

The uneven implementation of the 4-day workweek: organizational cultures in tension

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Abstract

Purpose – Despite the different scientific contributions about the 4-day workweek, there is a lack of research into the role of organizational cultures in implementing the 4-day workweek. This article addresses that gap, discussing the extent to which specific types of organizational culture favour the experience of implementing the 4-day workweek and the tensions that surround it.

Design/methodology/approach – This article is based on a case study exploring how the uneven implementation of a 4-day workweek in a small company relates to organizational cultures and their tense dynamics. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and an organizational culture assessment instrument.

Findings – This case study reveals that the uneven implementation of the 4-day workweek is favoured by the hybrid organizational culture of a small company, combining tradition and innovation leadership styles. It discusses a double tension between current and preferred organizational cultures, as well as inside the existing hybrid organizational culture, which managed to accommodate both 4-day and 5-day working formats.

Originality/value – This study outlines the underexplored scientific area of organizational cultures in leveraging the 4-day workweek and the tensions that arise from running through it. In addition, it offers insights for organizations and practitioners' debate because it discusses an uneven experience of implementing the 4-day workweek as it includes workers who joined, declined or were excluded from the 4-day format by a unilateral decision of the administration.

Keywords 4-Day workweek, Working time, Work organization, Organizational culture, Case study

Paper type Research article

Introduction

Reducing normal working hours has been observed over time (Moase, 2016; Moen *et al.*, 2013; Schor, 2010; Fitzgerald, 1996), with different organizations adopting various approaches, depending on the underlying objectives. There is a widespread notion that these decreases in working time are mainly used to enhance workers' productivity and performance, while at the same time providing improvements in their well-being (Chakraborty *et al.*, 2022; Kallis *et al.*, 2013; Kamerāde *et al.*, 2019; International Labour Office, 2019; OLoughlin, 2022). With this in mind, there has been strong interest in reducing working hours through a 4-day workweek (Lewis *et al.*, 2023).

The growing interest in reducing working hours also arises from the fact that this practice is a possible response to contemporary challenges related to growing wage inequalities, the fast development of automation, the culture of long working hours and environmental problems (Chung, 2022; Walter and Fontinha, 2022; Coote *et al.*, 2021; Delaney and Casey, 2021; Gomes, 2021; Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2018; Hollo and Twomey, 2016; Skidelsky and Kay, 2019; Stronge *et al.*, 2019; TUC, 2018).

This article draws on a case study of a small company partially implementing the 4-day workweek to discuss the extent to which the dynamics of organizational cultures can favour or hinder this working time reduction. One of the innovative dimensions of this case study is an



organizational dynamic including workers who choose to join the 4-day workweek, workers who choose not to participate, and workers who were excluded by a unilateral decision of the administration. This article explores the tensions between current and preferred organizational cultures, as well as between the existing hybrid organizational culture, which managed to reduce work to 32 h over 4 days. Specifically, it discusses the dynamics of a hybrid organizational culture and mirror teams in leveraging innovative organizational practices (Azeem *et al.*, 2021) like the 4-day workweek. This topic is particularly timely given the growth of managerial experiments on the 4-day workweek (Schor *et al.*, 2022, 2023; Moen and Chu, 2023) and the increasing changes that have been taking place in the contemporary world of work (Fan, Moen, 2022; Schor, 2020; Rani and Dhir, 2020) thus confront a fundamental challenge to how currently society is being organized around time, with its division into working and non-working time.

Literature review

Working time reductions

Over time and worldwide working time reductions have been observed (Schor *et al.*, 2023; Fan, Moen, 2022; Lepinteur, 2019; Skidelsky and Kay, 2019; Stronge *et al.*, 2019; Golden, 2012; Bird, 2010). They can take various forms such as a shorter working week, more days of annual leave, a later start to the working day and earlier retirement (Skidelsky and Kay, 2019). Moreover, these working time reductions can be introduced by the intervention of local or national government, as an initiative by employers or via agreements negotiated by workers' and employers' representatives at the level of sectors or workplaces (Coote *et al.*, 2021).

The literature confronts different perspectives when it comes to the arguments for and against a reduction in working hours. Some authors argue that these reductions are capable of reducing unemployment, which generates positive effects for specific groups, such as women, the elderly or disadvantaged groups (Delaney and Casey, 2021; Perpetual Guardian White Paper, 2019; Kallis *et al.*, 2013; Fitzgerald, 1996). In fact, in the past, reductions in working hours served as measures to control unemployment through job sharing, as was seen in the case of the Great Depression in the United States and the case of France, with the change in the working week from 39 to 35 h (International Labour Office, 2019; Skidelsky and Kay, 2019; Stronge *et al.*, 2019; Raposo and van Ours, 2010). However, the effect on the creation of new jobs depends on how this reduction affects labour supply and demand, through changes in wages and productivity (Coote *et al.*, 2021; Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2018).

Long-term cost savings are also another of the arguments addressed in the literature and are achieved as the retention of workers reduces turnover (Golden, 2012). Moreover, there is a widespread notion that productivity is also positively influenced, even though it is crucial to understand whether these gains are a consequence of automation or whether they are obtained by increasing the productivity of living labour, with workers being paid more while working less (Chung, 2022; TUC, 2018; Hollo and Twomey, 2016; Kallis *et al.*, 2013).

