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A MATTER OF BALANCE: HOW A FOUR-DAY WORKWEEK
CAN IMPACT YOUNG ADULTS' WORKPLACE PERCEPTIONS

Dissertation Project submitted to Universidade Católica
Portuguesa to obtain a Master's Degree in Psychology
Applied to Business and Economics

By

Giovanni Caccioppoli

Faculty of Human Sciences

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Abstract

In the modern era of fast technological and societal change, being able to rapidly react and align with emerging needs and necessities becomes the central responsibility for research. Overly rooted and rigid traditional schemes fail to meet the priorities of new, young generations undermining their flourishing and development. In line with the United Nations' 8th goal for sustainable humanitarian development, seeking to guarantee decent work conditions and meaningful employment for all people, and with a special focus on Generation Z, this dissertation project aims to investigate how reduced workhours and compressed schedules, particularly a 4-Day workweek, impact young adults' job perceptions, shedding light on the mediating role of life balance, and on the opportunity for dual-benefit outcomes, predicting employees job satisfaction while protecting and even enhancing organisational performance. This research involved a cross-sectional online survey to analyse a sample of young workers, comparing employees on a standard 5-Day schedule with those on a condensed 4-Day workweek. The survey measured job satisfaction, perceived job performance and work-life balance outcomes for both groups and a hierarchical regressions and mediation analysis was performed for data processing. Aligning with relevant literature and recent research, the findings revealed that reduced workhours significantly and consistently predicted higher scores in both job satisfaction ($p < .001$) and perceived job performance ($p < .002$). These correlations remained significant after controlling for demographic covariates such as gender, job-type and work modality. Work-life balance significantly and partially mediated both relationships: indirect effects accounted respectively for 39% of the total effect on job satisfaction and 41% on perceived performance. This dissertation contributes to psychological literature with valuable insights about how young workers perceive and evaluate their job and workplace, and how policies can successfully align with the emerging priorities and needs of the new generations, ultimately enhancing occupational health, promoting well-being and self-development and fostering sustainable development.

Key words: 4-Day workweek, workhours, satisfaction, performance, life balance, Generation Z.

Resumo

Na era contemporânea de rápidas transformações tecnológicas e sociais, a capacidade de reagir prontamente e alinhar-se às necessidades emergentes constitui uma responsabilidade central da investigação académica. Esquemas laborais tradicionais, excessivamente enraizados e rígidos, deixam de satisfazer as prioridades das novas gerações, comprometendo o seu florescimento e desenvolvimento. Em consonância com o 8.º Objetivo de Desenvolvimento Sustentável das Nações Unidas, garantir trabalho digno e emprego produtivo para todos, e com especial enfoque na Geração Z, este trabalho investiga de que modo a redução da carga horária, nomeadamente a semana laboral de quatro dias, influencia as perceções laborais de jovens adultos, esclarecendo o papel mediador do equilíbrio entre vida e trabalho e a sua possibilidade em produzir benefícios mútuo, ao prever maior satisfação dos colaboradores e, simultaneamente, preservar ou até melhorar o desempenho organizacional. Realizou-se um inquérito on-line transversal a uma amostra de jovens trabalhadores, comparando participantes com horário convencional de cinco dias com aqueles que cumprem uma semana condensada de quatro dias. Avaliaram-se a satisfação profissional, a perceção de desempenho e o equilíbrio entre vida-trabalho; procederam-se a regressões hierárquicas e análise de mediação. Os resultados revelaram que a redução do tempo de trabalho foi preditor, de forma significativa e consistente, de uma maior satisfação ($p < .001$) e de uma melhor perceção de desempenho no trabalho ($p < .002$). Estas relações mantiveram-se mesmo depois de controlar por variáveis como género, tipo de função e modalidade de trabalho. O equilíbrio entre vida-trabalho mediou parcialmente ambas as relações, explicando 39 % do efeito total sobre a satisfação e 41 % sobre o desempenho. Esta dissertação contribui para a literatura psicológica ao demonstrar que o investimento em políticas de redução de horas podem alinhar-se com as prioridades emergentes da Geração Z, promovendo saúde ocupacional, bem-estar e desenvolvimento sustentável.

Palavras-chave: Semana de 4-dias, horas de trabalho, satisfação, desempenho, equilíbrio vida-trabalho, Geração Z.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review	3
2.1 Prolonged working hours and health-related risks.....	3
2.2 The way forward: Shortened workweek implications and global trials..	4
2.2.1 <i>United Kingdom trials</i>	5
2.2.2 <i>Microsoft Japan trial</i>	6
2.2.3 <i>Iceland trials</i>	6
2.3 Shortened workweek and productivity.....	7
2.4 The Job Demand-Resources model of job satisfaction: Early and reviewed	8
2.5 Work-life balance	9
2.5.1 <i>Quality of work life</i>	11
2.5.2 <i>The spillover theory of work-life balance</i>	11
2.5.3 <i>Impact of job demands and workhours on work-life balance</i>	12
2.5.4 <i>Four-day workweek and work-life balance</i>	13
2.6 Job satisfaction	15
2.6.1 <i>Work engagement and job satisfaction</i>	16
2.6.2 <i>Reduced workweek, flexible arrangements and job satisfaction</i>	17
2.7 Four-day workweek and job performance: Why is it essential and its integration in the Job-DR model	19
2.8 Overview of the problem	21
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	22

3.1 Design	22
3.2 Sampling and participants	22
3.3 Instruments and scales.....	23
3.4 Procedures	25
Chapter 4: Results.....	27
4.1 Correlations	27
4.2 Hypothesis 1	27
4.3 Hypothesis 2.....	28
4.4 Hypothesis 3	29
4.4.1 <i>H3a</i>	30
4.4.2 <i>H3b</i>	30
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	31
5.1 Work-life balance across generations.....	33
5.2 Limitations	34
5.3 Future research opportunities	35
5.4 Conclusion and practical implications	37
Bibliography	39

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2015 the United Nations set a series of 17 fundamental goals for sustainable humanitarian development, these globally shared commitments serve the purpose of promoting and contributing to our welfare as a species. The societal value of these goals is immense and so is the responsibility for researchers in all fields to lay the groundwork necessary to reach them. In line with the 8th goal for humanitarian sustainable development (SDG 8), protecting and promoting decent work conditions and full and productive employment for all people, this dissertation focuses on young workers' conditions, with an emphasis on the consequences of long working hours, the rigidity of outdated and non-efficient working rhythms that struggle to align with the fast-paced progress of modern times, and on the potential laying in recent policies promoting shorter and more flexible schedules with the goal of improving the occupational health and promoting the self-development of the young workforce.

The American Psychological Association (APA), the European Agency for Occupational Safety and Health (EAOSH) and the UK Mental Health Association studied recent trends regarding occupational health and psychological and psychosocial concern arising in modern economy for young workers entering the job market, with results and data consistently highlighting the pressing necessity to raise awareness of these issues and to involve psychological research in informing policies that protect workers' well-being (American Psychological Association, 2023). According to the APA (2023), 77% of workers reported experiencing work-related stress in the past month. This high prevalence of stress is not without consequences, as 57% of workers acknowledged experiencing adverse effects commonly associated with workplace burnout. One of the key factors to address in the context of workers' mental health is the long working hours and the overtime working. The EAOSH report (2023) clearly shows that despite a slight trend toward a reduction in average working hours across the European Union, the overall impact remains significant. Between 2006 and 2019, the weekly average working time for full-time employees in the EU-27 decreased marginally from 40.2 hours to 39.9 hours, reflecting an overall reduction of just 15 minutes (EU-OSHA, 2023). This minor shift, however, does not sufficiently address the broader challenges associated with long working hours, particularly regarding their impact

on psychological health. The persistence of extended working time continues to demand attention from policymakers, organizations, and researchers seeking to develop interventions aimed at fostering healthier work environments and protecting employees from work-related stress and burnout.

Moreover, highlighting the inefficiency of the current state of work, already in 2015, Paulsen introduced in its research the term “empty labour”, identified as the time spent by employees on non-work-related activities, that is becoming increasingly occurrent in many of today’s workplaces. With the advancement of technology many work tasks have been automated or replaced. It was reported as remarkable that the time spent at the workplace remains unchanged from when most tasks required manual effort, despite the technological progress that enables us to work more efficiently and effectively. This discrepancy between the potential for increased productivity and the actual demand of work highlights a fundamental issue within traditional work structures. Such an approach significantly limits workers’ opportunities for personal growth and development (Paulsen, 2015).

Aiming to successfully address this issue, this dissertation will be structured as follows: Chapter 1 served to introduce the main topic, the present data and to highlight the relevance of the problem the thesis intend to examine; Chapter 2 will introduce the main theoretical frameworks that support the orientation of the study and will delve deep into the most recent and meaningful literature regarding working hours, workweek arrangements and job perceptions, with particular emphasis on job satisfaction, perceived job performance and work-life balance. Through Chapter 3 the methodology will be covered, including research design, instruments and scales and procedures. Chapter 4 will present the results, and the statistical analysis as performed and finally Chapter 5 will discuss the findings, covering their relevance, the limitations and obstacles encountered and the potential impact that research in this field can have on both a psychological and organizational level.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The chosen theories and models support the orientation of the study to investigate the implementation of a four-day workweek concept, in the context of job perceptions outcomes and implementation aspects; these theories and models were chosen based on their usefulness, given the broader perspective and the data collection process as established.

