

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In early 2024, 45 organizations across diverse industries in Germany aimed to trial a four-day-week (4DW) schedule for a period of six months. This report presents data from organizations that have either completed the trial or are about to finish by the end of the year.



INDUSTRY REPRESENTATION & ORGANIZATION SIZE

The participating organizations spanned various industries, including professional services, manufacturing, construction, health care and social services, IT, and utilities. Organizations ranged in size from micro-organizations with fewer than 9 employees (13%) to large organizations with over 250 employees (14%). The majority were small (10-49 employees) or medium-sized (50-249 employees) organizations (73%).



START OF THE TRIAL

While 51% of the organizations adhered to the official start date of February 1st, 2024, others began their 4DW trial between January and June. This approach allowed organizations to tailor the implementation to their specific operational needs, offering greater flexibility.



IMPLEMENTATION FLEXIBILITY

Organizations had the autonomy to determine how they implemented the 4DW. While 60% of participating organizations applied the 4DW to their entire workforce, 40% limited it to selected employees or teams. Larger organizations predominantly implemented the 4DW only for specific departments. Organizations also implemented a variety of different work reduction models varying by the degree of time reduction and flexibility of days off. 34% of organizations reduced work time by 20%, while 20% opted for a reduction of 11-19%. 85% of the organizations designated one full day off each week, while 15% chose alternative models.



EXPECTATIONS & MOTIVATION

The primary reasons for organizations to trial the 4DW included enhancing employer attractiveness (89%), improving employee health (77%), productivity growth (57%), and future orientation (37%).

PREPARATION & SUPPORT

Organizations had the opportunity to attend up to 15 digital workshops on topics about how to introduce the 4DW, such as defining framework conditions, optimizing work processes, and legal considerations. They also had access to digital and in-person networking opportunities to share experiences and insights.



ORGANIZATIONS DROPPING OUT

Out of the original 45 organizations, two large organizations discontinued their participation due to economic difficulties or lack of internal support for the 4DW.



DATA COLLECTION

The research involved the collection of data in three waves and multiple data sources. Subjective perceptions of employees and managers were captured via surveys and interviews. Further, the research team utilized smartwatches and hair samples to collect objective physiological data on the individual level capturing detailed information about stress, physical activities, and sleep. Moreover, organizational metrics serve as objective data on the organization level. Control groups within organizations that did not adopt the 4DW for all employees provided a baseline comparison in addition to the comparisons over time.



IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

To compensate for the reduced working hours, employees made several adjustments, such as reducing distractions (65%), optimizing processes (63%), and modifying meeting structures (52%). Others stated to utilize focus time (32%) or introduced new digital tools (25%) to further enhance work efficiency.



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WORK TIME & OVERTIME

The trial resulted in a significant reduction in both weekly workdays (-0.45 days) and weekly work hours (-3.95 hours). At the same time monthly overtime decreased (-1.58 hours).



PERFORMANCE & PRODUCTIVITY

Financial performance metrics such as revenue and profit do not show a significant difference compared to the previous year. However, the fact that these metrics remain stable, while work hours were significantly reduced, suggest that at least some productivity gains have been realized. Top management perceptions and self-reported employee data support this.



SATISFACTION & EMPLOYER ATTRACTIVENESS

Overall employee satisfaction increased and organizations reported improvements in recruitment and retention rates. However, we find only little evidence for increased job satisfaction and decreased turnover intention reported by employees. Likewise, we do not find solid evidence for improved turnover rates as measured by objective metrics.



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY & SLEEP

The introduction of the 4DW significantly increased physical activity levels, as measured by step counts, and intensity minutes. In comparison to the control group, 4DW participants took more steps (+1.848 steps) and were more physically active (+24.45 min) per week. Additionally, participants in the 4DW slept longer per week than those in the control group (+38 minutes).



EMPLOYEE HEALTH

Participants reported significant improvements in mental and physical health. Smartwatch data confirmed these findings, showing that participants in the 4DW experienced fewer stress minutes per week (-89 minutes) compared to those in the control group.

ABSENTEEISM

We do not find strong evidence for an improvement in employee absenteeism. Although organizational-level data showed a slight decrease in monthly sick days, the difference compared to 2023 is not statistically significant. Likewise, while employees self-reported a decrease in absence from work the same applied for the control group, suggesting seasonal differences as the underlying reason.



TIME USE

We find that participants had more time for their family, their friends, physical activity, and self-care. For instance, before the trial, 64% of employees expressed a desire to spend more time with family. During the trial this figure dropped to only 50%.



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

International studies have found that the implementation of a 4DW can significantly reduce employees' and companies' environmental footprints, primarily through decreased commuting and lower electricity consumption in the workplace. However, in our sample, no such reductions were observed. Commuting times remained unchanged, and there was no evidence to suggest that activities undertaken on the additional day off were particularly environmentally friendly.



POST-TRIAL CONTINUATION

73% of organizations stated that they will continue the 4DW beyond the trial, either by extending the trial phase or fully implementing it. Meanwhile, 20% opted to discontinue the 4DW, and 7% remained undecided. From the employee perspective 83% wish to continue. These findings demonstrate an overall positive reception of the 4DW.