Reducing weekly working hours also increases leisure time, family and friends' time, or time for personal tasks, which creates well-being benefits (Chung, 2022; Rafferty *et al.*, 2022; Hollo and Twomey, 2016; Marston, 2016; Schor, 2010; Fitzgerald, 1996). This idea is evident in Europe when free time was seen as a sign of progress and improvement, rather than as detrimental to workers' performance (Chakraborty *et al.*, 2022; TUC, 2018; Pullinger, 2014; Ashford and Kallis, 2013; Alesina *et al.*, 2005; Owen, 1988). At the end of the 1990s, for example, reductions in weekly working hours in Portugal and France, from 44 to 40 h and from 39 to 35 h, respectively, increased the well-being of workers in both countries, through improvements in job satisfaction and leisure (Freitas, 2019; Lepinteur, 2019; Romagnan and Benoit, 2014; Fagnani and Letablier, 2004). Also in the Netherlands, the European country with the highest percentage of part-time work, the application of measures to support the voluntary choice to reduce working hours was beneficial mainly for women and well-paid workers (Coote *et al.*, 2021; Skidelsky and Kay, 2019). For its part, Sweden, one of the richest countries with a high human development index, has experimented with several tests with a six-hour working

day, on the initiative of the local government in the city of Gothenburg, which has had positive effects on the physical and psychological health of workers (Stronge *et al.*, 2019; Moase, 2016).

However, there are concerns about the intensification of work, both at a sectoral level and at a more personal level (Chaffey, 2022; Shepherd, 2021), and difficulties of implementation in some sectors (Delaney and Casey, 2021; Laker and Roulet, 2019). The case of France is a good example: on the one hand, there has been an intensification of work and a consequent increase in workers' stress levels (Coote *et al.*, 2021; Skidelsky and Kay, 2019; Romagnan and Benoit, 2014), on the other hand, there have been difficulties for hospitals that have reduced their working hours, given that this reduction has not been accompanied by proportional job creation (Skidelsky and Kay, 2019). In fact, different sectors and types of work have different characteristics and needs, which implies that a one-size-fits-all approach will naturally create problems (Coote *et al.*, 2021; Pullinger, 2014). A poor application of working time reduction can increase inequalities between sectors of workers. However, this practice aims to contribute to improving working conditions, promoting job security and redistributing income (Skidelsky and Kay, 2019).

Reductions in working time can also be associated with a reduction in environmental impact, either because there is less demand for transport and water and electricity consumption in the workplace or through the perspective of sustainable degrowth (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2018; Moase, 2016; Pullinger, 2014; Knight *et al.*, 2012; Schor, 2005). According to this perspective, if the productivity gains obtained from these reductions in working time are invested in non-resource-intensive leisure practices (e.g. outdoor walks, physical exercise, staying at home to rest, etc) rather than in capital, there could be a fall in product growth, a reduction in consumption and, at the same time, an increase in well-being (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2018; Marston, 2016; Knight *et al.*, 2012). However, these impacts become uncertain if we consider, for example, that although machines help to increase productivity, they also end up increasing environmental damage (Kallis *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, it is not known whether the extra leisure time will be redirected to less resource-intensive activities (Worstell, 2019; Pullinger, 2014; Kallis *et al.*, 2013; Schor, 2005), so it is uncertain that there will be a reduction in consumption.

Organizational culture and the 4-day workweek

Organizational culture has been conceptualized by different social sciences in multiple ways. Some perspectives stress the relevance of the various levels and contents of organizational culture, while others emphasise the organization's rules and forms of communication, the practices and discourses shared by its members, the values, metaphors or images used by organizational actors, the creativity of individuals or groups in the organization, the knowledge, symbols, meanings, shared beliefs and the unconscious processes of the mind and individual representations (Alvesson, 2010; Martin, 2004; Hofstede, 2000; Schein, 1985; Smircich, 1983). Despite the existence of these multiple approaches, organizational culture has been viewed in a holistic, historically determined and socially constructed way (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2025). Schein's (1985) perspective on organizational culture stands out for the integrating and balancing function he attributes to it (Martin, 2004), defining it as an articulated set of devices that an organization builds, discovers, or develops as it learns to deal with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration. As these devices work efficiently and effectively, they are considered operational means to be passed on to organizational actors as the appropriate way to perceive, think and act in the face of similar problems in everyday organizational life.

One of the most widely researched areas of organizational culture is the attempt to categorize organizational cultures into typologies (Handy, 1993). Organizational typologies are abstractions of reality and reflect ideal types. They should therefore be understood and used as conceptual tools for analysing, systematizing and interpreting organizations, and are useful for helping to diagnose organizational reality. One of the most popular typologies is that developed by Cameron and Quinn (2006), whose aim is to assess and profile the dominant cultures of organizations because it helps to identify the underlying assumptions and beliefs that exist in an organization. These authors propose a set of values underlying the concept of

organizational effectiveness which structures three organizational dimensions: the contrasting dimension of flexibility/control (predictability and stability/innovation and adaptation); the contrasting dimension of internal orientation/external orientation (integration and unity/differentiation and rivalry), and the contrasting dimension of means/ends (planning and setting objectives/effective production of results). Based on these three dimensions, [Cameron and Quinn \(2006\)](#) created an “Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument”, which is used to identify the profile of the current and preferred organizational cultures based on the fundamental values, assumptions, interpretations and approaches that characterize organizations. This instrument is an ipsative measure of six items related to six dimensions: dominant characteristics, leadership, people management, organizational glue, organizational strategy and success criteria. First, the dominant characteristics of the organization, i.e. what the organization is like as a whole. Second, the leadership style and approach that guides the organization. Third, the hunger for managing employees or the style that characterizes the way employees are treated and the working environment. Fourth, the organizational glue or the binding mechanisms that hold the organization together. Fifth, the strategic options define the areas of emphasis that guide the organization’s strategy. Sixth, the criteria selected to define success and how this is rewarded and celebrated. This model of contrasting values can be represented by two axes, around which the three dimensions are distributed, forming four quadrants. From these four quadrants, four types of culture are derived: clan culture (human relations or group culture), hierarchy culture (internal processes or control culture), adhocratic culture (open systems or innovation culture) and market culture (rational objectives culture) ([Cameron and Quinn, 2006](#)).