2.1 Prolonged working hours and health-related risks

Both the American Psychological Association and the European Agency for Occupational Safety and Health have identified prolonged working hours as a significant contributor to occupational stress and declining mental and physical health. Employees frequently experiencing long workdays report lower psychological well-being and reduced job satisfaction. The APA (2023) found that many workers feel overworked and undervalued, leading to various negative outcomes, including increased risks of cardiovascular disease, sleep disturbances, and diminished overall life satisfaction (American Psychological Association, 2023). Chronic stress from excessive work hours has also been shown to impair cognitive function, weakening decision-making abilities and contributing to emotional exhaustion (American Psychological Association, 2023). Similarly, the EAOSH (2023) emphasizes that excessive working hours correlate with heightened stress, fatigue, and burnout, increasing the likelihood of workplace accidents. Various factors, such as the length and frequency of extended shifts, the intensity of work, and the availability of breaks, exacerbate these risks. Research highlights that accumulated fatigue not only reduces productivity but also elevates susceptibility to physical and psychological illnesses (American Psychological Association, 2023; European Agency for Occupational Safety and Health, 2023). The detrimental effects of extended working hours have been widely studied over the past decades. A meta-analysis by Wong et al. (2019) synthesized data from 46 studies published between 1998 and 2018, examining the relationship between long work hours and occupational health outcomes. The study categorized five dimensions of occupational health, physiological health, mental health, health behaviors, related health, and unspecified health, and found that employees working extended hours faced significantly higher risks across all categories. Notably, long work hours were associated

with short sleep duration, fatigue, sleep disturbances, and an increased risk of workplace injuries (Wong et al., 2019). Similarly, Virtanen et al. (2011) found that working more than 55 hours per week significantly increased the risk of depressive and anxiety symptoms, with each additional 10 hours linked to a 17% and 22% rise in these risks, respectively. These findings align with prior studies, such as Kleppa et al. (2008), who identified a strong correlation between overtime work and anxiety symptoms, and Shields (1999), who demonstrated that working beyond 40 hours per week increased the likelihood of developing depressive disorders, particularly among women.

Building upon these insights, Virtanen et al. (2009) investigated the impact of working more than 55 hours per week compared to standard 35-40-hour workweeks, finding a strong association between extended work schedules and sleep-related disorders. Sleep disturbances not only deteriorate physical health but also have profound implications for mental well-being. Wong et al. (2019) reinforced these concerns through their large-scale meta-analysis involving 814,084 participants across 13 countries, concluding that long working hours significantly increased the risk of cardiovascular diseases, mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, and unhealthy behaviors like smoking and physical inactivity. The combined evidence from these studies underscores the urgent need to restructure work schedules to promote long-term well-being (Virtanen et al., 2009; Wong et al., 2019).

2.2 The way forward: Shortened workweek implications and global trials

In recent years, the impact of the Covid-19 crisis has accelerated a growing interest in alternative work arrangements, particularly those involving shorter and more flexible working hours (International Labour Organization, 2023). This shift has been driven by the increasing demand for workplace flexibility from both employees and employers, resulting in the implementation of pilot programs across multiple countries. These initiatives have positioned flexible work schedules as a viable alternative to traditional working patterns (Darwish, 2023).

2.2.1 United Kingdom trials

Lewsey (2023) reports findings from the world's largest 4-Day workweek trial, led by Cambridge social scientists in 2022. This six-month study included 61 UK-based organizations, each reducing working hours by 20% while maintaining full wages. The research focused on the impact on workers' health, productivity, and job satisfaction, as well as key success factors and challenges in implementation. The findings revealed substantial benefits: participants experienced significant improvements in both mental and physical health, with burnout decreasing by 71% and sick days dropping by 65%. Despite the reduced working hours, companies maintained or even increased productivity, with an average revenue rise of 1.4%. Employees also reported enhanced work-life balance, contributing to higher job satisfaction due to increased personal and family time.

However, challenges were noted, including increased work intensity for some employees, raising concerns about sustainable workload management. Additionally, sector-specific and company-size differences indicated that successful implementation requires tailored approaches. The trial's success depended on strategic planning, organizational support, adaptive work practices, and employee engagement. Companies that effectively transitioned to a shorter workweek did so by preparing extensively, learning from businesses already operating on a 4-Day model, and implementing structural changes such as shorter meetings, designated focus periods, and improved technological efficiency. Employee involvement and willingness to adapt played a crucial role in ensuring productivity gains and workflow adjustments. Ultimately, successful implementation was supported by both management and employees (Lewsey, 2023).

Schor (2023) provides further analysis of the UK's 4-Day workweek pilot program, offering insights into the immediate effects of implementation. The study primarily evaluates short-term outcomes observed during the trial period and shortly afterward, with long-term effects yet to be fully explored. The six-month trial included pre-trial data from participating companies covering an equivalent period. Notably, 92% of organizations chose to continue with the 4-Day workweek, and 18 firms adopted it as a permanent policy. However, the lack of long-term follow-up data remains a limitation, as the post-trial evaluation period was not explicitly defined. The study underscores the necessity for additional research to determine whether the observed benefits can be sustained over time and to identify the conditions under which the 4-Day workweek remains viable for organizations (Schor, 2023).

2.2.2 Microsoft Japan trial

In 2019, Microsoft Japan conducted an experiment to assess the impact of a 4-Day workweek on employee productivity and well-being. As part of the Work-Life Choice Challenge Summer 2019, the company granted its entire workforce - comprising 2,300 employees - five consecutive Fridays off throughout the month of August, all while maintaining their regular salaries. The results were striking, not only did employee satisfaction increase, but overall productivity surged by an impressive 40%.

Beyond the boost in efficiency, the trial yielded additional benefits. Employees took 25% fewer days off compared to usual, suggesting a positive effect on work-life balance and well-being. Moreover, the reduction in office hours led to a 23% decrease in electricity consumption, highlighting potential environmental and cost-saving advantages. Paper usage also saw a significant drop, with employees printing 59% fewer pages. Importantly, the initiative was overwhelmingly well-received, with 92% of employees expressing their approval of the shortened workweek. These findings suggest that a more condensed work schedule, when implemented thoughtfully, can lead to enhanced productivity, greater employee satisfaction, and reduced resource consumption (The Guardian, 2019).

2.2.3 Iceland trials

Between 2015 and 2019, Iceland undertook two large-scale trials to assess the impact of a 4-Day workweek on productivity and employee well-being. These trials were conducted by the Reykjavík City Council in collaboration with the national government and involved public sector employees across a diverse range of workplaces, including preschools, offices, social service providers, and hospitals. A key feature of the experiment was that employees, many of whom had previously worked 40-hour weeks, transitioned to reduced working hours without experiencing any pay cuts.

Spanning four years, the trials included approximately 2,500 participants, representing over 1% of Iceland's workforce at the time. The primary objective was to evaluate whether reducing working hours could maintain or even enhance productivity while simultaneously fostering a healthier work-life balance. The findings were overwhelmingly positive: researchers observed that productivity remained stable or even improved in most workplaces, while employees reported significant improvements in well-being. Measured

indicators such as stress levels, burnout rates, overall health, and work-life balance demonstrated notable enhancements, reinforcing the potential benefits of a condensed work schedule.

The success of these trials has since led to a widespread transformation in Iceland's labor landscape. As a direct result, by the following years, an estimated 86% of the country's workforce had either already transitioned to shorter working hours for the same pay or had secured the right to do so in the near future. This shift has positioned Iceland as a pioneering example in the global conversation on work-hour reduction and employee well-being (BBC, 2021; CNN, 2024).

2.3 Shortened workweek and productivity

Beno et al. (2022) note that while reduced working hours are often perceived as advantageous for employees, they are not necessarily viewed as beneficial by employers. Pencavel (2014), however, suggests that individuals tend to work more efficiently when given shorter work periods. This claim is supported by economists specializing in growth accounting, who have found that employees working fewer hours exhibit higher productivity during those hours, thereby compensating for the reduction in weekly working time through increased hourly output (Pencavel, 2014). This aligns with Parkinson's law, which states that "work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion" (Parkinson, 1957).

From a historical perspective, data suggest that as labor productivity increases, working hours tend to decrease, leading to further productivity gains (Kallis et al., 2013). Research has demonstrated that reductions in working hours can foster labor market expansion, prompting further examination of additional relevant factors. One possible explanation for why reduced working hours do not necessarily lead to a decline in productivity is the distinction between productivity as a ratio and output as a measure. Workers who experience less fatigue, exhaustion, or boredom may be able to work more creatively, efficiently, and with higher-quality outcomes. Productivity gains may also stem from employees engaging in training or leisure activities that enhance their skills, particularly in information and communication technology (ICT) (Kallis et al., 2013).

