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Balancing life and work until the cows
come home:

The potential for a four-day week in the New Zealand
dairy industry

Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme

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Executive Summary

In the time of the 'great resignation' in a post COVID-19 world, finding and retaining top talent is an ongoing and costly concern for businesses. As the employee value proposition evolves, employers may wish to use a change in the structure of the work week as a distinguishing factor for them as an employer.

This research investigates the efficacy of a four-day week amongst the office-based knowledge workers of the New Zealand dairy industry workforce. The key aims of this study were to identify the benefits that a four-day week could provide, establish the barriers to said four-day week, and to recognise how COVID-19 impacted the evolution of workplace norms. The research was undertaken by reviewing existing literature and conducting semi structured interviews employees in the dairy industry.

Thanks to COVID-19 and changes in the use of technology as an accepted modality within the business world, the line between work and home has continued to become increasingly permeable. This impacts work-life balance for employees and subsequently satisfaction in both life and work. An opportunity is presented for a reset of worker culture to benefit the mental health and wellbeing of the employee, increase employee engagement within their personal communities, all while simultaneously benefiting the company through more engaged employees and potential increases to productivity.

Employees have benefited greatly from the increased flexibility that has been normalised following COVID-19. There may be further advantages to both employers and employees by formalizing a four-day week variation. This could see further benefit to employee wellbeing and enhanced engagement within their community. However, implementing a four-day week might be difficult due to anecdotal reports that many employees are regularly working over their contracted hours. Others admitted to working to appear like they are still productive, but they admit to idly filling in time until it is socially acceptable to leave the office. As such, feasibility will depend on the team itself and specific circumstances, such as stakeholder availability or time zone cross over. Transitioning from the current model straight to a four-day week is not the best approach, but instead opting for a four-day week variant would help to smooth the transition and address/overcome the key barriers.

Interviews with 12 current employees of the New Zealand dairy industry found that the key obstacles to a four-day week were perception (of shareholders, and other employees), and maintaining availability to an employee's respective stakeholders. This reiterates the nuances that exist in each team. These would need to be accounted for in any change to the structure of the working week. Another important recurring theme that manifested was the importance of bidirectional trust between employees and their manager/company. Bidirectional trust enables managers to not have to time-keep their employees, while the employees feel empowered to complete the requirements of their role. Trust on both sides empowers the respected privilege of a four-day week variation.

The key recommendations from this study for a dairy company considering a four-day week are:

- Acknowledge the difference between task-oriented workers and knowledge workers within their employee base and structure workplace change specific to each worker type.
- Use a formalised process/framework and support from senior leaders within the company to overcome any negative stigmatism from current workplace attitudes towards long hours.
- Establish clear performance measures for both business and employee to ensure adequate outputs; and
- Allow individual teams to devise their own implementation plan within set boundaries to adequately consider team-specific nuances.

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1.0 Introduction

"Is your worth found in your time, or in the value that you add?" -E2. This was a question posed during a semi structured interview with a current employee of the New Zealand dairy industry. The topic of conversation? A four-day week.

In a post COVID-19 world, companies are facing the 'great resignation' (Sull et al., 2022). Attracting and retaining staff is an increasing challenge for employers (Li et al., 2022), with large costs involved (Grimmond, 2014). As such, strategies need to be implemented to attract talented employees to the New Zealand dairy industry ("Food and Fibre sector insights," 2022), and redefining what it means to be an employer (KPMG, 2023).

Existing trials on a four-day week have been conducted across multiple workplaces and company sizes, both within New Zealand and internationally. These trials are reviewed as a part of this study, but none encompass the nuances specific to the New Zealand dairy industry. However, the benefits found by these trials show promise towards the benefits that could exist for the knowledge workers of the dairy industry.

The primary focus of this research is to explore the efficacy of a four-day week in the New Zealand dairy industry, specifically the knowledge workers. The ideal outcome would be to identify key benefits that could be captured and barriers that need to be overcome for it to succeed.

2.0 Project Scope and Objectives

The scope of this research is limited to office-based knowledge workers due to some innate flexibility to their roles. Staff based in other roles in the New Zealand dairy industry supply chain, for example on-farm teams, manufacturing staff and tanker drivers etc have been excluded from the scope of this research. Kaczmarczyk and Murtough recognise knowledge-work as being fundamentally different to task-oriented work in industrial processes (Kaczmarczyk & Murtough, 2002). Therefore, office-based workers, who can be considered to be knowledge workers, are the focus of this study.