In the context of implementing the 4-day workweek, organizational culture is particularly relevant because most companies and other organizations share organizational characteristics related to their size, leadership, and reputational path, which allow them to be early innovators ([Pang, 2020](#)). In fact, most of the 113 organizations studied by [Pang \(2020\)](#) are small and medium-sized enterprises, where internal changes are easier to introduce and manage. They are also run by their founders, whose formal position and moral authority give them the power to introduce major changes. Finally, they are innovative and creative, thus creating an atmosphere favourable to experiments such as the 4-day workweek. In addition to sharing these organizational characteristics, it’s also important to note that the organizations involved in the 4-day workweek ensure three conditions simultaneously (reduced working hours, maintaining wages, maintaining productivity, profitability, and customer service levels), the so-called 100–80–100 principle, i.e. 100% of wages, 80% of time and 100% performance ([Four-Day Week Global, 2025](#)). These organizations cover a wide range of sectors from catering, software, e-commerce, consultancy, insurance, financial services, the creative industry, manufacturing and maintenance, health and beauty, care services, etc. Among this diversity, the most represented sectors are catering, the creative industry and software, which are sectors of economic activity particularly affected by problems relating to gender inequalities, recruitment, stress, turnover, and burnout ([Pang, 2020](#)). It’s worth mentioning two cases. The Perpetual Guardian company in New Zealand is internationally recognized for the successful implementation of a 4-day workweek pilot in 2018, with improvements observed in terms of stress, productivity, job satisfaction and work-life balance ([Campbell, 2023](#); [Coote et al., 2021](#); [Skidelsky and Kay, 2019](#); [Delaney, 2018](#)). Like many organizational leaderships who have implemented the 4-day workweek ([Pang, 2020](#)), this company also recognizes that its leader’s previous professional experiences of long working hours, difficulties in reconciling work and personal life, and problems of personal or professional burnout were the trigger for implementing changes in the organization of working time. In the case of Microsoft Japan, the company’s first foreign subsidiary, the need to intervene in an innovative way in work cultures is recognized as a means to address the problem of *karoshi* (death by overwork) among the Japanese workforce ([Pang, 2020](#)). The involvement of its 2,300 workers in 2019 during the 4-day workweek pilot generated a 40% increase in productivity, as meetings became much more efficient, workers were more satisfied, and there were also positive environmental

effects, as electricity costs fell by 23% and workers printed 59% fewer sheets of paper (Coote *et al.*, 2021; OLoughlin, 2022). In this sense, organizational culture plays a key role in leveraging organizational innovation practices (Azeem *et al.*, 2021), such as the 4-day workweek. Being complementary to technological, scientific and social innovation, organizational innovation is a dimension (Sanchis, 2023) that contributes to the sustainability of business growth, productivity levels and well-being at work.

Methodology

This article is based on a descriptive case study (Yin, 2014) of a single small company, XWise (pseudonym), with 20 employees that imports and distributes flooring and wall coverings. The choice of a small company and an intensive study carried out with semi-structured interviews with 18 employees (given that two were absent from the company) results from the representativeness of this type of business structure in the Portuguese economic formation, made up of many companies (1.437 million companies in 2022, for a country with an active population of around 5 million workers), which are very small: 63.5% employed only one to four workers (GEP, 2023). It is, therefore, a relevant choice for the Portuguese context, but also for a more global framework of the flexible, networked company paradigm, made up of connections between smaller production units, which means that the study of the 4-day workweek experiences benefits from case studies in small production units, carried out in an intensive and qualitative approach. Collecting data through semi-structured interviews with the total universe of workers and administrators active in the company during the study, as we did, ensures consistent data saturation and redundancy (Saunders and Townsend, 2016). To reinforce these aspects of redundancy and to better assess the effects of applying this 4-day workweek measure, two interviews were carried out with each participant, in a longitudinal logic (Yin, 2014), first from a more retrospective perspective, in the sense of taking the interviewees back to the pre-implementation context, and then three months later, in the middle of the implementation phase. The case study includes workers who joined the 4-day workweek, those who chose not to take part, and those who were excluded by a unilateral decision of the administration. This universe of varied situations regarding the 4-day workweek enriches the research, both from the point of view of analysing tensions in the organizational culture and reflecting the perspectives of employees in these three situations on the various leadership styles present in the company.

XWise company: the implementation of the 4-day workweek

The XWise was founded in 1991 and is based in Portugal. It is family-owned, as the father is the administrator, and the son is the assistant administrator of the company. In 2022, the assistant administrator proposed that the company implement the 4-day workweek, without a pay cut, to, in his view, continue to *invest in promoting workers' quality of life*.

The planning behind the implementation of the 4-day workweek was not without its conflicts, as the administrator considered excluding administration and the sales department because, in his view, these were areas with greater flexibility in terms of working hours, without much need to take days off. Therefore, the measure would have to cover people who were in the company every day with schedules to keep. The assistant administrator felt that everyone should be allowed to take part in the 4 days, not excluding any area from the outset. Despite these disagreements, which will be analysed in detail in the next section of the article, they have not jeopardized the implementation of the 4-day workweek. It took place in January 2023, with a reduction in working hours from 40 to 32 h a week, with no change to the daily schedule, workers' wages or working conditions, which is in line with the most common format adopted by companies that implement the 4-day workweek (Lewis *et al.*, 2023; O'Connor and Schor, 2022; Schor *et al.*, 2022; Delaney and Casey, 2021; Walker, 2019; Bird, 2010). The company has 20 employees, 9 of whom have joined the 4-day workweek; 3 have

not joined by choice, and 8 have been excluded from this process by administration decision, namely 6 from the commercial department and 2 from administration. The workers from the included departments could choose between participating in the 4-day working format or continuing to work five days a week, in which case they received a 3% pay rise.