Economic models, however, often argue that reducing working hours can have negative financial implications for businesses. A decrease in hours per worker raises the

average hourly cost of production, and firms may incur additional expenses related to training new employees or covering social security contributions, particularly if these costs are calculated per worker rather than per hour worked (Kallis et al., 2013).

Despite the limitations and difficulties, direct results from the previously discussed trials are promising: the 4-Day workweek continues to be a widely supported alternative, with negotiations primarily centered around productivity gains. These discussions highlight the dual benefit of such a model, offering workers not only higher efficiency but also more leisure time, which in turn fosters job satisfaction and positive work perceptions (TUC, 2018).

2.4 The Job Demand-Resources model of job satisfaction: Early and reviewed

To explore the relationship between working conditions, particularly working hours, and job satisfaction, this dissertation adopts the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model as its primary theoretical framework. Originally proposed by Demerouti et al. (2001), the JD-R model provides a comprehensive and flexible approach to understanding employee well-being and performance across various occupational contexts. The model is particularly relevant to this research because it conceptualizes job satisfaction as the outcome of a dynamic interaction between job demands and job resources. Job demands are defined as **“those physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and psychological costs”** (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501). These demands include work overload, time pressure, interpersonal conflicts, job insecurity, and other stress-inducing factors, which includes as a crucial factor workhours and schedules. When such demands are excessive and not adequately counterbalanced by opportunities for recovery or support, they can lead to physical fatigue, psychological strain, and, ultimately, emotional exhaustion, a core component of burnout (Knardahl & Ursin, 1985; Hockey, 1997).

On the other hand, job resources are characterized as **“those physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that may be functional in achieving work goals, reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs or stimulate personal growth and development”** (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501). Examples of such resources include autonomy, feedback, social support, and opportunities for professional

development. The JD-R model suggests that while high job demands contribute to strain and disengagement, the presence of adequate job resources can buffer the negative effects of those demands and promote positive outcomes such as engagement, motivation, and satisfaction (Bakker, Demerouti & Euwema, 2005; Bakker, Demerouti & Verbeke, 2004; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007).

The model was further refined by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), who integrated concepts from positive psychology by introducing work engagement, a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind marked by vigor, dedication, and absorption, as a counterpart to burnout. Excessive job demands, especially when paired with insufficient recovery time, lead to sustained activation and energy depletion, eventually causing emotional exhaustion. In contrast, a lack of job resources impedes goal achievement and fosters withdrawal behaviors, a protective mechanism to conserve energy in the face of mounting demands (Bauer et al., 2014).

In the context of this dissertation, the JD-R model offers a robust theoretical framework for examining how reduced working hours, conceived as a reduction in job demands, can influence job satisfaction. Moreover, it highlights the importance of maintaining or enhancing job resources in parallel to avoid disengagement and to maximize the potential benefits of structural changes like the 4-Day workweek. By applying the JD-R model, this research aims to evaluate whether such interventions can lead not only to the reduction of burnout-related symptoms but also to the promotion of the overall job perceptions.

2.5 Work-life balance

To gain a deeper understanding of how modifications in work arrangements, such as the implementation of a 4-Day workweek, influence employee well-being and organizational performance, it is essential to consider the role of work-life balance and flexibility. Flexibility in work arrangements has been recognized as a critical factor in organizational psychology and human resource management, as it contributes to employees' well-being and, in turn, enhances organizational outcomes (Wong et al., 2020). A well-balanced work-life equilibrium facilitates the integration of professional and personal responsibilities,

enabling employees to fulfil their work obligations while also maintaining time for personal and family commitments.

The relationship between work-life balance, employee health, and overall well-being has been widely examined in academic literature (Kossek et al., 2001; Guest, 2002; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Meyer & Maltin, 2010; Magee et al., 2012). Research suggests that employees who effectively manage work-family conflict and maintain a stable integration of professional and personal responsibilities experience improved mental and physical health, as well as greater overall well-being in the workplace (Kossek et al., 2001). Despite the lack of a universally accepted definition, work-life balance is broadly understood as an individual's capacity to successfully fulfil multiple roles across both work and personal domains, including family and other non-work-related commitments (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). Greenhaus and Powell (2006) further refine this concept by emphasizing that work-life balance reflects the extent to which an individual can engage effectively in both professional and personal roles. This balance is achieved by minimizing work-family conflict and ensuring that obligations in one domain do not excessively interfere with participation in another (Eby et al., 2005; Kalliath & Brough, 2008; Zheng C. et al., 2015).

Some researchers posit that work-life balance should not be understood solely as the absence of conflict but also as the presence of enrichment, where positive experiences in one domain enhance success and fulfilment in another (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). However, work-life balance remains a dynamic and subjective construct, varying across individuals and life stages (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012). Individual preferences, job demands, and organizational culture influence how work-life balance is perceived and maintained, with some employees favouring a clear separation between work and personal life, while others thrive in a more integrated approach (Kossek et al., 2014).

Given the substantial implications of work-life balance for both employees and organizations, continued research is necessary to refine its conceptualization and identify factors that contribute to a sustainable equilibrium; with workhours playing a crucial role in this scenario, the introduction of a 4-Day workweek holds the potential for a significant improvement in workers' psychological and physical conditions.

2.5.1 *Quality of work life*

The *quality of work life* is a construct strictly related and crucial to work-life balance; it is defined as the employee satisfaction with a variety of needs through resources, activities, and outcomes stemming from participation in the workplace, which involves the effect of the workplace on satisfaction with the job, satisfaction in non-work life domains, and satisfaction with overall life, personal happiness, and subjective well-being (Sirgy et al., 2001).

2.5.2 *The spillover theory of work-life balance*

To further understand the role of work-life balance in the perspective of the Job Demand-Resources model, it is essential to look at one of the most relevant theories and frameworks giving a perspective on *work-life balance* and *quality of work life*: the *spillover theory*; this theory was first introduced by Wilensky (1960), and states that a person's attitudes, emotions, skills, and behaviours in one domain flow into the other and vice versa, and it can occur in both positive and negative ways (Wilensky 1960; 1961).

Negative spillover indicates that limited resources for managing multiple roles in both the domains could reciprocally induce stress and strain. Serious familial conflicts or mishaps may prevent people from focusing on their work, thus impeding their productivity significantly. This phenomenon is called negative spillover. Several studies conducted with working adults in the Netherlands, Australia, Sweden, and the United States have reported a significant association between negative spillover and mental illness, such as depression (Goodman & Crouter, 2009; Li and Wang, 2022). Vice versa, *positive spillover* means that positive aspects of the workplace could enrich life at home (Lee et al., 2021).

In the perspective of quality of work life, the *Spillover Effect* can also be defined as *horizontal* or *vertical*; *vertical spillover*, in particular, refers to the notion of hierarchy of life domains: Life domains (job, family, leisure, community, etc.) are organized hierarchically in people's minds. At the top of the hierarchy is the most superordinate domain, namely overall life. Feelings in this most superordinate domain reflect what *quality of life* researchers call life satisfaction, personal happiness, or subjective well-being. Subordinate to the most superordinate life domain are the major life domains such as family, job, leisure, community, and so on. Satisfaction/dissatisfaction within each of these major life domains “*spills over*”

to the most superordinate domain, thus affecting life satisfaction. For example, satisfaction in the job domain spills over vertically (bottom-up) affecting life satisfaction; this phenomenon is described as *vertical bottom-up spillover* (Sirgy et al., 2001).

2.5.3 Impact of job demands and workhours on work-life balance

The term work demands refers to various aspects of employment that have the potential to generate negative job-to-home spillover, thereby affecting employees' ability to maintain a stable work-life balance. Work demands encompass factors such as the number of hours worked, work intensity, defined as the pace of work and the proportion of working hours dedicated to job-related tasks, and work-related pressures, including workload peaks and high job expectations. Prolonged working hours, in particular, reduce the time available for personal and family life, while high work intensity and pressure can lead to physical and psychological exhaustion, increasing the likelihood of negative outcomes such as fatigue, anxiety, and other psycho-physiological strains (Hochschild, 1997; Schor, 1991). These consequences can, in turn, diminish the quality of home and family life by restricting recovery time and contributing to persistent stress (Hsu et al., 2019).

Stress is a fundamental factor underlying the adverse effects of work-life imbalance on well-being. While stress is a subjective experience that may stem from various occupational stressors, including excessive working hours, deadline pressure, and fear of failure, it consistently manifests when individuals perceive a lack of control over their work environment (Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard, 2014). Elevated stress levels have been linked to an increased prevalence of psychological disorders such as depression, as well as physiological conditions including headaches, cardiovascular disease, and even cancer. Additionally, stress is a known precursor to interpersonal conflicts, contributing to strained relationships and exacerbating work-life tensions (Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard, 2014).