The vision of this study is to drive positive change in the work life balance of knowledge workers within the industry without sacrificing business outputs through reduced productivity.

The objectives of this report are to:

- Identify what benefits could materialise if the New Zealand dairy industry implemented four-day week variations for office-based workers.
- Identify the key barriers to implementing four-day week variations with the current nuances of the industry; and
- Recognise how forced changes (i.e., lockdowns, widespread working from home) during COVID-19 impacted the current workplace norms, and how this has by default influenced the evolution of workplace structures and workability going forward.

3.0 Key terminology

Given the different interpretations of the concept of the four-day work week, it is important to define common terminology used throughout this report and research.

Standard week refers to the 'normal 40-hour' work week, consisting of five workdays of eight hours per day (five by eight). This is for 100% of salary.

Condensed week refers to working 40 hours in a week but doing it across four days instead of five. This is for 100% of salary. The fifth day isn't limited to being a Friday.

Reduced week refers to working less hours, with pay adjusted on a pro rata basis according to hours worked. Some examples include: 32 hours a week, for 80% of full-time equivalent salary, or 20 hours a week for 50% of full-time equivalent salary.

Five by Seven week refers to working for five days a week but having reduced hours on each day. i.e., five workdays consisting of seven hours per day. This is still for 100% of salary.

Four-day week refers to working normal hours for four workdays a week, while still maintaining the same output. This is for 100% salary. The fifth day isn't limited to being a Friday.

100-80-100 model is the same concept as the four-day week. 100% of pay, for 80% of the hours, provided 100% of the output can be maintained.

Four-and-a-half-day week refers to working four normal working days. This is followed by a half day, finishing work at lunch time on Friday.

Nine-day fortnight refers to one week within a fortnight being a four-day week.

Four-day week variations refers to any of the reduced hour variations that don't adjust salary on a pro rata basis to compensate for the reduced hours, but rather an adjustment in what is considered a full-time equivalent job. These are all based on the assumption that output doesn't diminish. These include five by seven week, four-day week, 100-80-100 model, four-and-a-half-day week, nine-day fortnight.

Non-standard week refers to work week variations that aren't four-day week variations but differ from the standard week. For example, a reduced or condensed week.

Knowledge worker refers to a worker whose primary task(s) involves the creation, distribution or application of knowledge (Choi & Ruona, 2007). For example, office-based workers.

Task worker is the logical opposite to a knowledge worker. A Task worker is someone whose primary task(s) involve routine tasks, simple prioritisation, and transactional activities (Choi & Ruona, 2007). For example, tanker drivers, on site machine operators.

4.0 Literature Review

4.1 COVID-19 learnings

COVID-19 has drastically altered the conditions for workers with many companies moving to remote working as a response to the pandemic. As a result of this shift, managers faced the new challenge of learning to manage remote teams (Hamouche, 2021). In the same way that COVID-19 changed the ways of working, it must also force a re-evaluation of the way a company measures employee performance and success (Sethi, 2020). New ways of working have been both developed and deployed to facilitate and accommodate the changing nature of work (Carroll, 2020) but measuring performance hasn't kept up. Since the outputs of knowledge work are not standardised by nature, said productivity measure continues to puzzle researchers (Kaczmarczyk & Murtough, 2002).

Another significant impact of COVID-19 was the reduction in negative stigma surrounding employees requesting workplace flexibility. This sees flexible work arrangements less as irregular behaviour, and more normalised (Chan, 2023).

4.2 Four-day work week study/findings

4.2.1 Origins of 5-day week

In the early 19th century, workers in the United States successfully pushed for workplaces to close on a Sunday out of respect for the sabbath. As time went on, Jewish workers – who observed the sabbath on a Saturday saw factories closing on both Saturday and Sunday to respect the religious beliefs of their workers (Blakemore, 2023). Then, in 1922 Henry Ford established the standard Monday to Friday work week. At the time, this was considered radical change, but by early 1930's this was the norm which we still know 100 years later. An interesting finding as a result of Henry Ford's trial was an increase in community engagement through greater attendance at church while factories suffered no loss in productivity. Despite New Zealand's religious population declining (*Losing our religion*, 2019), thus making church attendance a less relevant metric for community engagement, the premise remains that community engagement may increase with a rejuvenation of the standard working week. A change to a four-day week variation presents an opportunity to increase community engagement e.g., volunteering.