Data collection and analysis

Data for this case study was collected through semi-structured interviews with 18 professionals (out of 20), two per person: the first interview carried out in March 2023, with a retrospective approach, taking the interviewees back to the pre-implementation context; the second interviews were carried out in June 2023, at the moment of implementation in progress and focusing on the opinions of workers about it. Four different scripts were drawn up for each of these interview phases, with the questions being adapted according to the respective group of interviewees: those who were in the 4-day format, those who remained working 5 days, one for the commercial department workers, and, finally, one for the administration. The goal is to investigate the effects of partially implementing a 4-day workweek for different groups of workers and how different organizational culture dynamics contribute to this process. Out of the 18 workers interviewed, 12 are male and 6 female and the majority have a 12th class degree, 5 workers are up to 35 years old and 13 are between 35 and 66 years old. Regarding distribution by work department, 2 are from the administration, 6 from the administrative/financial department, 4 from the logistics department, 2 from the marketing department, and 4 from the commercial department.

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, the workers were asked to fill in the “Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument” by [Cameron and Quinn \(2006\)](#). Five responses were considered valid (workers who filled in all the questions in the tool). Although this corresponds to a minority of the interviewees, we believe it is a useful analytical element in the case study, allowing for discussion of tensions that exist between the current and preferred organizational cultures, which can also manifest as a tension around the present and the future development of the company and of the initiative of the 4-day workweek. The semi-structured interviews were analysed using the social constructivist paradigm. The major element of this paradigm is that individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work ([Creswell, 2007](#)), and these subjective meanings are not simply embedded in individuals but are formed and negotiated through social interactions over time. Interviewees are considered as social actors, inserted in a particular context – the XWise company – constructing meanings from their participation in this context. This process of sensemaking ([Weick, 1995](#)) is crucial to understand the perceptions and practices of the different profiles of interviewees about the pre-implementation organizational context and the implementation process of the 4-day workweek at XWise. The interview data were transcribed and coded based on an inductive process that captured a range of concepts related to the dynamics of organizational culture, work organization and working times. Although we have demographic data on the gender, age and profession of the workers, confidentiality issues, given the small number of participants, prevent us from using these markers to avoid identifying the workers ([Table 1](#)).

To identify the interviewees throughout the data analysis without compromising their identity, they were designated by letters from the alphabet, from A to R, revealing only whether they worked 4 or 5 days a week.

Table 1. Interviewees’ characterization

Designation	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R
Work format	4 days	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x						
	5 days						x	x		x			x	x	x	x	x	x

Source(s): Authors’ own creation

Findings*The company's organizational cultures*

In line with the main goal of this article, a key aspect is to understand how employees perceive the organizational culture of XWise. With the application of the "Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument" (Cameron and Quinn, 2006), which covers the current and preferred organizational cultures, it was possible to see that, for the employees who responded (5), two types of current organizational cultures stand out: the hierarchy culture (with 3 responses from individuals with positions in the company's administration and who work closely with the administration) and the market culture (2 responses from employees without positions in the company's administration). Concerning the hierarchy culture, participants consider the company to be a formalized and structured workplace, where procedures direct behaviour. They point out that leaders focus on coordination and organization and that formal rules and policies keep the organization together. For them, this is a company that aims to achieve stability and the smooth execution of tasks. They emphasize the value of efficiency and predictability. Finally, reliable delivery, continuous planning and cost control are seen as defining success. As for the market culture, respondents consider the company to be a results-based workplace that emphasizes the achievement of objectives. Leaders are considered hard drivers, and producers, and organizational cohesion is maintained through an emphasis on winning. People are seen as competitive and focused on goals, with reputation and success seen as the most important. Lastly, market dominance, meeting objectives, and high performance metrics are seen as defining success.

From the analysis carried out on preferred organizational culture, it should be noted that a significant majority of respondents desire a different culture to the current one, namely clan culture (3), hierarchy culture (1) and market culture (1). Only one respondent, without a position in the company's administration and who works closely with the administration, indicates the same type of current and preferred culture (in the case, hierarchy one). Concerning clan culture, respondents highlight the dynamic and creative working environment. Leaders are seen as innovative and risk-takers, while experiences and innovation are a way of creating bonds between workers. They value individual initiative and freedom and show a desire to grow and generate new resources. The creation of new products or services is seen as a success.

The data collected suggest that XWise's current organizational culture is a mixture of two main types: hierarchy and market cultures. However, when asked about their preferred organizational culture in the future, most respondents expressed a desire for change in favour of a clan culture standing out. The gap between these two profiles shows the desire for and direction of change. The fact that the clan culture is particularly desired by the assistant administrator, who was responsible for bringing the idea of the 4-day workweek to the company, highlights an aspiration for different organizational dynamics in the company, as the following subsection of the article shows.

The organizational leadership and the decision to partially implement the 4-day workweek

Leaders in the company are seen as people who focus on coordination and organization (within the hierarchy culture) and are also considered hard drivers, and producers (as suggested by the market culture). This hybrid organizational leadership style is fundamental for framing the process of discussing and implementing the 4-day workweek at XWise, which is described below.

The company's assistant administrator was responsible for coming up with the idea of implementing the 4-day workweek, without a pay cut. According to him, it was a development of the investment in *promoting workers' quality of life*, after the company had increased workers' salaries in 2022 to compensate for the increase in the cost of living. His idea also came about because he was aware of experiments taking place in other countries. He presented the idea to the administrator, who supported it:

Shortly afterwards, in a conversation like the ones that come out of the blue, my son (...), who is a bit more modern than I am, with the (administrative and financial director), etc., we came up with the idea

of reducing, giving a bonus to employees, because sometimes people really like time with their families, to have barbecues or, in short, other alternatives. As I felt we had enough people for what we were doing, I thought—I thought no, we thought why not create the possibility for people to reduce their working hours?