Moreover, a substantial body of research has demonstrated that poor work-life balance can lead to detrimental health effects (Borowiec & Drygas, 2022). Two key mechanisms explain this relationship: prolonged stress and ineffective time management. Work-life conflicts arise when professional and personal demands compete, leading to chronic stress that disrupts the equilibrium between an individual and their environment. Over time, sustained exposure to stress triggers physiological processes that may

compromise specific bodily systems, increasing the likelihood of developing stress-related illnesses and disorders. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model further supports this perspective, emphasizing that stress and negative health outcomes emerge when high job demands are not offset by sufficient resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Moreover, individuals experiencing high levels of strain may attempt to cope through maladaptive behaviors, such as excessive consumption of unhealthy foods or increased tobacco use, which further exacerbate health risks (Borowiec & Drygas, 2022). With many and significant findings supporting these conclusions, revealing that extended working hours contribute to heightened occupational stress and impaired cognitive alertness, investigating the way work-life balance mediates the relationships between workhours and job perceptions is crucial to re-shape our perspective on employee's conditions and well-being (White et al. 2003; Hsu et al., 2019).

2.5.4 Four-day workweek and work-life balance

Policymaking plays a crucial role in protecting the health (both physical and psychological) and the well-being of the workers preventing risks and negative consequences associated with key factors regarding work life. As research consistently delivered during the years concerning results showing the risks associated with long working hours and overtime work (Hsu et al., 2019), it is essential for psychology to inform policymakers providing data and possible solutions. One of the most relevant and so far, successful implementations of this process was the introduction, piloting and spreading of the 4-Day workweek policy, which has the objective of improving workers' mental health by reducing the time spent at work, while also protecting and promoting businesses' productivity (Lewsey, 2023; ILO, 2023).

A 4-Day workweek has been increasingly recognized for its potential to improve work-life balance, primarily by reducing work-family conflict and enhancing overall well-being. Traditional work schedules, while providing stability, can be rigid and challenging for individuals balancing professional and personal responsibilities, particularly those with caregiving duties (ILO, 2018; 2023). Compressed workweeks, which either redistribute a 40-hour workweek into four 10-hour days or reduce them to around 32 weekly hours, have been linked to improvements in work-life balance. Research consistently suggests that such

arrangements allow employees to dedicate more time to family, social engagements, and personal activities, contributing to higher levels of job satisfaction and overall life satisfaction (ILO, 2023). The additional day off also facilitates better management of domestic responsibilities, allowing weekends to be reserved for leisure (Lewsey, 2023; ILO, 2023).

Research studies from the University of Cambridge and Boston College demonstrated reductions in anxiety, fatigue, and stress among employees participating in a 4-Day workweek trial, with notable improvements in both mental and physical health (Lewsey, 2023; Bushwick, 2023; Chakraborty et al., 2022). The most recent (Lewsey, 2023), reported a 65% reduction in sick days and increased engagement among employees, reinforcing the notion that a compressed schedule can lead to a healthier and more productive workforce.

Beyond personal benefits, organizations implementing a 4-Day workweek may experience enhanced recruitment and retention, improved job satisfaction, and reduced overhead costs (Baltes et al., 1999; Gross, 2018; Stronge & Lewis, 2021). Businesses adopting this model, such as Panasonic and Amazon, have observed decreased absenteeism, higher employee morale, and greater efficiency (Yeo, 2022; Burkus, 2017). Additionally, employees working fewer but more focused hours tend to exhibit higher productivity and creativity, as they experience less burnout and distractions (Quiggin, 2023; Villegas & Knowles, 2021). Reduced commuting time further contributes to financial savings and environmental benefits while enhancing employees' overall quality of life (Walker & Fontinha, 2022).

In conclusion, since work-life balance significantly influences job satisfaction, stress levels, and overall well-being (Bartel, 2021; Facer & Wadsworth, 2008; Kelly, 2022), failing to account for it may confound the true impact of a 4-Day workweek. Incorporating work-life balance the research can isolate the specific effects of reduced work hours on job perceptions, providing a clearer understanding and a more complete perspective of the topic; this approach strengthens the validity of the findings and enhances their applicability to organizational policymaking and workforce well-being initiatives.

2.6 Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is widely recognized as a fundamental element in organizational and occupational psychology, representing a core dimension of individual well-being and workplace functioning. It has been defined by Locke (1976) as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences,” and by Spector (1997) more simply as the extent to which people like (satisfaction) or dislike (dissatisfaction) their jobs. This subjective evaluation includes affective and cognitive responses to various aspects of the work environment, such as the nature of the tasks, relationships with coworkers, rewards, and work-life balance. Research underscores the multifaceted nature of job satisfaction, which not only reflects an individual’s contentment with their job but also significantly influences organizational outcomes such as job performance, motivation, absenteeism, and turnover (Montuori et al., 2022). High job satisfaction is associated with increased organizational commitment and discretionary effort, thereby enhancing workplace effectiveness and competitive advantage (Judge et al., 2001; Kara, 2020). Conversely, low levels of satisfaction are linked to stress-related conditions such as burnout, which can compromise both employee well-being and institutional productivity (Montuori et al., 2022).

Despite its importance, job satisfaction levels remain alarmingly low across many global contexts. According to recent Gallup statistics, only 15.0% of the world’s 1 billion full-time workers report feeling engaged and satisfied at work, with nearly half being “not engaged”, meaning psychologically detached from their jobs and organizations (Gallup, 2022). In the European Union, approximately 16.9% of employed residents report low job satisfaction, while 24.6% express high satisfaction; the majority (58.5%) falls somewhere in between (Montuori et al., 2022). These figures reveal that dissatisfaction is a widespread and persistent issue that merits strategic attention. Given its broad impact on both individual and organizational outcomes, researchers have proposed various theoretical perspectives to conceptualize job satisfaction. Vroom (1964) described it as the affective orientations individuals have toward their current work roles, while Armstrong (2006) emphasized it as the attitude and feelings people hold about their work, ranging from highly positive to deeply negative. Statt (2004) focused on the degree to which workers are content with their job rewards, particularly those linked to intrinsic motivation, while Newstrom (2017) defined

job satisfaction as a set of favorable or unfavorable feelings that employees associate with their work experiences.

Moreover, job satisfaction is closely related to broader life domains, including family connection, social relationships, and perceived health status (Montuori et al., 2022). One crucial factor influencing these interrelations is work-life balance, which has been shown to significantly affect how individuals perceive their jobs. As such, when assessing the effects of modern work structures, such as shortened workweeks on job satisfaction, it is essential to consider how work-life balance serves as a mediator variable, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of what truly drives satisfaction.

2.6.1 Work engagement and job satisfaction

Building on the JD-R model's framework, the connection between job satisfaction and work engagement emerges as a central component in understanding employee well-being. While the model initially conceptualized these outcomes separately, burnout as the consequence of overwhelming demands and work engagement as the result of sufficient resources, recent research highlights a more nuanced relationship between engagement and satisfaction. Job satisfaction, typically defined as a relatively stable, affective evaluation of one's job, shares significant conceptual overlap with work engagement, a more dynamic construct reflecting cognitive and emotional immersion in work tasks (Bostjancic & Petrovic, 2019). Alarcon and Lyons (2011) demonstrated through hierarchical regression analyses that although job satisfaction and work engagement exhibit distinct associations with different domains of the work-life scale, they are nonetheless interrelated. Specifically, engagement reflects more active and task-focused cognitive involvement, manifested through vigor, dedication, and absorption, while job satisfaction leans toward affective judgments about one's overall job experience (Bostjancic & Petrovic, 2019).

Despite these definitional distinctions, empirical studies have struggled to establish clear discriminant validity between the two constructs. This difficulty arises largely because dimensions such as dedication and absorption in work engagement strongly resemble the affective components of job satisfaction (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Semantic analyses have confirmed this conceptual proximity, suggesting that high correlations between the constructs may be partly due to semantic equivalence rather than entirely distinct

psychological experiences (Bostjancic & Petrovcic, 2019). Some researchers have even proposed treating work engagement as a subcomponent of job satisfaction, particularly when measuring overall emotional responses to work. Yet, this approach remains debated, as other findings show bidirectional causality between the two variables: sometimes engagement predicts satisfaction, and in other cases, satisfaction leads to higher engagement (Saks, 2006; Simpson, 2009; Ibrahim and Hussein, 2024).

In line with the JD-R model's motivational pathway, several studies propose that work engagement acts as a mediator between job resources and job satisfaction, suggesting that engagement is a mechanism through which positive workplace conditions translate into enduring job contentment (Bakker et al., 2005; Bostjancic & Petrovcic, 2019). Conversely, in healthcare settings, job satisfaction has also been found to significantly predict engagement levels; nurses with lower satisfaction scores reported lower engagement and a higher intention to quit (Simpson, 2009). These mixed findings imply that the directionality of the relationship may depend on context-specific variables, such as job sector, organizational culture, or individual personality traits. A longitudinal perspective further reinforces the presence of a reciprocal relationship, where job satisfaction and engagement mutually reinforce each other, influencing critical outcomes such as job performance, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions (Bostjancic & Petrovcic, 2019).