Charlotte Lockhart, a global advocate for a four-day work week, highlights how at the time the 40-hour week became normal, society was structured significantly differently. Only the father tended to work and work never affected home life. Now both parents tend to work, and laptops and phones see work creeping into the home life (Cuadra, 2021). Combine this with how COVID-19 drastically altered working conditions to see employees forced to work from home (Carroll, 2020; Hamouche, 2021; Schor & Bridson-Hubbard, 2022), and the line between work and home becomes distinctly more permeable (Chan, 2023). This blurred line leads to higher work-life conflict, leading to emotional exhaustion and burnout, as well as ultimately increasing turnover (Chan, 2023). The high cost of turnover within the primary industries (Grimmond, 2014; PWC, 2006) only further emphasises the benefits that improved employee wellbeing could bring. Haar notes that balance between work and life is vitally important in creating satisfaction within a job (Haar, 2018).

Long work weeks often came about by agreement between employees and employers as a means to earn enough money for the workers to support their family (Whaples, 2001). However, it is noted that a long-term decline in the average length of the work week is due to increased economic productivity, resulting in higher wages for workers. As predicted by Herzberg's motivation theory (Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005), money is not a primary source of motivation for employees. This correlates with willingness to work longer hours decreasing as hourly earnings increase.

4.2.2 Four-day week studies

Voluntary trials have been conducted regarding reduced hours of work with no reduction in pay since 2021 for six-month trial periods. The trials included two-months of preparation including coaching, mentoring, and support from those who had already implemented four-day weeks (Schor & Bridson-Hubbard, 2022). 33 companies were involved, primarily across Ireland and United States. One participating company had employees based in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Employees included in the trial covered a variety of age ranges, countries of origin, and genders. Participating companies ranged from <10 employees to >100. As shown in Table 1, the small number of large firms involved in this trial does somewhat limit the relevance of this study to the New Zealand dairy industry. It does however support that change within smaller teams may prove successful.

Table 1: Breakdown of trial participants by size, ranked by number of employees (Schor & Bridson-Hubbard, 2022)

Number of employees	Number of companies	Percentage
1-10	17	52.0%
11-25	9	27.0%
26-50	4	12.0%
51-100	1	3.0%
101+	2	6.0%
Total	33	

The results from the 33-company trial have been overwhelmingly positive, with 93% of companies either continuing or planning to continue with a four-day week. Another interesting nuance from this study was that not all participating companies scheduled the fifth day as Friday, and some remained at 5 days of work, but made a meaningful reduction in hours worked, with an average reduction of 6 hours per week.

Other positive benefits found:

- 97% of employees want to continue the trial.
- Employee stress, burnout, fatigue, and work-family conflict all declined.
- Physical and mental health, work-family and work-life balance, and satisfaction across multiple domains of life increased.
- Climate benefits by reduced commuting.
- Stress and burnout levels of employees decreased.
- Reduction in absenteeism, measured in sick and personal days.
- Slight reduction in staff resignations despite trial taking place during the 'Great Resignation' (Sull et al., 2022).

Another similar trial was done by a New Zealand company. This trial was inspired by growing evidence that modern open-plan workspaces can be detrimental to worker productivity (Haar, 2018). Given the difficulty and nuances around measuring productivity of knowledge workers (Kaczmarczyk & Murtough, 2002) the company opted to let teams decide how to best translate their workload to a four-day week. The expectation was that the workers would benefit from productivity improvements, while the company made gains through recruitment/retention, enhanced reputation, and other smaller gains like reduced energy usage from the office.

Key trial results:

- 24% increase in employees stating work-life balance had improved.
- 7% drop in stress levels.
- Employees reported better job satisfaction and engagement.
- Supervisors rated team performance as no different across the trial.
- Supervisors noted increased creativity and engagement which saw better service performance.

