

Merit

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Focus: Should NZ adapt to a 4-day working week?**Research Questions**

1. What are the positive impacts of adopting to a four-day working week?
2. What are the negative impacts of adopting to a four-day working week?
3. What are the values and viewpoints of people to a four-day working week from a health perspective?
4. What are the values and viewpoints of people to a four-day working week from an economic perspective?

Source I will use:

[Kiwis back four-day working week - new poll \(1news.co.nz\)](https://www.1news.co.nz/kiwis-back-four-day-working-week-new-poll/)
[4-Day Work Week - New Zealand Workplaces | BuckettLaw](#)
[Making the four-day week work: 'You've got to move to the future' | RNZ News](#)
[Kiwi businessman who pitched four-day week starts global petition \(1news.co.nz\)](#)
[The New Zealander trying to revolutionise the working week: 'It's a rational business decision' | Work & careers | The Guardian](#)
[Unilever to try out four-day working week in New Zealand | Reuters](#)
[New study shows 4-day week to be a success | World Economic Forum \(weforum.org\)](#)
[Unilever NZ to trial four-day work week at full pay | Unilever](#)
[FOCUS: Japan Inc. turns to 4-day workweek to offer flexibility to employees \(kyodonews.net\)](#)
[4 Day Work Week Companies in the Netherlands - 4dayweek.io \(2023\)](#)

Link to our survey:

[4 Day Working Week Survey - Google Forms](#)

[The student also included an appendix of the results from their survey]

Research question one – What are the positive impacts of adapting to a four-day working week?

The four-day work week has been a popular discussion around New Zealand and many New Zealanders are in favor of the idea. 1News did a Kantar Public Poll to see how many people in New Zealand supported the four-day working week and how many people opposed the 4-day working week. A total of 63% said they supported the “introduction of a four-day working week for New Zealand” and only 22% opposed the four-day working week whereas 15% are unsure or refused to answer the poll. There are many positive impacts when it comes to working four days a week and the idea of the notion has been promoted by many businesses and organizations to increase employee well-being and productivity, where in New Zealand we already have 50 companies who have put the notion to work. According to the poll, 70% of Kiwis aged between 18 and 49 have supported the idea of a four-day working week which means that majority of the younger generations are for the idea whereas 30% of Kiwis aged above 49 may have opposed the idea of a four-day working week. The poll had showed that people who were more likely to support the idea were Green Party supporters, people with an annual household income of more than \$150,000, graduates, and labor supporters. Our survey results in response to the question: ‘What are the positive impacts of adapting to a four-day working week’ suggest this:

- Workers with more rest and leisure time are often more productive and produce higher quality work (survey response 33).

- A shorter week gives people more time for family, hobbies and personal activities; provides students with a break; and can improve quality of life, productivity, morale and team culture (survey response 16).
- Having a full day to ourselves allows time for activities we value, which can support mental wellbeing, increase positivity and help us work better during the four working days (survey response 46).

Through research and surveys, it is clear that people in NZ are supporting the idea of a four-day work week due to the likelihood of working in a stressful workplace or school being mentally draining and even other countries have trialed this notion and it has had a significant change in their businesses.

Research question two - What are the negative impacts of adapting to a four-day working week?

Even though the four-day work week has been seen as a positive and beneficial towards businesses, schools etc, there are some negatives that come with the notion. Buckettlaw the employment law experts state the pros and cons of this action in an article about the four-day work week. One of the cons about this notion is the risk of it being expensive, in Sweden's two-year trial that reduced a 40-hour week to a 30-hour week but maintained the five-day schedule and while the study recorded higher work satisfaction, it overall became too costly to uphold. Another con about a four-day work week is not all industries can participate because some of them require a 24/7 presence or other scheduling, making a four-day work week impractical. There is also a 'pressure cooker effect' where the pressure to fit the work of five days into four days can result in mental health issues like stress and anxiety. Survey results in response to the question: 'What are the negatives impacts of adapting to a four-day working week' prove this:

- Some negative impacts might include decreased productivity, especially for younger people who might spend the day on their screens instead of using it well. This could make people lazier and affect how well they work during the four workdays (survey response 46).
- Depending on the industry, there could be more pressure to finish everything in less time, which might increase stress. A four-day week might not suit every company or job (survey response 6).
- Reduced income might be an issue if fewer hours mean less pay, which could affect people's standard of living and create challenges for some businesses.
- Some workers might also find it hard to adjust after working five days a week for a long time, which could temporarily lower productivity or cause extra stress.
- Businesses working on a five-day schedule might struggle to meet customer expectations, which could hurt their competitiveness.
- In some cases, employees might need to work longer hours during the four days to keep up, which could lead to burnout (survey response 33).

Through research and surveys, it is clear that some people in NZ also are opposing the idea of a four-day work week because of reduced income, difficulty adjusting and many more reasons.

Research question three: What are the values and viewpoints of people to a four-day working week from a health perspective?