Once the administrator had accepted the idea, the next step was to design the process of implementing the 4-day workweek. One of the interesting dimensions of this process is the organizational dynamic that excludes some employees, namely from the sales department and administration, and employees who choose not to participate. The administrator assumed from the outset that the sales department would be excluded from the 4-day workweek:

For me, the employees in the sales department were left out. And why? Because the employees in the sales department—I have people who have worked with me for 20 years or so—are very healthy people, who have never taken half a day off to go to the doctor, never taken half a day off, regardless of whether they have a time limit or not—they have never said “look, I won’t come to work tomorrow because I have to take my daughter to the hospital or to the doctor or to take care of something”. They are out on the street and they manage their own schedules . . . so the need is for the people who are here, who have schedules to keep. (. . .) I consider that we are a relatively organized and well-managed company, not by me, (. . .), but the truth is that if there is no one calling attention to this or that every day, everything is fine, and sometimes things are not all right.

The administrator, as we can see, considers that the sales department has a more autonomous organizational dynamic compared to other departments. This exclusion was a sensitive issue and generated the greatest internal debate, since there was no consensus on the decision to exclude it. The words of the assistant administrator highlight this organizational tension:

The administrator thought that the commercial area couldn’t have 4 days, that they had to be available to the customer at any time. I thought that everyone should be given the option of choosing the 4 days. However, I didn’t object too much to my father’s decision, because I understand my father’s perspective when he says that the commercial area has always had more freedom in its work because it’s not an office or warehouse job, commercial workers are out of the company most of the day and can organize their day better, so much so that they don’t take as many days off, to go to the doctor, etc, (. . .) so I accepted my father’s decision.

In addition to the exclusion of the commercial department, the exclusion of the administration was also decided by the administrator:

(. . .) I think we’re a relatively organized and well-managed company, not by me (. . .), but what is certain is that if there isn’t someone calling attention to this and that on a daily basis, everything is fine, and sometimes things aren’t alright, the administration always has to be in the company.

This decision was not consensual, in the words of the assistant administrator, and is indicative of different mindsets in terms of business management, people and organizational leadership:

I think everyone should be included (. . .) I’d rather have the day off and not have my salary increased, I’d prefer that quality of life to higher pay. I’m more of an employee (. . .) for me personally it’s more about time than money (. . .) This was also the position of the administrative and financial director, who was the person who dealt with this issue, who interacted with all the workers (. . .). My father is here every day, he says he needs top and middle management to be at the company every day (. . .) that’s where we’re different, I look at the business with different glasses, I have a different position (. . .) I’ve lived my whole life in Canada, I have a different view (. . .) the people here are competent, reliable, and capable of making decisions, regardless of whether they’re at the top or the bottom, there should be no difference when it comes to providing a measure of quality of life (. . .).

In addition to these exclusions (six people were left out of the 4-day workweek), the administration also provided a particular organizational dynamic when it proposed that participation in the 4-day format was optional, with financial consideration. In other words, individuals who didn’t take part in the 4-day workweek would get a pay rise, but the others wouldn’t. The company’s leadership set aside around a month for the workers (excluding those in the commercial department) to consider

their decision based on all the information obtained. Moreover, during this period, all workers had the opportunity to actively participate in the construction of the 4-day format, raising doubts and pertinent questions that served to fine-tune the model. Three workers chose not to change to the 4-day workweek and received financial compensation.

The days off accepted for the majority were Mondays and Fridays, and for those who work on Saturdays, the days off changed to Fridays and Tuesdays. Every three months, workers change their day off, ensuring that it is rotated fairly for everyone. The holiday period also had to be considered, and it was decided and accepted by the workers that during this period, days off would count as vacation days, and if one of the members of the mirror teams went on holiday, there would be no days off for the other member.

The perceptions of the workers being excluded and workers choosing not to participate in the 4-day workweek

As mentioned in the methodology section, all the workers in the sales department (four) were excluded from the 4-day workweek. The way the workers viewed this exclusion was not uniform. In the first phase of the interviews, workers M and N said, respectively:

I don't really understand the reason for the exclusion (...) today companies are all commercial entities, the company is all connected (...) if I'd had a choice, I would have accepted the 4 days.

I think that if some have the right, the others should also have had the opportunity to choose (...) I would have chosen a 4-day week, I think that the work you do in 5 days could be done in 4 days.

Interviewees O and P stated a different position:

I can understand the decision, he believes that the commercial area has to be more available, and that it's easier to manage the administrative side compared to the commercial area (...) we work by zones, even within, for example, the northern zone, I work in a specific zone and another colleague works in other zones and, being only 2, it wouldn't be possible for me to cover the colleague's zones on his day off and vice versa (...) if I'd had the opportunity to choose, I could have opted for the 4 days, but more if there had been a consensus within the commercial area, if everyone had joined in.

I understand the management's decision to exclude the commercial area (...) there is only one commercial office in the northern area, so there would be one day when there would be no one (...), which may be why they didn't allow us to join the 4-day week (...).

Of the testimonies from the four workers in the commercial department, half don't understand the reasons and disagree with the company's decision, saying that if they had had the chance, they would have joined the 4-day workweek. The other half said that they understood the administration's arguments for excluding this department because it is a company spread over two areas in the country, the north and the centre, which cover different cities, and therefore, if it had gone ahead with the 4-day workweek, there would have been cities that could not have been covered.

The three workers F, G and J, who opted out of the 4-day workweek (one from the administrative department and two from the logistics department) identified their motivations in the first phase of interviews:

I think the pay rise was better than having a day off, and I also had some reservations about the effects of the measure.

I didn't feel that I needed that day off to stop and rest.