The success of this trial epitomises the power that organisational support can render, and benefits that can be seen by taking the risk to trust employees with a new approach to work.

At its core, the fundamental idea behind a four-day week is a shift away from hours worked as a metric of employee productivity and commitment, to the view that working shorter hours can increase productivity and efficiency (Chung, 2022).

4.3 Staff and business impact

4.3.1 Efficiency

Kaczmarczyk and Murtough (Kaczmarczyk & Murtough, 2002) identified a trend in the recognition of knowledge workers as a source of human capital for a business. Said capital can be enhanced through improvements to both environment and amenities. A four-day week variant is one such way to improve an employee's environment, through providing a more satisfied and engaged employee (Haar, 2018).

A study of 2000 United Kingdom based office workers showed that the average participant was only productive for approximately three hours' worth during their normal workday (Vouchercloud). This leaves plenty of room for improvement. Haynes (Haynes, 2007) posits that improving office productivity can be summarised by two conflicting approaches. The first focuses on reduction of cost/space (control paradigm), while the second focuses more on acknowledging the role of the individual in creating knowledge (enabling paradigm). Kaczmarczyk and Murtough suggest that the responsibility of office managers now extends to developing the essence behind high performing workplaces, to allow them to make the best people-focused decisions. This supports the enabling paradigm suggested by Haynes (Haynes, 2007). The idea of enabling employees was further demonstrated by (Haar, 2018), in how the company enabled each individual team to best decide how the change in workplace norm would be implemented by their respective team.

4.3.2 Job satisfaction

Haar (Haar, 2014) concluded that work-life balance has significant impacts on both job and overall life satisfaction. He suggests that workers should be encouraged to seek achieving a greater balance, while firms should look towards providing policies aimed at enhancing work-life balance amongst its employees. This is supported by (Chan, 2023), which suggests that at a team or organisational level, there lies an opportunity to cultivate a compassionate workplace culture that places value on an employee's health and well-being.

Successful trials conducted in multiple countries have shown that reduced working hours per week has a positive impact on employee's mental health, job satisfaction, and general wellbeing (Chung, 2022; Haar, 2018; Schor & Bridson-Hubbard, 2022). This is supported by evidence which suggests that when team members have time to actively participate and engage in their community, that retention is enhanced ("Food and Fibre sector insights," 2022). One of the many social benefits to a four-day week that was highlighted was more time for family and community engagement (Schor & Bridson-Hubbard, 2022).

A multi-company trial of four-day week variations, which averaged a reduction in working hours of 6 full hours per week, saw noticeable health and wellbeing improvements throughout the six-month trials. While the study found that 17% of interviewed employees experienced an increased stress level, more than double that saw a reduction. Job satisfaction recorded a 3.8% increase. Employee burnout fell significantly, down 16%. The overall work conditions showed such an improvement, that 97% of employees reported wanting to continue the trial. This was also emphasised by the pay rise they would need in a new job to return to standard five-day week. This breakdown is shown in Table 2. Given the average reduction in work hours was 15% (six hours across a 40-hour week), to see that 85

out of 155 respondents would want at least a 26% pay rise, while a further 20 respondents would not shift jobs is a strong indication of how satisfied employees were in this trial. This reiterates the finding that money is not the only motivator to an employee (Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005).

Table 2: Trial results of pay adjustment needed for a worker to return to a five-day week (Schor & Bridson-Hubbard, 2022)

Salary change required to return to five-day week	Count	Percentage
<10%	6	3.9%
10-25%	44	28.4%
26-50%	65	41.9%
50+%	20	12.9%
No amount of money	20	12.9%
Total	155	

4.3.3 Staff turnover and retention

The cost of retention could be up to 12% of pre-tax income for the average salary (PWC, 2006). While this could be lower given the size of firms within the New Zealand dairy industry (Li et al., 2022), it is still a significant cost for a company. This high cost of turnover lowers productivity in several ways – teams covering a vacancy, onboarding processes, and hiring processes. Non-tangible costs include diminished customer experience, loss of institutional knowledge, and reducing the benefits of training (Grimmond, 2014). Therefore, retention becomes critical to ensure that those with the necessary skills remain within an industry.