Overall, while job satisfaction and work engagement may originate from distinct psychological processes, they often coexist and interact in ways that significantly influence organizational behavior. In the context of interventions like reduced working hours or the implementation of a 4-Day workweek, the interplay between these constructs becomes especially relevant. Enhancing job resources and managing job demands effectively can foster both engagement and satisfaction, leading to improved employee retention, productivity, and overall workplace well-being.

2.6.2 Reduced workweek, flexible arrangements and job satisfaction

The intensification of work and widespread prevalence of extended working hours pose serious challenges to employee well-being, yet growing evidence suggests that flexible working arrangements, particularly reduced workweeks, can significantly enhance job satisfaction. While a substantial portion of the global workforce still works more than 48

hours per week (Messenger, 2018), and overwork remains endemic in parts of Asia (Yamashita, Bardo, & Liu, 2016), research continues to uncover the detrimental effects of these excessive demands on both physical and psychological health. Long working hours are associated with fatigue, lower productivity, somatic complaints such as headaches and weight gain, and severe health outcomes including stroke and heart disease (Allison et al., 2022; Descatha et al., 2020; Ishikawa, 2022; Li et al., 2020; Nagaya, Hibino, & Kondo, 2018; Okazaki et al., 2019; Virtanen et al., 2020). Furthermore, psychological impacts such as stress, low job satisfaction, and reduced enjoyment are widely documented (e.g., Afonso, Fonseca, & Pires, 2017; Hoang & Knabe, 2021; Piovani & Aydiner-Avsar, 2021; Shin et al., 2021).

However, the recent turn in research has highlighted that job satisfaction does not simply decrease with increasing work hours in a linear fashion. Rather, there is a nonlinear relationship, where job satisfaction and well-being deteriorate more markedly beyond certain thresholds (Chu, 2021; Dong et al., 2021; Rudolf, 2014; Zheng et al., 2023). In this context, reduced workweeks and flexible schedules emerge as promising strategies to reverse this trend. Nakata (2017) notes that long hours are a risk factor for depressive disorders, while others have found that shorter or more autonomous work schedules can improve psychological health and workplace satisfaction (Dong et al., 2021). Experimental evidence supports this: Seminal work from Christopher Orpen (1981) found that employees on flexible schedules reported significantly greater job satisfaction, even if objective performance remained unaffected.

Further studies show that flexibility not only helps individuals manage work stress but also increases their overall sense of well-being and connection to their work. Organizations with family-supportive policies report higher employee satisfaction and lower turnover intention (Allen, 2001). Similarly, Li and Wang (2022) demonstrate that both the perceived availability and actual use of flexible arrangements are strongly associated with increased job satisfaction and lower work-family conflict. The benefits of shortened workweeks are amplified when employees can maintain social connections while enjoying schedule autonomy, as shown by Kwon and Kim-Goh (2023). Collectively, these findings reveal that flexible and reduced-hour models are not merely organizational perks, but evidence-based tools with the potential to foster healthier, more engaged, and satisfied workforces. This study builds upon this growing body of work, exploring whether a 4-Day

workweek, by reducing work strain and increasing time for recovery, may be a key determinant of career and job satisfaction in today's demanding work culture.

2.7 Four-day workweek and job performance: Why is it essential and its integration in the Job-DR model

Job performance has always been one of the central constructs in organizational psychology, serving as a foundational element in personnel selection, training, and employee evaluation (Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000). Defined as the scalable actions, behaviors, and outcomes that employees engage in or bring about, job performance is intrinsically tied to the accomplishment of organizational goals (Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000). Although the concept can be assessed using various theoretical and methodological approaches, this study will adopt a self-assessed, subjective perspective, focusing on *perceived job performance*. This approach aligns with the data collection strategies employed and provides valuable insight into employees' own evaluations of their effectiveness, especially within the framework of flexible or reduced workweek arrangements.

The decision to include job performance as a second outcome variable in the present research is rooted in both theoretical and practical considerations. First, from an organizational standpoint, one of the most common concerns surrounding the implementation of shortened workweek policies is a potential decline in productivity and operational efficiency. With fewer hours allocated to work tasks, employers may fear a proportional decrease in output, making the viability of such policies questionable in highly competitive or performance-driven environments. Second, from the employees' perspective, if job performance declines or remains unchanged despite reduced hours, the increased pressure to meet the same objectives in less time could generate fatigue, cognitive overload, and a subsequent decline in well-being. Conversely, if individual performance remains stable or even improves under these conditions, the implications are significant: not only would this indicate that productivity can be maintained or enhanced with fewer hours, but it would also suggest potential gains in well-being, job satisfaction, and overall organizational functioning. Therefore, assessing job performance is essential to understanding the broader implications and effectiveness of alternative work arrangements.

In the broader literature, the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance has long been considered a cornerstone of industrial-organizational psychology, often referred to as its “Holy Grail” (Judge et al., 2001). While there are various ways to define and measure both constructs, ranging from global to multidimensional assessments, the consensus across several theoretical models is that a meaningful and often reciprocal relationship exists between them. Expectancy-based theories, goal-centered frameworks, and motivational perspectives all support the idea of a significant, bidirectional influence (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Judge et al., 2001; Naylor, Pritchard, & Ilgen, 1980; Vroom, 1964). In essence, satisfied employees are more likely to perform better, and strong job performance can, in turn, enhance one’s satisfaction, creating a reinforcing feedback loop beneficial for both individuals and organizations.

A third construct highly relevant to job performance is work engagement. Although the relationship between engagement and performance is sometimes debated due to variability in findings, numerous studies within the framework of the JD-R model have highlighted a strong link between the two. Schaufeli et al. (2002, 2006) identified a robust and cross-culturally consistent correlation between work engagement and job outcomes, using samples from various European countries and occupational sectors. Further reinforcing this connection, Demerouti and Schaufeli (2008, 2009) found that work engagement significantly predicted key organizational metrics, such as financial returns, in a sample of fast-food employees, and mediated the relationship between self-efficacy and job performance among flight attendants. These findings suggest that engagement not only contributes directly to job performance but also acts as a vital psychological mechanism linking other motivational factors to tangible outcomes (Demerouti & Cropanzano, 2010).

Taken together, the inclusion of job performance as an outcome variable in the current study allows for a comprehensive analysis of how flexible work arrangements may predict not only employees’ well-being and satisfaction but also their effectiveness and contribution to organizational objectives. By integrating the constructs of job satisfaction and work engagement, the study aims to illuminate the interconnected psychological pathways that support sustainable high performance in evolving work environments.

2.8 Overview of the problem

In the complex landscape of the contemporary society, characterized by the fast-paced progress that influence and constantly transform and redefine the role of human labor within the work system, as technologies increasingly substitute or automate many job functions, the rigid traditional labor structure seems to be outdated as it fails to align with modern needs and necessities. Long work shifts affect workers' well-being, undermining job perceptions and heightening the risks for occupational health (EAOSH, 2023; ILO, 2023; Virtanen et al. 2009; 2011; Wong et al. 2019), ultimately exposing workers and organizations to phenomena of turnover, job-related stress and burnout (WHO, 2024). A more flexible and human-centered approach is deeply needed; the 4-Day workweek policy tries to address this issue focusing on shortening the working hours, by giving the workers an extra day of break, the goal is to favor processes of recovery from stress and to promote self-care and development. Such an approach seems to hold the potential to significantly increase job perceptions (ILO, 2023) while protecting the performance from exertion and cognitive fatigue, representing an incredibly valuable opportunity to produce a double benefit, for both the workers' and the organizations.

With a focus on young generations entering the labor force, this dissertation project aims to test if working a shortened 4-Day weekly arrangement can significantly predict healthier and more favorable job perceptions by testing the following *hypotheses*:

Hypothesis 1: *Compared to working a standard five-day schedule, working a four-day workweek significantly predicts higher levels of job satisfaction among young adults.*

Hypothesis 2: *Compared to working a standard five-day schedule, working a four-day workweek significantly predicts higher levels of perceived job performance among young adults.*

Hypothesis 3a: *Work-life balance significantly mediates the relationship between workweek arrangement and job satisfaction.*

Hypothesis 3b: *Work-life Balance significantly mediates the relationship between workweek arrangement and perceived job performance.*

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Design

This quantitative research employs a correlational, cross-sectional design; the main objective is to test if a 4-Day Workweek, a shortened and more flexible version of the weekly work arrangement, can significantly predict an increase and improvement in individual job perceptions. Allowing for secure and efficient data collection, the survey was developed and administered using the Qualtrics platform. The study examined the relationship between workweek arrangement - defined as the number and distribution of working hours - as the predictor variable, and two key outcome variables: job satisfaction and perceived job performance. Work-life balance was included as a mediator variable, given its well-established influence on job-related outcomes. The selection of these variables reflects the theoretical and empirical relevance in organizational and business psychology.

This research design was chosen over experimental or quasi-experimental approaches due to practical constraints, above all the non-controllable nature of the predictor variable, other than issues related to time, resources available, and data accessibility. Utilizing a cross-sectional survey allowed for efficient data collection from a larger sample within a limited time frame.