I had only been with the company for a short time (6 months) and I was a bit reluctant to work just 4 days, so I didn't accept.

Despite workers being excluded and others choosing not to participate in the 4-day format, the company managed to implement the 4-day workweek. In the second phase of interviews, three months after the first interviews were conducted, no interviewee reported any negative

occurrences in the company's working environment, which seems to show the company's organizational capacity to make 4-day and 5-day working formats compatible.

The organizational role of the mirror teams

The mirror teams are an organizational measure designed in the company to support the implementation of the 4-day workweek. These teams mean that workers have to work in a mirror with another colleague and everyone must demonstrate a certain level of versatility, as they take over from their mirror on their day off, performing some of their main duties, not necessarily all of them, but the minimum to ensure that there are no breaks in the service provided. The words of the person responsible for designing and implementing the measure (interviewee A) are enlightening in this respect:

During the absence of the colleague from the mirror team, the other ensures the minimum of his duties, if something needs to be sorted out, he does it, but also for one day, unless it's something urgent, that needs an immediate response, he doesn't have to do the work of two that day, no, he only has to take care of the other's urgent situations. After one day, the other is already here and vice versa, so it's absolutely peaceful. (...) I think that in our specific case it's the only way we can successfully implement the 4-day workweek.

This versatility could have been challenged when it was proposed, but this was not the case. The creation of the mirror teams by XWise was intended to facilitate and accommodate the whole process of implementing the 4-day workweek and, in fact, from the perspective of the interviewees, they have had the importance attributed to them from the outset by administration. There was general agreement that these teams were fundamental and played a key role in the 4-day workweek moving forward. As interviewee D says, *it was a great idea, because this way we can always ensure that when one of us is not there, the other's job will still be done*. Interviewee L adds that the company has *the perfect number of employees for this type of method*, and interviewee B says that *it couldn't be any other way here in our organization*. Even in the context of leave and holidays, the teams were, in the words of interviewee H, *very important so that the normal functioning of the work was not disrupted*.

A minority that was more sceptical about the role of these teams in the first interviews, in the second wave of interviews declared that it is a well-organized scheme that facilitates work for all employees, whether they are taking part in the 4-day workweek or not.

Although the concept of mirror teams was created specifically for the 4-day workweek, it is clear that the company already has an organizational tradition of working in this versatile way, as interviewee G shows:

Even before the 4-day workweek, the company already had a level of versatility, there had to be a mirror rhythm (...) there had to be cooperation between everyone in the company.

They also highlighted the multi-disciplinarity and versatility already inherent in the company's organizational culture, even before the 4-day workweek was implemented. Interviewee M states the following:

Yeah, because we're a smaller company, we've always had that in mind, from a certain point onwards. Even the people who joined the team ended up being multidisciplinary, dealing with different tasks, precisely so that when someone failed, there was another resource to take over.

The fact that there are fewer than twenty employees, the company is led by its founder, and it seeks innovative solutions to set itself apart from other companies in its sector – for example, in this respect, it is the only company to run training courses in the area of floating floors based on the CNEI (Constant Never Ending Improvement) philosophy – all contribute to the smooth running of the mirror teams. In addition to these dimensions, XWise took over from the outset that it would safeguard the 100–80–100 model (Four-Day Week Global, 2025), i.e. 100% of salary, 80% of time, and 100%, which is also an important anchor for employees to actively contribute to the smooth running of mirror teams. Interviewee A's words are enlightening in this respect:

(...) the work has to continue to be done in those four days and the perception for the clients, there can't be a perception for the client that we're working one day less, that's a bad sign, it's a sign that something isn't going well. Therefore, the return that has to be given, the response that has to be given has to be the same or better, even better, hopefully because people are more motivated, they'll get paid the same and work fewer hours, they'll come to work in a different mood (...).

When analysing the role of the mirror teams, it is important to understand the employees' view of working in this context. Interviewees L and P admit, respectively, that *it works very well*, and that *the people they are replacing are doing their job well*, and that there were no complications. For this to be possible, it was also mentioned that certain precautions have to be taken among colleagues who are mirroring. As interviewees K and B explained when they said that *the tasks must be well defined* and that a *summary (...) must be made so that the worker is aware of what happened that day that he didn't come, so that he can continue work easily*. In this sense, interviewees D and F agree that for everything to work, *people need to be able to communicate well* and that *they need to have a good relationship (...) and be on the same page*. The issue of communication is therefore fundamental to the success of mirror teams. The organizational peculiarity of the company's size can also be highlighted here, i.e. there are only nine workers who have to organize themselves for the mirror teams to function, which contributes to speeding up the communication process between the team. The fact that the leadership focuses on coordination and organization and that the formal rules and policies keep the workers together, traits of XWise's hierarchy organizational culture, also contribute to the smooth running of the mirror teams.

The commercial department also has a positive outlook on the work carried out by the mirror teams, stating that they don't feel any change in their work since the introduction of the 4-day workweek and, therefore, the creation of the mirror teams, and ensuring that there is always someone available to take calls or answer any questions that need clarifying.

Work organization and working times

In the first phase of interviews, the workers were aware of the demands that the 4-day week imposes in terms of work organization, since *everyone will have to organize themselves, they will have to manage their work even better* (interviewee D) and *working time is much more intensive* (interviewee K). However, there is also the perception that *tasks will flow more naturally* (interviewee H), considering the expectation that motivation will also be positively influenced by the 4-day workweek. A concern voiced by some interviewees, namely D and K, was the possibility that better organization of work and time would require a reduction in break times and socializing between workers.