“If one of the key pillars of what a business wants to achieve is looking after its people, then [a 4-day week variation] is one of the tools available” – E8

Labour shortages are not specific to the dairy industry in New Zealand but are felt much wider due to the ongoing implications from the COVID-19 pandemic (“Food and Fibre sector insights,” 2022; KPMG, 2023). The KPMG 2023 Agri Agenda notes that the labour shortages observed in New Zealand are mirroring those seen across the globe. As such, the resulting labour shortages have seen significant rises in the labour cost across organisations. Therefore, there is a benefit to being an employer of choice in the time of labour shortages, as the role of an employer changes (KPMG, 2023). There is a need to transition the employment proposition away from a take-it-or-leave-it approach, towards becoming an employer who encourages their employees to grow. This growth then allows the employees to contribute beyond the company, to their families, communities, and the wider sector (“Food and Fibre sector insights,” 2022). By creating this good employee experience, it can then lead to a good customer experience (Sethi, 2020), which is a positive business outcome.

Findings by Haar (Haar, 2013) found that work life balance is especially beneficial for employees, but that it ultimately provides the firm performance benefits because of employees being more satisfied in their roles. Rowarth (Rowarth, 2013) highlights another benefit of career satisfaction – satisfied employees tend to encourage others (be it intentional or unintentional) to follow their path. Therefore, a greater work-life balance for employees could see employees satisfied in their role, and willingly (if not consciously) providing another benefit to their company through potential word-of-mouth recruitment for said employer.

5.0 Methodology

The research undertaken for this paper involved an analytical review of existing literature around the four-day work week and semi structured interviews with

existing employees within the New Zealand dairy industry. Braun and Clarke's six phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) were used to perform a qualitative analysis across the interview findings. This led to the identification of themes relevant to the objectives of this study. Findings from the interviews are compared with learnings from the existing literature.

5.1 Interviews

Interviews were conducted with 12 head-office-based employees currently in the New Zealand dairy industry. These were informal, semi-structured interviews. Of these 12, nine were 'regular' employees from across different age brackets, experience levels, educational backgrounds, and work streams. There was a mix of interviewees who had direct reports, and those who did not – to further broaden the perspective gained. Table 3 below outlines the spread of these key factors amongst the nine interviewees. The purpose of these interviews was to establish a broader perspective on both the opportunities and limitations that could result if a four-day week variation were implemented. These interviews focused on flexibility in their current roles, and individual feasibility of a four-day week variation.

The three remaining interviews were with employees who work within the broad umbrella of Human Resources (HR). Once again, interviewees were approached to cover a range of different areas and work streams under the HR banner. While the employee interviews focused more on the feasibility from an employee perspective, the HR interviews focused more on the feasibility from an employer/company perspective. It is important to note that these interviewees were expressing their opinion, and are not representative of their employer's opinions.

The final semi structured interview was with a high-level representative from a company that has currently implemented a four-day week variation and is continuing to tweak its implementation.

These interviewees were coded by interviewee type (employee, HR, leader), and their respective interview number. E1 through E9 represent the office-based employees in non-HR functions. H1 through H3 represent those working under the umbrella of HR, while L1 represents the senior leader from the external company that has implemented a four-day week variation. This coding was done to respect the anonymity of interviewees as per the agreement with each individual interviewee. A thematic analysis was conducted on the interview data as per Braun and Clarke's six step process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Table 3: Breakdown of non-identifying characteristics of employee interviewees.

Code	Work Area	Age Bracket	Time in current role	Time with Company	Time in Workforce	People leader
E1	Planning	35-44	3 Years	17 Years total	>20 Years	Y
E2	Supply Chain	18-24	<1 Year	<1 Year	<1 Year	N
E3	FMCG Sales	25-34	1.5 Years	6 Years	6 Years	N
E4	Internal Audit	25-34	1.5 Years	7 Years	8 Years	N
E5	Third Party Manufacturing	25-34	1 Year	5 Years	5 Years	N
E6	Sales & Optimisation	25-34	<1 Year	6 Years	6 Years	Y
E7	Pricing	35-44	4 Years	9 Years	16 Years	Y
E8	Sales	45-54	5 Years	5 Years	30 Years	Y
E9	Sales	45-54	5 Years	12 Years total	25 Years	N

5.2 Limitations

There is a limitation that stems from the range of interviewees. More breadth of interviewee age/experience/job area would help to cement themes that were identified from the conducted interviews. Further interviews should include representation from other dairy companies within New Zealand. Given the author's position as an analyst at Fonterra at the time the interviews were conducted, it was decided that interviewing employees at external dairy companies would have yielded answers that may have been guarded. As such, the only interviews were of Fonterra employees. Given the size of Fonterra in the New Zealand dairy sector, the interview interpretation and resulting analysis can still be considered as being indicatively representative of the New Zealand dairy sector.