3.2 Sampling and participants

The target population for this study was young adults between the ages of 18 and 29, corresponding to the developmental phase commonly referred to in psychological and sociological literature as emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2006). Given that the research focused on perceptions of employment, only individuals who were either currently employed or had previous experience in any form of employment were eligible to participate. This criterion was essential to ensure that respondents possessed direct and possibly recent experience with the variables under investigation.

After conducting a power analysis via the statistical software “G*power”, results showed that to detect a medium size effect ($d = 0.50$) with the alpha set at .05 and power at .80, the minimum number of participants required to detect an effect was 77.

A total of 82 English speaking participants were recruited using a convenience sampling strategy; the survey was distributed primarily through digital platforms, including social media channels such as Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook, and WhatsApp, as well as via personal and professional networks using word-of-mouth. However, only 53 of the responses met the necessary criteria for the analysis.

Gender distribution was nearly equal, with just slightly over half of participants identified as female (55.0%), and the remaining as male (45.0%). When it comes to educational attainment, the level was high: almost half of the sample held a university degree: either bachelor's (23.3%), a master's degree (21.7%), or a doctorate (1.7%). The rest of the sample reported having a high-school diploma (53.7 %). Regarding employment status a majority were employed full-time (55.0%), part-time (31.7%) or freelance (13.3%). Most occupied entry-level (63.4%) or mid-level (23.3%) roles, with a minority in senior level (3.3 %) and other positions (10.0%). Regarding work type, 48.3% worked on-site, 40.0% hybrid, and 11.7% remote.

The survey was available exclusively in English to maintain consistency in the interpretation of items and to avoid biases related to translation or cultural variation in language use. Although the survey was in English, its distribution was widespread, with 55.0% of the participants born in Italy, while the remaining 45.0% spread across ten other European countries.

Regarding the predictor variable, participants were nearly evenly distributed between the two working arrangement categories, with 33 participants (55.0%) working within a conventional five-day schedule, whereas 27 (45.0%) following a shortened four-day workweek.

3.3 Instruments and scales

The survey utilized the following scales and measures (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics for all the variables):

Working arrangements: Working flexibility was measured by asking participants “*please enter your workweek arrangement*” and giving them the choice between a standard (5-Day) and a shortened 4-Days workweek.

Job Satisfaction: is widely regarded as a key concept in organizational and occupational psychology, as it plays a central role in both individual well-being and effective workplace functioning. The present study utilizes the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (short form) (MSQ) to measure job satisfaction. In its short version, the MSQ consists of 20 items (Spector, 1997) and uses a 5-point Likert-type response format (ranging from 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied) and takes around 5 minutes to complete. The MSQ comprises of two distinct components: a) intrinsic job satisfaction, that measures feelings about the nature of the job tasks; and b) extrinsic job satisfaction, that measures feelings about situational job aspects, or aspects that are external to the job. Examples of items related to the respective components are “*I feel satisfied with the freedom to use my own judgement*”; “*I feel satisfied with my pay and the amount of work I do*” (Spector, 1997; Buitendach et al., 2009).

A reliability analysis revealed a Cronbach’s alpha of .91 indicating an excellent level of internal consistency ($> .90$). The mean of *Job Satisfaction* was 3.50 with a standard deviation of 0.59.

Perceived Job Performance: Job performance remains a key construct within the field of organizational psychology, playing a vital role in areas such as personnel selection, employee training, and performance evaluation (Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000). While job performance can be examined through various assessment methods, the present dissertation adopts a self-reported, subjective approach, focusing on *perceived job performance*. This perspective allows for a more personal insight into how employees evaluate their contributions within their specific work contexts.

To effectively measure perceived job performance, this survey utilizes the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ) (Koopmans, 2013). The IWPQ was based on a four-dimensional conceptual framework, in which individual work performance consisted of task performance, contextual performance, adaptive performance, and counterproductive work behavior. The short version of the IWPQ is composed by 7 items measured on a 5-points Likert scale where the participants have to indicate how much they agree with each statements of the questionnaire (from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree); an example of a scale item was “*I was able to perform my work well with the minimal time and effort*” (Koopmans, 2013).

The analysis showed a Cronbach's alpha of .87 revealing a high level of internal consistency and reliability ($> .80$). Mean and standard deviation for perceived job performance were respectively 3.78 and 0.69.

Work-Life Balance: The APA Dictionary (2018) defines Work-Life Balance as “the level of involvement between the multiple roles in a person's life, particularly as they pertain to employment and family or leisure activities”.

This study employs the Work-Life Balance Scale (WLBS) (Hayman, 2005) in its short version, composed of 4 items measured on a 5-points Likert scale. The items refer to the perception of the work-life equilibrium of the subject with statements such as “*Overall I believe that my work and non-work life are balanced*”. To each of the statements, participants must give a score based on how much they agree to it (from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

The internal consistency among items was highlighted by a Cronbach's alpha of .87 indicating high reliability ($> .80$). The mean for Work Life Balance was 3.67 with a standard deviation of 0.81.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for all the variables.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's α
<i>Job Satisfaction</i>	3.50	0.59	.91
<i>Perceived Performance</i>	3.78	0.69	.87
<i>Work-Life Balance</i>	3.67	0.81	.87

3.4 Procedures

The online survey, accessed via an anonymous link, contained questions about demographics, work-life balance, job satisfaction and perceived job performance.

Informed consent was obtained digitally prior to participation, and no identifying information was collected, ensuring full anonymity; all participants were informed about the

voluntary nature of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

To align with the purpose of the dissertation, the survey was solely intended for young adults (age ranging between 18 – 29) with experience of being or having been employed at least once; this information was also included in the Informed Consent.

After completing the demographic section of the survey, participants were divided in two natural groups depending on the workweek arrangements they were currently following (Standard or Shortened).

Finally, participants were requested to complete 4 questionnaires assessing each of the variables in the following orders: 1) *work-life balance (mediator)*; 2) *job satisfaction (outcome 1)*; 3) *perceived job performance (outcome 2)*.

Each of the four questionnaires started with instructions on how to correctly complete it and the order in which items were disposed was randomized for each participant.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Correlations

To investigate the relationships between all key variables (work-life balance, job satisfaction and perceived performance) a correlation coefficient was computed (see Table 2). The results revealed that all the variables were moderately-to-strongly correlated (all r s $> .555$, all p s $< .001$).

Table 2: Pearson correlations between all key variables

		<i>Work-Life Balance</i>	<i>Job Satisfaction</i>	<i>Perceived Performance</i>
<i>Work-Life Balance</i>	Pearson Correlation	1	.555***	.591***
	<i>Sig. Two-tailed</i>		$< .001$	$< .001$
<i>Job Satisfaction</i>	Pearson Correlation	.555***	1	.737***
	<i>Sig. Two-tailed</i>	$< .001$		$< .001$
<i>Perceived Performance</i>	Pearson Correlation	.591***	.737***	1
	<i>Sig. Two-tailed</i>	$< .001$	$< .001$	

Note: *** = correlation coefficient is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed).

4.2 Hypothesis 1

Compared to working a standard 5-Day workweek, working a 4-Day workweek significantly predicts higher levels of job satisfaction among young adults.

The main aim of this analysis was to test how diverse arrangements in the weekly workhours could predict differences in the way young adults perceived their job. To investigate H1, the main goal was to test whether participants working a 4-Day workweek reported significantly higher scores with their job satisfaction, when compared to those working a standard 5-Day workweek.

A total of 53 participants completed the 20-items questionnaire ($N = 53$). A linear regression was conducted to evaluate whether work-week arrangement (0 = standard five-day, 1 = 4-Day) predicts job satisfaction among young adults. The overall model was

statistically significant, $F(1, 51) = 19.30, p < .001$, and explained 27.0% of the variance in job satisfaction ($R^2 = .27$), with a residual standard error of 0.51. The estimated intercept indicated that participants working a standard 5-Day schedule reported a mean satisfaction score of 3.23 ($SD = 0.54$) on the 1-to-5 scale (95% CI: [3.04, 3.42]) while for the 4-Day (shortened) group, the mean reported for satisfaction score was of 3.85 ($SD = 0.47$). Crucially, the regression coefficient for work-week arrangement was positive and large, $b = 0.62$ ($SE = 0.14$), yielding a standardized effect of $\beta = .52, t(48) = 4.39, p < .001$, (95% CI: [0.34, 0.91]). Shifting from a 5-Day to a 4-Day schedule is associated with an average increase of 0.62 points in job satisfaction scores. Given the model's substantial explanatory power and the significant, positive coefficient, these findings provide clear support for H1: working a 4-Day workweek significantly predicts higher levels of job satisfaction among young adults.