Andrew Barnes is a sixty three year old CEO of Perpetual Guardian who introduced the four day work week in an eight week trial in 2018. He later launched an international petition called '4 Day Week Global' because he wants people to work smarter and shorter hours and raise awareness about the benefits of a four day week. He stated, "their stress levels have dropped... more of them say they can work better working four days rather than five... the productivity of the company has actually gone up." Andrew's point of view is shaped by a health perspective because he believes wellbeing should be treated as an essential part of work, not something that comes after long hours. His own experience as a young investment banker in the UK, working punishing hours in a competitive sector, shaped his values around protecting workers from burnout and unhealthy workloads. For example, he talked about a leaked Goldman Sachs survey reporting "inhumane" 100-hour weeks and said workers were being treated like racehorses. These experiences show that he values fairness, balance and healthy working conditions. Because he sees wellbeing as something employers should actively support, he argues that shorter hours can create healthier workers, which then improves productivity. The trial at Perpetual Guardian showed that the four day week helped his team be more productive while improving their mental wellbeing. This encouraged other companies to try the idea, including some in New Zealand.

Unilever is a multinational company that makes food, drinks, cleaning products and personal care items. In New Zealand, all 81 staff joined a 12-month trial where they kept 100% of their pay but worked 80% of the time. They had flexibility around when and how they worked within the four day model. Unilever NZ managing director Nick Bangs said "the aim was to change the way work is done, not increase the working hours on four days." Nick Bangs' point of view is also shaped by a health perspective, although he connects wellbeing to workplace systems and long-term sustainability. He values creating an environment where people can work at their best without being overloaded. This comes through in his comments about reducing stress, supporting balance and focusing on healthier work patterns that last. Bangs also talked about shifting away from "old ways of working," which shows he values change that helps both people and the business. These values influence his viewpoint because he believes improving wellbeing and removing stressors helps teams perform better.

Unilever reviewed the results to see if the approach could work for their global workforce of 155,000 employees. The idea gained more attention when Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern encouraged businesses to look at four day weeks after COVID-19. Bangs explained, "Our goal is to measure performance on output, not time... the old ways of working are outdated." This shows that his point of view comes from both a health perspective and an economic one because he wanted to prove that wellbeing and productivity can increase together. Their trial showed similar positive outcomes to Perpetual Guardian, as workers were more motivated and productive with the shorter week. This social action strengthens my findings because it shows how a four day work week can benefit businesses and support employee wellbeing, which Unilever valued.

Research question four: What are the values and viewpoints of people to a four-day working week from an economic perspective?

A point of view that relates to this issue is Cathy Stewart, a people and culture manager at Kowtow Clothing. She supports the 4day work week because she believes it makes the business more productive while also looking after workers. From her experience in their workplace trial, she found that working fewer days helped the team focus better. She explained, "You really have to assess what you're wasting time on – are your meetings too long, are you having too many meetings, does the stuff at the bottom of your todo list really

need to be done? So, team by team, we just sat down and assessed those things.” This shows she values efficient work habits and believes the business benefits when time is used wisely. Cathy’s viewpoint is shaped by an economic perspective because she wants the company to meet its goals and targets, and she sees a shorter week as a way to improve performance. She mentioned that the trial helped them “form measurable and think through how it might impact the business,” showing that she prioritises productivity and clear results. For her, supporting workers’ wellbeing is part of keeping the business running effectively, since rested employees work better.

She also said, “It’s just great to see that the conversations happening, and people are thinking about it. And that employees are getting the opportunity to have a little bit more of that balance between their work and their personal life.” Even though she talks about balance, she connects it to improved motivation and focus at work. She challenges the idea that longer hours automatically mean more work is done and believes that four days is enough when time is managed properly. Therefore, Cathy’s perspective strengthens my findings because it shows how a New Zealand workplace has already used a 4-day week to improve productivity while supporting employees. It gives a real example of how an economic perspective can still value workers and see wellbeing as part of business success. However, some people who have an economic viewpoint argue the other side. A viewpoint that relates to this issue is Catherine Beard, a BusinessNZ spokesperson. She is against the idea of a 4-day working week because she thinks it could make businesses less productive. Catherine argues that squeezing five days of work into four could put pressure on staff and harm efficiency. She explained that “the challenges in a four-day work week could be that actually staff end up having a really intensive four days, so that could be stressful in and of itself.” She also pointed out that businesses operating seven days a week, like retail or hospitality, may need extra staff to cover the lost day, increasing costs and making it harder to stay profitable. Catherine’s viewpoint is shaped by an economic perspective because she values stability, productivity and making sure businesses can continue running without extra financial strain. She sees risks in shorter weeks, such as higher staffing costs and reduced time to meet targets.