There are inherent biases that exist in this study. The most impactful of these biases is the combination of confirmation and self-serving biases. As an office-based staff member of a company within the New Zealand dairy industry, the author notes a vested interest in the research topic due to the potential personal benefits that could be delivered should a four-day work week be implemented.

In order to help reduce the impact of these biases, the biases have been acknowledged, and interviews have been conducted to form a broader opinion, while reducing bias of the feasibility and barriers of a four-day week. This included a senior representative from an external, non-dairy related company who has implemented a four-day week variation but had found it less effective than most of the research suggests.

Another inherent bias exists with the selection of interviewees. The participants were sourced from the author's personal network within the company. To obtain representative data and mitigate the selection bias, participants were chosen from across a range of ages, experiences, work streams to ensure as much breadth of opinion as possible. Relative position to the interviewer was taken into consideration. As such, there is a lack of senior interviewees to mitigate any negative impacts on future career options. Given the distinction between knowledge workers and task-based workers (Kaczmarczyk & Murtough, 2002), this research is also limited by a lack of interviews with task-based workers.

One final limitation is a lack of longer-term studies showing the efficacy of four-day week variations in industries that are directly applicable to the New Zealand dairy industry.

6.0 Analysis

A qualitative analysis was conducted across the interviews using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis technique (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This allowed for identification and analysis of recurring patterns the interviews generated.

As per Braun and Clarke's methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2006), interview recordings were used to become familiar with the data, before coding responses and tabulating these into themes for further analysis.

6.1 Derivation of themes

Key thoughts, ideas, and outlooks were extracted from the interview notes and recordings. Once the interviews were all transcribed, be it employee, HR, or leader interviews, the key ideas were distilled and tabulated. Table 5 shows which interviewees mentioned each of the key themes.

Table 4 below summarises the key themes that were drawn from the three different categories of interviewed groups. Repeated ideas that frequently appeared across multiple interviews are in bold. Given L1 was the only interviewee in their category, none are emboldened.

Table 4: Key themes derived from interviews

Themes	E1-9	HR1-3	L1
Flexibility and efficiency	Prevents burnout, helpful for living, having the choice , able to live life and work, manager specific, COVID-19 drove change	Flexibility to choose as big positive change , COVID-19 drove change, how employees can have a say about working environment, formal structures let staff find the best fit within the guidelines , work never stops - where to draw the line	Formalised structure implemented post COVID-19, guiderails to ensure no harm to business or people
Satisfaction and engagement	Boost team morale, community engagement , mental health benefits, grow loyalty and retention, symbiotic employment relationship, time with family	The benefits of engaging, everyone is different	Surprised how quickly it turned to an expected privilege
Perception	What would farmers think, not all roles appropriate	Ensuring equity across employer base , wage vs salary employee, farmer ownership , old school thinking, hard for people to unwind old habits	Hard to claw back extra days if needed
Stakeholder availability	Time zone crossover, logistics, (external) customer expectations	Being intentional about maintaining relationships, operational challenges, availability for logistics queries (ports etc)	
Trust and leadership	Experience differs by manager , empowered by high trust model, being clear on deliverables	Hard for managers to let go of control	Senior leaders still working during the hours that were reduced

During this process, the two key barriers to implementing a four-day week variation emerged: availability to stakeholders, and perception. 85% of interviewees said that remaining available to their stakeholders was a key concern. Regarding perception, 58% of relevant interviewees said this was a key concern. Notably all of the HR interviewees said that this was one of their key concerns. 70% of interviewees discussed how they could make a four-day week variant work in their current role.