To further deepen the relevance of the findings, a series of demographics controls were successively introduced to test if the shortened workweek was a significant predictor independently of the different groups: gender, job-level (entry-level to executive) and job type (on-site; hybrid; remote). After demographics controls were introduced, the 4-Day schedule continued to have a robust influence, $b = 0.54$ ($SE = 0.15$), $\beta = .45, t(44) = 3.55, p = .001$, (95% CI: [0.23, 0.85]). Neither gender nor any of the controls reached significance (*all ps* > .09), indicating that even after statistically adjusting for gender, job level, and job type, a 4-Day workweek remained a strong, positive predictor of job satisfaction among young adults, thus reinforcing H1.

4.3 Hypothesis 2

Compared to working a standard 5-day workweek, working a 4-day workweek significantly predicts higher levels of perceived job performance among young adults.

Following the approach used for H1, a parallel linear regression was performed to ascertain whether work-week arrangement (0 = standard 5-day, 1 = 4-Day) predicts perceived job performance among young adults ($N = 53$) with the 5-Day group reporting a mean of 3.52 ($SD = .73$) for perceived job performance, lower values compared to the 4-Day

group reporting instead a mean value of 4.11 ($SD = .47$). The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 51) = 11.15, p = .002$, and accounted for 17.9 % of the variance in perceived job performance ($R^2 = .179$), with a residual standard error of 0.63. The intercept indicated that those on a five-day schedule reported a mean perceived job performance score of 3.52 (95% $CI [3.29, 3.76]$), $t(50) = 30.38, p < .001$. Crucially, moving to a 4-Day schedule produced an estimated increase of 0.59 points on job performance, $b = 0.59 (SE = 0.176)$, 95% $CI [0.24, 0.94]$, corresponding to a moderate–large, standardized effect, $\beta = .42, t(50) = 3.34, p = .002$. Thus, the shortened workweek explains a meaningful proportion of performance perceptions and is associated with markedly higher self-rated job performance, providing clear support for H2, that working a 4-Day workweek significantly predicts higher levels of perceived job performance among young adults.

As for H1, to determine whether the advantage of a 4-Day schedule on perceived job performance withstands demographic differences, a hierarchical regression was run in which gender, job level (entry- to executive), and job type (on-site, hybrid, remote) were entered as controls. The control block accounted for a modest, nonsignificant share of the variance, $R^2 = .11, F(7, 44) = 1.06, p = .400$. Adding work-week arrangement produced a significant change, $p = .004$, yielding a final model that explained 24.0% of the variance in perceived job performance and reduced the residual standard error to 0.61. Even after adjustment, the 4-Day schedule remained a robust predictor, $b = 0.48 (SE = 0.16)$, $\beta = .40, t(44) = 3.00, p = .004$, 95% $CI (0.15, 0.81)$. None of the demographic covariates reached significance (*all ps* $> .40$); these results affirm and reinforce H2.

4.4 Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3a and 3b were successively tested to answer the secondary research question of this dissertation project, being “Can Work-Life Balance mediate the relationship between different workweek arrangement and overall job perceptions in young adults?”. To test these hypothesis, two separate Model 4 analysis were run in PROCESS v4.2 (Hayes, 2022).

4.4.1 H3a

Work-life balance significantly mediates the relationship between workweek arrangement and job satisfaction.

A mediation analysis tested whether work-life balance accounts for the link between a four-day workweek and job satisfaction. As expected, the condensed schedule was a significant positive predictor of work-life balance, $b = 0.56$, $SE = 0.21$, $t(52) = 2.61$, $p = .012$. In turn, work-life balance predicted job satisfaction over and above the work-week arrangement, $b = 0.31$, $SE = 0.08$, $t(52) = 3.76$, $p < .001$. A bootstrap test of the indirect effect confirmed mediation: *Indirect effect* = 0.17, *BootSE* = 0.08, 95 % *CI* [0.04, 0.34], $p < .05$. Because the direct path from schedule to job satisfaction remained significant ($B = 0.45$, $p = .002$), the pattern represents partial mediation; roughly 39 % of the total impact of the 4-Day schedule on job satisfaction is transmitted through improved work-life balance. The full model explained 43.0% of the variance in job satisfaction, $F(2, 50) = 19.20$, $p < .001$. Thus, a shorter workweek enhances young adults' job satisfaction largely by fostering a better balance between professional and personal life, while still providing an additional direct benefit beyond that mechanism.

4.4.2 H3b

Work-life Balance significantly mediates the relationship between workweek arrangement and perceived job performance.

Consistently with results from H3a the condensed schedule was a significant positive predictor of work-life balance ($b = 0.56$, $SE = 0.21$, $t(52) = 2.61$, $p = .012$) and in turn, work-life balance predicted perceived job performance over and above the work-week arrangement, $b = 0.43$, $SE = 0.10$, $t(52) = 4.36$, $p < .001$. A bootstrap test of the indirect effect confirmed the mediation: *Indirect effect* = 0.24, *BootSE* = 0.12, 95% *CI* [0.05, 0.51], $p < .05$. Because the direct path from schedule to perceived job performance remained significant ($b = 0.35$, $p = .036$), the pattern represents again a partial mediation; approximately 41.0% of the total impact of the 4-Day schedule on perceived performance is transmitted through improved work-life balance. The full model accounted for 41.0% of the variance in

perceived job performance, $F(2, 50) = 17.06, p < .001$. These findings indicate that a shorter workweek enhances young adults' self-assessed performance largely by fostering a better balance between professional and personal life, while retaining an additional direct benefit beyond that mechanism.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This dissertation aimed to explore how different workweek arrangements, with particular focus on a shortened 4-Day workweek, impact young adults' job perceptions, including satisfaction and perceived performance, and to assess whether work-life balance mediates these relationships. The results provide robust support for all three hypotheses, revealing consistent and significant effects of a shortened workweek across both outcome variables.

In short, the findings show that participants working a 4-Day schedule reported significantly higher levels of job satisfaction compared to those working a standard 5-day workweek (Hypothesis 1). The regression model explained a substantial proportion of the variance in satisfaction scores, with the effect persisting even after adjusting for demographic covariates such as gender, job level, and work modality. These findings are consistent with prior research demonstrating that reduced weekly work hours are associated with greater job satisfaction, largely due to enhanced autonomy, better recovery opportunities, and improved work-life integration (Delaney & Casey, 2021; Knight, 2022; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Aligning with and contributing to the Job Demand-Resources model, the findings emphasize the importance of temporal work structure, suggesting that a reduced workweek functions as a contextual resource. By reducing time-based demands, a 4-Day workweek may facilitate psychological detachment and recovery key mechanisms in preventing burnout and promoting well-being (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

Hypothesis 2 was also strongly supported, with participants on a 4-Day schedule reporting significantly higher levels of perceived job performance. This relationship remained robust even when controlling for demographic variables. These results align with

previous findings suggesting that condensed work arrangements can sustain or even enhance productivity and task performance when paired with improved well-being and focus (OECD, 2022; Peters et al., 2022). According to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001), reducing job demands, such as workhours, can prevent fatigue and preserve performance; a 4-Day workweek may protect young professionals from overexertion while fostering sustained cognitive functioning (OECD, 2022).

Finally, the mediation models provided support for Hypotheses 3a and 3b. Work-life balance significantly and partially mediated the relationship between workweek arrangement and both job satisfaction and perceived job performance. The analysis showed that nearly 40% of the total effect of a 4-Day workweek on these outcomes was transmitted through improved work-life balance. This partial mediation suggests that while balance is a key explanatory mechanism, other psychological or organizational factors may also play a role.

These findings reflect results from prior research that has identified work-life balance as a critical mediator between job structure and employee outcomes. For instance, Greenhaus and Allen (2011) conceptualized work-life balance as a dynamic equilibrium where individuals experience minimal conflict between work and non-work roles and showed through a quantitative model how this form of balance significantly predicted both job satisfaction and life satisfaction. Allen et al. (2000) similarly found that work-family conflict, particularly when unidirectional from work to home, significantly undermined job satisfaction and commitment. Their study controlled for gender and hours worked and still found work-life variables to be among the strongest predictors of job-related attitudes.

More studies have extended these models using mediation frameworks and moderated mediation. Peters et al. (2009) conducted a study on Dutch employees using multivariate regression and found that flexible work arrangements enhanced job satisfaction primarily through perceived increases in autonomy and better work-life balance. They controlled for demographic variables such as age and job type, confirming that the mediating role of balance held across diverse worker profiles. Moen et al. (2011) employed a quasi-experimental design in the United States to test the results of a Results-Only Work Environment (ROWE) intervention on 775 participants; the sample included employees of a corporate headquarter. The ROWE is an initiative which offers participants greater work-

time control and flexibility, in this case regardless of employees' gender, age, or family life stage; the intervention found that increased control over work time led to better work-family outcomes, which in turn predicted higher performance and job satisfaction. Their study controlled for job role and baseline measures of well-being, reinforcing the robustness of the findings.