In the second phase of interviews, it became clear that the organization of work had to be *more rigorous* (interviewee B) and *required us to adapt to having less time to organize the same work we had with more time* (interviewee H). To achieve this better organization, the interviewees mention the need for more meetings to organize and prioritize work, such as interviewee L explains: *more department meetings are needed to try to understand what is most urgent*. In this context, the different dynamics of the various departments pose particular challenges in terms of work organization and working times. In this regard, the logistics and marketing departments stand out, albeit for different reasons. The logistics department, on the one hand, requires controlled management of tasks, since clients can be unpredictable and set deadlines that alter workers' routines, making certain days more overloaded than others. If that day coincides with a day when fewer people are on duty, it can force deliveries to be postponed, as some interviewees explained. Regarding this topic, the interviewee D says:

It's always been a concern (...) to do this in such a way that we don't lack the minimum resources. Even deliveries have to be guaranteed, otherwise the rest doesn't flow as it should.

On the other hand, marketing requires creativity and, consequently, time to discuss and plan activities and projects. The overlapping of other issues treated as priorities in a context in

which working hours have been reduced means that time and work management sometimes create some pressure to fulfil tasks, which becomes a challenge. As interviewee L. highlights:

Yeah, always having one person in each department so that tasks are carried out as if it were a normal five-day week is a challenge.

The interviewee F says that *people have to be focussed (...) to do their best* and in this regard, mutual help also stands out, as interviewee A admits: *there is more team spirit, people communicate better, and communicate more.*

Related to this increase in team spirit, the interviewee L emphasizes in the second phase of the interviews, three months after the 4-day workweek was implemented, the deliberate relational dimension of controlling work with superiors:

Trying to plan how long it will take me to carry out that task, passing on that briefing to my superiors (...) so that each task is done in its own time.

The interviewee G says even more about the link between work organization, working times and organizational culture at XWise:

The 4-day workweek has allowed us to improve working relationships, for example, the workers find it easier to accommodate changes and other types of responsibilities to control their working time. Those of us in management have more of a facilitating role, it was already a bit like that in our company, and the 4-day week has accentuated this tendency towards a more family-orientated company.

It is clear that employees report an increase in the level of collaboration, teamwork and mutual willingness to help each other, as the success of the 4-day workweek stems from this. The fact that the company remains united around the 4-day workweek, concentrating on making the experiment a success, shows traits of XWise's market organizational culture, particularly those related to people being seen as competitive and focused on objectives.

On the other hand, the broad agreement that the reduction in working hours would only be feasible if everyone did their job and contributed to the quality of the service provided to customers shows that the 4-day workweek is an organizational innovation capable of creating bonds between workers, which reveals traces of the clan organizational culture preferred, particularly by the assistant administrator.

The sick leave situation was also a challenge for work organization, working times and workload, expressed in the second phase of interviews, as there were times when two or three people were on sick leave at the same period. Although these situations are not due to the introduction of the 4-day workweek, the truth is that it was something that changed the working dynamics in the company and that, in the long term, could jeopardize the viability of the 4-day workweek. As Interviewee A says:

In teams as small as ours, when there's someone on sick leave—and unfortunately we've had several situations so far (...) we've already entered a very high stress zone because we have a 4-day workweek and a person on sick leave at the same time and the person who stays on is stressed, there's no redundancy with anyone (...).

This situation of sick leave was a challenge that raised concerns in terms of work overload and employee stress and naturally forced a reorganization of work and greater emotional management. Even so, the overall view is positive, as interviewee B describes:

Working fewer days doesn't mean working more, in my view. Working fewer days means working better. Working better requires better time management and greater rigour.

Regarding the workload, there is a common idea that there is *some additional burden and effort* (interviewee A), so there is indeed more work due to the greater organization and time management that has had to take place. However, the interviewees say that they feel that the

tasks are appropriate to the job and that, even when there is a small work overload, this doesn't necessarily translate into increased levels of stress at work.

This greater need for organization doesn't harm working hours, because as the interviewee O states:

If it's well managed, if it's well organized between the person who's going to replace who, clarifying what they have to do as a priority, and then reconciling it with what they normally do, it's perfectly feasible.

The following two interviewees were quite clear in showing that the workers do not use overtime. As Interviewee L explains:

Yeah, in a general view, everyone in the company still works the same hours, from 9am to 6pm.

This perspective is reinforced by interviewee A's words:

(...) We've managed to maintain it, albeit with some effort, but effectively we haven't done an hour more, within the tolerances that were already normal and, therefore, this has organized people's working time and means that they have to make the most of every minute of work to fit in all the tasks.

The introduction of the 4-day workweek has allowed discussions in the different teams about how to organize work, which do not focus strictly on working time, promoting an increase in the sense of engagement and agency of the workers and valuing individual initiative to solve the challenges that arise in the company's daily life.

Discussion

Organizational cultures and the partial option of the 4-day workweek: between tradition and innovation?

The initiative of the company's leadership to open up the debate about the 4-day workweek and to communicate openly with all employees is framed in two distinct organizational leadership styles existing at XWise, one more focused on conservative control (characteristic of the hierarchy culture), led by the administrator and the other more focused on tasks and achieving goals (characteristic of the market culture), led by the assistant administrator, also crossed by a clear generational contrast between father and son. One of the singularities of this case study is that a hybrid organizational leadership style (Cameron and Quinn, 2006), which could be incompatible, works in XWise's case to fit in with the 4-day workweek. This is not unrelated to the fact that XWise has particular organizational characteristics discussed in the scientific literature (Pang, 2020) that act as catalysts for the success of the 4-day workweek, i.e. a company with few employees, with its founder at the helm, and with a track record of early innovators in terms of training policies. In addition to these characteristics, XWise is a family business, with the administrator and assistant administrator being father and son respectively. This circumstance favours a hybrid organizational leadership that seems to be consistent and sufficiently committed for the 4-day workweek to be successful. The fact that the assistant administrator himself says that he identifies more with the clan organizational culture (Cameron and Quinn, 2006) and that he himself brought the idea to the company, and it wasn't rejected, is indicative of the cohabitation of two styles of organizational leadership, albeit asymmetrical in terms of the exercise of power. The company's decision to promote openness to employee participation, although not all of them, especially in the sales department, is also expressive of this familiarity and socially constructed organizational hybridity (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2025). On the other hand, the company's decision to give workers the option of choosing to work 4 or 5 days (with a trade-off in terms of working time versus salary increase) shows a not entirely prescriptive approach that invites workers to weigh up their decisions and rethink their own work experiences within their teams. This organizational strategy (Cameron and Quinn, 2006) increases the possibility of commitment and ownership throughout the process and favours the absence of major conflicts between the two groups.