The majority of the findings from these interviews corroborated the findings from the literature in terms of benefits that employees could experience. Given 100% of relevant interviewed participants wanted a variation of this, it shows that there is a willingness for change from a staff level. These results could be different, if a wider range of people were interviewed, including a combination of task-oriented and knowledge-based workers from multiple dairy companies within New Zealand.

Once the key considerations were identified (as shown in Table 4), the frequency of mention was then coded by each interviewee to calculate the percentage of respondents that aligned with each consideration. These results are shown below in Table 5. The themes that emerged were:

- Flexibility in the workplace
- The role of leadership and managers in the workplace structure
- Bi-directional trust between employee and employer
- Obstacles to a four-day work week

These four themes form the basis of the key findings and discussion section of this report.

Table 5: Mentions of key considerations for implementing a four-day week during interview process

Code	Perception	Stakeholder availability	Equity of Implementation	Importance of trust and/or performance metrics
E1	N	Y	N	Y
E2	N	Y	N	N
E3	Y	Y	N	Y
E4	N	N	N	N
E5	N	Y	Y	Y
E6	Y	Y	N	N
E7	Y	Y	N	Y
E8	Y	Y	N	Y
E9	N	Y	N	Y
H1	Y	N	Y	N
H2	Y	Y	Y	Y
H3	Y	Y	Y	Y
L1	N/A	Y	Y	Y

7.0 Key findings and discussion

7.1 Implementation

Interviewees were asked about both their definition of a four-day week, and whether they thought this report's definition of a four-day week could be possible in their current role. When asked what they thought a four-day week meant (as per question 12 in Appendix one), all but two interviewees referred to either a condensed week or a reduced week. Only two related to this report's definition of a four-day week. Both interviewees were amongst the younger interview candidates. While this spread of responses is an interesting finding, it is worth noting these responses may have been impacted by recent business communications around flexible working.

However, upon asking if they thought they could achieve a four-day week in their current role, the split of answers was more even. Five thought they could make it work while four thought it would not be feasible. Of these four, while one was new to their role (less than one year and thought it would have been possible in their previous role), two of the remaining three thought that a four-day week variation could work in place of transitioning straight to a four-day week.

Despite not everyone saying they thought it could be achieved in their current role, 100% of employee interviews stated that they were interested on the idea of a four-day week, should it prove viable. This response rate reinforces what the research suggests in the regards to the benefits of the four-day week for employees (Haar, 2018; Schor & Bridson-Hubbard, 2022).

"I think the 4-day work week really comes down to the person, the type of role, their ability to get their job done, and the most important thing is getting done what you're meant to be getting done" – E6

7.1.1 Team level impacts

Manager dependence was another theme that shone through across the interviews. For example, E6 mentioned that they like to be in the office more often than not, and as such expected their team to operate in a similar manner. E1 acknowledged similar preferences to E6, but subsequently admitted that their preferences would be considered 'old fashioned'. Meanwhile, E7 stated that they felt like they would be more likely to pass on workplace freedoms to their team that they had experienced as an employee themselves. Interestingly, E7 is already managing someone who is working a non-standard work week in the form of a reduced week. They take an outcomes approach to managing this person and the rest of their team. Multiple interviewees (both regular employees and people leaders) mentioned that a formalised, top-down approach towards implementing a four-day week variation would help reduce the perception issues that have been highlighted as a key barrier. It shows that the senior leaders within a company support this change rather than it only being supported at the level of the relationship between an employee and their direct manager.

"Giving an employee more freedom over their hours should be repaid in turn with meeting business needs." – E5

Table 5Table 4 shows that two thirds of employee interviewees spoke about bidirectional trust needing to exist for a four-day week variation to succeed. The importance of clear performance measures to ensure that business needs are still being met, was reiterated throughout multiple interviews. Bidirectional trust ensures that a manager does not need to micromanage, and time keep their team, thus empowering the team to meet their respective performance metrics (Spell & Arnold, 2007).

Both interviewees and literature suggest that measuring productivity of knowledge workers is an intrinsically difficult task given the spread of work completed. (Kaczmarczyk & Murtough, 2002). A smaller number of interviewees identified a further risk that 1% of employees could abuse the system and subsequently ruin the efficacy of the four-day week implementation. The below quote from one employee interview highlights the importance of the combination of clear performance measures and the role the manager plays in ensuring said measures are established and accomplished.