Additionally, the integration of the *Spillover Theory* (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000) within the framework of the *Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model* (Demerouti et al., 2001) provides a strong theoretical basis for interpreting these results. According to Edwards and Rothbard (2000), experiences in one life domain (e.g., work) transfer to another (e.g., home), either positively or negatively. High work demands, such as excessive workhours, often lead to negative spillover, resulting in emotional exhaustion and reduced capacity to engage in meaningful non-work activities (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). According to the JD-R model, temporal job demands, like the number of hours worked or time pressure, can be reduced through structural resources such as schedule flexibility or compressed workweeks, thereby decreasing burnout risk and improving affective and cognitive functioning at work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

The partial nature of the mediation implies that while improved balance is a key mechanism, other psychological or organizational processes may also be contributing to the observed benefits, paving the way for future research.

Taken together, these results offer a cohesive picture: shortening workhours by shifting from a standard (5-Day) to a 4-Day workweek can significantly improve how employees experience and evaluate their jobs. The integration of empirical findings with established psychological frameworks and current research underscores the relevance of these benefits, contributing to the growing literature advocating for more human-centred work policies, fostering the well-being of younger generations entering the labour market.

5.1 Work-life balance across generations

The present findings become particularly relevant when analysed within the broader context of generational differences in work values and expectations. This dissertation focused on young adults between the ages 18 to 29; Generation Z, generally comprising

individuals born between 1997 and 2012, is entering the workforce with notably different attitudes compared to Millennials and Generation X. Research suggests that Gen Z places a strong emphasis on mental health, flexibility, and purpose-driven employment, often prioritizing work-life balance over traditional indicators of success such as salary or promotion (Schroth, 2019; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). The observed positive outcomes associated with a 4-Day workweek are especially relevant for this generation, which witnessed rapid economic and technological change, and developed heightened awareness of burnout and psychological health (Twenge, 2017). Unlike Generation X, which is often characterized by a strong work ethic and a tendency to maintain clear boundaries between personal and professional life (Zemke et al., 2013), or Millennials, who pioneered the push for flexible work but still internalized many “hustle culture” values (Ng et al., 2010), Gen Z appears to demand a fundamental redefinition of the role that work plays in life. They seek the integration of their personal values with their job environment, often viewing employers’ flexibility and care for well-being as key attractors in job selection (PWC, 2022).

A reduced workweek offers not only more time for recovery and autonomy but also symbolizes a more human-centred approach to employment, an aspect Gen Z particularly values (Deloitte, 2023). This generational shift suggests that interventions like a 4-Day workweek are not merely operational adjustments but represent directly deeper sociocultural transformations in how younger generations conceptualize a “good job.” In contrast, for Gen X and older Millennials, work-life balance improvements may be welcomed but are often seen as negotiated benefits rather than foundational employment criteria (Twenge, 2010). Therefore, the social relevance of these findings, capturing a broader generational movement toward rebalancing life and labour, underscore the need for organizations to adapt to evolving generational values.

5.2 Limitations

While the findings of this study provide meaningful insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, due to its correlational nature, the cross-sectional design did not allow to make causal inferences, even if the relationships between predictor and outcomes were strongly significant, directionality and causality could not be confirmed, however the consistency of the findings over demographics controls suggest the high relevance of the

correlations. Future research employing longitudinal or experimental designs would better establish causality.

Second, the unexpected reduction in the sample size ($N = 82$ turned into $N = 53$ complete responses) stemming from the partial or unfinished questionnaires, which were not considered during the statistical analysis, caused the tests to be ran below the minimum participants number highlighted by the power analysis first performed ($N = 77$); this might influence generalizability and effect sizes. Additionally, all variables were assessed through self-report measures, which introduces the potential for common method bias and social desirability effects, particularly in evaluations of perceived job performance.

5.3 Future research opportunities

Building on the current findings, and on the nature of the limitations encountered, future research should explore the long-term effects of the 4-Day workweek using longitudinal or (quasi-)experimental designs to clarify the causal pathways. Understanding deeply the impact of new, diverse, and more flexible work time configurations could be of extreme value to re-shape a traditional and overly rooted conception of labour, which according to data seem to not align with present-day needs.

In some European countries, like the Netherlands and Sweden, workweek flexibility, allowing individuals to work anywhere from 20% to 100% of a full-time schedule, has been already institutionalized, enabling people to adjust their working hours on a percentage-based arrangement, based on life phase, caregiving duties, or educational pursuits (Yerkes & Visser, 2006). These models promote inclusivity and work-life alignment, especially for younger generations who seek more control over how and when they work (Spreitzer et al., 2017). However, reduced time spent in the workplace may also present challenges. For instance, individuals working only one day per week may struggle to integrate socially, identify with their team, or maintain a sense of belonging, all of which are critical to motivation and engagement (Ashforth et al., 2008; van Dick et al., 2004). These risks are particularly relevant in early career stages when workplace identity and social networks are still forming (Allen et al., 2015).

Future research could investigate whether a minimum threshold of weekly work engagement is necessary to maintain psychological integration and professional identity. Moreover, studies should also explore how organizations can mitigate these risks through virtual team-building practices, inclusive digital cultures, and hybrid strategies that balance autonomy with social cohesion (Kossek & Michel, 2011; Van Steenbergen et al., 2010). Ultimately, while flexibility introduces complexity, it is an essential factor in modern and sustainable work design.

In addition, the integration of different psychological mediators to better understand how work time reduction leads to improved outcomes remains a key opportunity for research. While this study focused on work-life balance, variables such as psychological detachment, autonomy, motivation, and sense of purpose may also play important roles (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Bakker et al., 2014). For example, psychological detachment during non-work hours is strongly associated with lower burnout and higher energy levels (Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005), while perceived autonomy and intrinsic motivation have been shown to sustain performance and reduce emotional exhaustion and cognitive strain (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Introducing these mediators in future research models could deepen our understanding of how and why reduced workweeks function as beneficial job resources.

Adding more complexity to the research model, introducing more moderators, including personality traits, organizational culture and characteristics, could potentially further broaden the perspective, leading to a well-rounded knowledge of the mutual nature of the benefits and under what conditions those are most pronounced (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018).

Finally, future studies could integrate multi-source data or manager evaluations to enrich the findings. Overcoming the self-reporting biases and the limited perspective of personal perceptions could encourage organisations and policymakers to further drive the progress towards new opportunities and solutions meeting the needs of young generations. Promoting the well-being and occupational health is the social responsibility of protecting and improving the collective welfare and foster sustainable humanitarian development.

5.4 Conclusion and practical implications

Despite the limitations and the obstacles encountered, the findings of this dissertation project hold great potential to inform the development of more sustainable, flexible, and human-centred work policies. The consistent statistical support across all three hypotheses highlights the relevance of revisiting conventional workweek structures to better align with the evolving expectations and psychological needs of younger generations in the workforce.

Hypothesis 1 was confirmed, indicating that a shortened 4-Day workweek is significantly associated with higher levels of job satisfaction among young adults. Similarly, Hypothesis 2 was also supported, demonstrating that participants on a 4-Day schedule reported significantly higher levels of perceived job performance, reinforcing the idea that productivity is not necessarily compromised by reduced work hours.

The mediation analysis further revealed that work-life balance plays a crucial role in explaining these effects. Approximately 40% of the total influence of the 4-Day workweek on both satisfaction and performance was transmitted through enhanced balance, confirming its role as a key psychological mechanism. However, the partial nature of this mediation also suggests the involvement of additional factors, warranting further investigation through more complex models in future research.

Understanding the impact of workhours on job perceptions and shedding lights on opportunities to re-think the traditional work schedules and rhythm is crucial not only to protect the workers on a personal and psychological level; from an organisational and managerial standpoint, in light of these findings, consistent with the large-scaled trials conducted in the UK, Japan and Northern Europe, a 4-Day workweek must be considered as an opportunity to re-design the workplace and optimize productivity among young workers.

As part of progressive labour reforms, a shortened workweek arrangement can serve as a viable, strategic intervention for improving organisational effectiveness, with companies experiencing increased employee engagement, improved morale, and stronger perceptions of organizational support (Kossek & Thompson, 2016). The absence of performance trade-offs in this dissertation, which supports previous global pilot programs, reporting either stable or improved productivity after adopting a 4-Day schedule (Peters et al., 2022; Autonomy, 2022) could be an additional significant factor to motivate policymakers and

labour organisations to keep supporting and encouraging the progress towards reduced-hours models.

Moreover, the demonstrated benefits of a 4-Day workweek align with Gen Z's expectations for flexibility, autonomy, and mental well-being, reflecting a broader generational shift in how work is perceived and valued. For Gen Z, a job not only represents financial security but a platform for personal growth, alignment with values, and life balance. In contrast to Generation X, which typically prioritizes job stability and maintains stricter boundaries between personal and professional life, Gen Z seeks a smoother integration of both dimensions. Compared to Millennials, who often embraced the "hustle culture" and long workhours, Gen Z is more likely to reject overwork and demand sustainable, human-centred approaches.

Lastly, these results highlight the importance of holistic work design that takes psychological needs into account. By aligning structural change with psychological well-being, organizations can move toward more sustainable models of work, an approach increasingly supported in the post-pandemic era of flexible and meaningful employment (Kniffin et al., 2021).

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