Mirror teams as an organizational glue?

The organizational measure of mirror teams is an anchor for implementing the 4-day workweek, as they are the basis for the work-sharing that needs to exist between employees to guarantee cover for those absent on their day off (Perpetual Guardian White Paper, 2019). We might expect conflict reporting from those working 4 days and 5 days in the same department, namely in the administrative and logistics departments. However, the interviews did not highlight any organizational problems relating to these teams, with 4 days and 5 days workers feeling that they work with the right mirror and that these teams are essential for the smooth running of the company's work. It is noteworthy that even the commercial department as a whole has a positive outlook on the work carried out by the mirror teams, stating that they don't feel any change in their work since the introduction of the 4-day workweek, emphasising that there is always someone available to take calls or answer any questions that need clarifying. This issue of it being a beneficial practice for everyone in the company, regardless of whether or not they are taking part in the 4-day workweek, highlights the fundamental role of the mirrors teams as the organizational glue (Cameron and Quinn, 2006) in leveraging this organizational innovation practice (Azeem et al., 2021). The mirror teams at XWise, as a formal policy on the one hand, and an objective around which workers mobilize, on the other, are expressive, respectively, of traits of the hierarchy and market organizational cultures (Cameron and Quinn, 2006), fulfilling an integrating and balancing function of the different situations experienced in the company in terms of the formats of the working week. They thus contribute to ensuring that everyone is well aware of the demands inherent in the functioning of the 4-day workweek.

What organization's strategies make the new working week feasible?

The 4-day workweek as a measure of organizational innovation (Sanchis, 2023) has intensified the increase in mutual help and concentration, with the majority of workers highlighting changes concerning improvements in communication, as well as in their ability to be multi-skilled at XWise. These changes constitute strategic organizational options (Cameron and Quinn, 2006) for integrating and balancing the new working dynamics and show how workers shape and change organizational cultures (Martin, 2004).

There is a general notion that the pace of work is increasing, as evidenced in some studies (Lewis et al., 2023; Topp et al., 2022), sometimes forcing some workers to extend their day or reduce the number of breaks they take because there is more work to do in less time. This increase in the pace of work is more prevalent in some departments than others, especially in logistics and marketing, due to their peculiarities, which becomes a challenge for the company itself. Despite this, the majority of workers do not find a cause-effect relationship between increased pace of work and greater burden and stress (Lewis et al., 2023; Rafferty et al., 2022). In fact, from the start of implementation, it was important to ensure that no more hours should be worked than those stipulated by the company, as happened in other international experiences (Perpetual Guardian White Paper, 2019). However, workers must make an effort and cooperate so that work flows as before (Wadsworth and Facer, 2016). This effort was mentioned by the interviewees, who assume that there is more concentration and a greater appreciation of the day off, which makes them feel more satisfied when they see the tasks completed and know that they can enjoy the day off (Topp et al., 2022; Coote et al., 2021; Perpetual Guardian White Paper, 2019). In addition, and contrary to what was reported by Delaney and Casey (2021), those who work four days claim to have greater control over their working hours (Lewis et al., 2023; Schor et al., 2022), justifying it with the adaptation to the new rhythm and method of work, which suggests the increasing sense of employee agency (Moen and Chu, 2023).

It is therefore not surprising to note that expectations of the continuation of the 4-day workweek are high (Lewis et al., 2023; Schor et al., 2022), and even those who didn't join it at XWise are now interested. In this sense, the withdrawal of the 4-day workweek would be seen as a setback for the company, not only because it would generate dissatisfaction among the workers, but also because it is an organizational innovation that distinguishes XWise from

other companies and, at the same time, serves as a retention factor for its workers (Lewis *et al.*, 2023; Rafferty *et al.*, 2022; Golden, 2012).

Conclusions

The article discusses the uneven implementation of the 4-day workweek in the company XWise, highlighting how its hybrid organizational culture, combining tradition and innovation leadership styles, favoured and shaped the process. It reveals a double tension between current and preferred organizational cultures, as well as inside the existing hybrid organizational culture that nevertheless managed to frame the 4-day and 5-day working week. The organizational practice of mirror teams designed by the company was key to supporting the successful implementation of the 4-day workweek, particularly concerning the organization of working times.

This case study outlines the underexplored area of organizational cultures in leveraging the 4-day workweek and the tensions running through it. By doing so, it sets the ground for scholars to further develop insights within each type of organizational culture, its various dimensions, and their interrelationships and tensions with the 4-day workweek. It is also important in order to explore the rationale and effects of the unequal access to reduced working time.

Although the process of implementing the 4-day workweek has gone well overall, it is pertinent to monitor this management practice, in particular, the evolution of the work organization and working times to control potential honeymoon effects since the short-term effects may not correspond to the long-term effects. Moreover, it's worth looking at the evolution of the workload to understand its impact on the use of time during days off. Finally, it is valuable to continue to follow this company to understand how the double tension between current and preferred organizational cultures, and between the current hybrid organizational culture, will evolve and influence the configuration and maintenance of the 4-day workweek.

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