

Informed consent was gained by asking the participants to sign the consent form after reading the participant information sheet. A signed consent form was obtained by each participant before any data collection. Data will be kept in a locked draw for

12 months at which point it will be destroyed. No forms of deception were used in this project.

Chapter 4- Results

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presented the results compared with the research question.

4.1 Results Compared with Research Question

This study set out to investigate '*What are the effects of a reduced working pattern on EW in APM?*'.

There is a vast amount of evidence in both the quantitative and qualitative results to suggest that 4DWW has had a positive impact on employees of APM. Results build on existing information of 4DWW trials in Spain, Finland, New Zealand, Germany, France, Ireland, and the Netherlands and provide new in-depth insight into the effects a 4DWW has had on an engineering company based in Wales. The literature review highlights a lack of current research on companies implementing the 4DWW policy in Wales. These results are exclusively focused on the impacts on employees. Therefore, data provides a new insight on how 4DWW impacts employee perceptions of wellbeing in APM.

Qualitative data via semi-structured interviews complements SCQ's to obtain additional detail. Much of the data collected concurred with research found in the literature review. For example, 83% of interviewees stated they use their additional day off to spend time with friends, family and pets. Aked et al. (2008), Jenkins et al. (2008) and Diener and Seligman (2002) all suggest relationships to others is a key factor for good mental health.

However, data also contradicts some of the existing literature. For example, although results in Appendix 5 suggest there has been an increase in wellbeing since 4DWW was implemented this disagrees with the views of Kamerade et al (2019) who suggest levels of wellbeing are similar when comparing those who work a range from one to 48 hours per week.

Chapter 5- Conclusions and Recommendations

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the research aim and objectives, as well as the overall study limitations. Additionally, future research implications are presented.

5.1 Research Aim

The research aim was *'to examine the effects a 4DWW has on EW in APM'*.

This aim was achieved by using SCQs and SSIs. The key finding was EW had improved for most participants in some aspect, which concurs with the research conducted by Christian (2022), Haraldsson and Kellam (2021), Jump et al. (2022), Gash et al. (2012), Fox-Leonard (2020) and Lepinteur (2019). For example, increasing exercise or seeing friends and family more. Research conducted by Aked et al. (2008), Jenkins et al. (2008) and Diener and Seligman (2002) all indicate connections to others is a key influencer to good mental health.

There has been no evidence of an increase in stress or burnout from the research which agreed with Haraldsson and Kellam (2021) and counters the thoughts of Russell et al. (2022), Rudolf (2014) and McGleenon (2022).

5.2 Research Objectives

This section will review the research report in relation to the initial objectives.

5.2.1 Objective One

Objective one was *'to identify any changes to EW after four months of the implementation of 4DWW in APM'*.

Data collection was completed in May, four months after the implementation of 4DWW. Following the data collection results were analysed to identify any changes to EW. The SCQ returned results whereby 85% of the modes were either agree or strongly agree. Therefore, indicating there had been improvements to EW. However, the remaining 15% of modes were neutral indicating the most popular answer was no change on two of the questions.

5.2.2 Objective Two

Objective two was *'to add to current literature on the relationship between EW and reduced working patterns'*.

Both quantitative and qualitative data collected contribute to current literature on the relationship between staff wellbeing and a transition to a 4DWW. The key contribution was EW overall has improved in a Welsh based company since the implementation of 4DWW.

5.2.3 Objective Three

Objective three was *'to adopt a mixed methods approach in order to examine the relationship between EW and a 4DWW'*.

SCQ's were adopted in order to obtain quantitative data along with SSI's to collect qualitative data.

5.2.4 Objective Four

Objective four was *'to draw conclusions and make recommendations as to how APM can improve EW for individuals participating in a 4DWW'*.

The report concluded that 4DWW had a positive impact on the wellbeing of most participants. For example, interviewees all reported they felt they were using their additional day off to benefit their health in some way. This concurs with the work by Jump et al. (2022) which concluded 4DWW can increase EW. However, there were some instances whereby employees felt there had been no change to certain aspects of wellbeing in SCQ's for example in areas such as thinking more clearly and feeling better about themselves.

5.3 Future Research Implications

This study is the first mixed methods research to be conducted on a Welsh company on this topic. Therefore, it is a starting point for further research in Wales. However, this research has added to existing literature on companies worldwide implementing the 4DWW. Results concluded many employees reported experiencing an increase in wellbeing which agreed with existing literature by Jump et al. (2022), Gash et al. (2012), Haraldsson and Kellman (2021), Fox-Leonard (2020) and Lepinteur (2019).

However, due to the limitations of the study more research needs to be conducted in Wales in order to make the results more generalisable.

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