Reflection: *Should New Zealand Adopt the Four-Day Work Week?*

Based on my research, I think New Zealand should adopt a four-day working week because the evidence shows it can improve people’s wellbeing and still keep businesses productive. Many New Zealanders already support the idea, and trials like Perpetual Guardian and Unilever have shown that workers can do the same amount of work in less time because they are more rested and motivated. People in my surveys also said they would have more time for family, hobbies and mental wellbeing, which helps them work better during the four days. Supporters like Damen Hansen and Andrew Barnes also value health and fairness, and they have seen stress levels drop and productivity increase. Even though there are concerns about pressure, staffing and costs for some industries, these challenges can be managed depending on the type of business. Overall, the research suggests that a four-day working week could make a positive difference to many workers in New Zealand, especially those who feel stressed and burnt out, while still allowing businesses to succeed.

Evaluation

Most of my sources were reasonably reliable because they were from reputable journalist websites, like the Guardian and 1News. The article from the World Economic Forum would

also be reliable, as they are a well-regarded international institution, who would be mindful of upholding their reputation. When looking at the study they used in the article, it also said it was done in collaboration with researchers from “Boston College, University College Dublin and Cambridge University” which means it was probably done with proper social sciences research methods, making it more reliable.

Although I did not collect many primary sources, one way I found evidence for my inquiry was through surveys. My friend and I jointly created a survey to get a wider range of responses, and we distributed it to both her and my friends and family. This resulted in 48 responses, giving us both a larger group of results and a more accurate picture of what people's opinions were regarding a 4-day work week. A little age bias may have resulted from the fact that, of the 48 survey replies, 35 came from respondents 10 to 19 years old. This is because most of our data came from younger people's perspectives. This could have created a bias because many young people tend to lack knowledge about the economy, news, and politics and may only enjoy the idea of having an extra day off from work or school. However, I went through all the responses and selected a variety of different responses based on the information I found.

Another improvement I could have made in my inquiry would be including more voices from people who were against shifting to a 4-day work week, because I noticed that most of the information I gathered came from individuals or groups who supported the idea or were at least open to trialling it. If I had been able to find more viewpoints from people who disagreed with the change, my investigation would have felt more balanced overall. One reason these perspectives may have been harder to find is that businesses might not want to publicly state that they do not support a 4-day work week, since this could affect how the public sees them, especially when many people are in favour of better work-life balance. Because of this, some organisations may have chosen not to comment at all, which limited how well I could explore the opposing side of the debate.

Make justified generalizations that could be applied outside of the context of the inquiry (the focus)

Many other countries have had their opinions about the notion of a 4-day work week such as Netherlands, Germany, United Kingdom, United States, Sweden and even Japan. The countries I have stated all have remarkably similar opinions about the 4-day work week, majority of them being positive towards the notion but however Japan and the United States have their concerns. Japan's reasoning varied from being understaffed or the workload being too great, Murata of Recruit Works Institute said the disadvantages of the four-day workweek include the difficulty of managing work shifts and the lack of communication among workers, she said that large firms that will embrace the work schedule could set an example. "Whether the four-day workweek brings benefits varies depending on the industry or type of jobs that workers have. Japanese companies could implement the idea on a trial basis and see whether it works for them, more firms may follow if they learn the benefits from those that have already utilized it," Murata said. Whereas in the Netherlands it seems to be the norm working less hours in a week. In comparison to other nations, 12% of working fathers and 86% of working mothers in this country each worked fewer than 35 hours per week. Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM, are considered standard business hours in the Netherlands. Employers are not allowed by law to make their staff work more than 12 hours a day, or a total of 60 hours a week. No one can be forced to work on Sundays in the Netherlands.

Grade: Merit

For Merit, the student needs to conduct a reflective social inquiry in depth.

In addition to meeting the Achieved criteria, this requires explaining the points of view, values, and perspectives that relate to the focus of the inquiry.

The Achieved criteria are clearly met. Appropriate focus questions that enable exploration of perspectives, viewpoints, and values have been developed. Evidence of the requirements to gather relevant background information is seen through a list of possible sources and collected survey data. Additionally, throughout the response, the use of specific data and quotes reflects curriculum level 7 expectations, providing further evidence for this criterion. The evaluation demonstrates reflection on the understandings developed during the inquiry by addressing the overarching question of whether New Zealand should adopt a four-day working week, assessing the reliability of sources, and providing a specific, evidence-based conclusion.

The student has discussed two key perspectives—economic and health—and the values associated with each as they relate to the four-day working week. These perspectives are clearly connected to the viewpoints of various individuals. This meets the threshold for an explanation, as the student not only identifies perspectives and values but also links them to individuals' experiences and beliefs, explaining how and why these shape their positions on the issue.

To reach Excellence, the student would need to make justified generalisations that extend beyond the immediate context of their inquiry. This involves moving past a descriptive account of how other countries view the issue and instead explaining the underlying perspectives and values shaping those views, as well as the significance of similarities and differences between contexts.

For example, they could examine how economic and health perspectives influence values and attitudes in Japan, where cultural expectations around work and productivity differ significantly from those in New Zealand, including the emergence of 'karōshi' (death from overwork) as a social issue. This level of analysis would enable them to make justified generalisations about how cultural and historical factors shape a society's approach to the four-day working week.