"If you get true flexible working and you're not meeting your deliverables, then it's no different to being [at work] for five days a week and not meeting your deliverables" – E5

7.1.2 Barriers and other obstacles to a four-day week variation

Across all of the interviews, two themes became clear as the biggest obstacles to the implementation of a four-day work week. These were perception and maintaining availability to respective stakeholders. **Error! Reference source not found.** Table 5 identifies the breakdown amongst interviewees. Perception was in context to company shareholders, and other workers throughout the New Zealand dairy supply chain who were unable to work in a four-day work week. This includes task-oriented workers (Kaczmarczyk & Murtough, 2002), such as manufacturing site workers and tanker drivers.

Another important perception consideration is that of the actual dairy farmers themselves. Given a large portion of the New Zealand dairy industry processors are owned under a cooperative model, covering more than 80% of the dairy supply in New Zealand (Barry, 2020), these farmers will need to be considered. To continue to support the farmer-owners and quell any concerns, it is crucial to ensure that business needs are still met should a four-day week variation be introduced.

Stakeholders in this case referred to either an internal stakeholder working in another part of the business (in-market sales teams, production planners etc), or external stakeholders (customer account teams, port officials etc). Of nine completed employee interviews, eight mentioned one or both factors when talking about potential barriers to a successful implementation. Two examples were mentioned in the interviews of how stakeholders could be impacted. Firstly, time zone crossover (mentioned by E6) between their current office and their stakeholders, and secondly, needing to be available five days a week for logistics related queries (mentioned by multiple interviewees).

Across the range of interviewees, both employee and HR, and their respective work streams, the challenge of overcoming the key barriers places a large hesitancy on implementing a four-day week. This implies that a direct transition to a four-day week might not be the most immediately appropriate change. However, most interviewees (67%) thought that in place of a transition to a four-day week, a four-day week variant could be used instead as an intermediary to facilitate a change in workplace norms. For roles/teams that are not able to facilitate losing a day, other options exist (Cuadra, 2021), but as proven by the New Zealand based trial, it is important to empower the team to decide how best to implement a change (Haar, 2018).

"Time is the one thing employees truly value because they can spend it in whatever way they want to spend it." – (Cuadra, 2021)

7.1.3 Leading by example

The semi structured interview with L1 gave very good insight for a practical understanding from a leader who has implemented a four-day week variation.

This reinforced the findings of both the literature, and the other interviews. The company transitioned to a nine-day fortnight and continues to refine its implementation on a quarterly basis but has committed to a minimum of one year of the trial. The importance of having a clear formalised structure regarding flexibility and expectations surrounding it was reiterated. This matches what was said in both the employee and HR interviews around a formalised top-down approach.

The initial implementation was designed as an experiment after formalising a hybrid working model post COVID-19. To ensure there was simultaneously no harm to people, and no harm to business outcomes, the business used a social contract and formalised guidelines to guide behaviour when implementing this change. This allowed for teams to work within these guidelines, but develop their own implementation suited to their team. This perfectly corroborates the findings by Haar (Haar, 2018).

In this real-world example, the nine-day fortnight was implemented with the expectation that small life events (appointments etc) were organised for the 10th day rather than during the remainder of the fortnight. However, it was found that old habits crept back in as time went on. It was also found that the 10th day very quickly turned into an expectation, rather than a respected privilege. This contributes a realistic example of the findings from interviews and literature regarding the importance of bidirectional trust.

The company operates on billable hours as a metric. As both the research and the other interviews suggest, this gives a clear output-based approach. This clear and measurable performance metric ensures that outputs did not drop as a result of the changing work week.

Over time, another difficulty materialised – once implemented, it was problematic for the company to attempt 'claw back' some of the extra given days should it find the current implementation was not optimal for the business. In order to compensate for this difficulty, the company reclaimed some of the tenth days, for non-BAU business requirements, such as quarterly planning sessions and other business needs.

As a senior leader within the company, L1 admitted that they regularly still worked on the tenth day but accepted that this was the nature of their role given their seniority for which they felt was a fair part of their compensation package. They still encouraged their staff to use the tenth day away from work as it was intended, thus showing support from senior leadership for the four-day week variation. This also shows that as seniority increases, there is potential for the efficacy of a four-day week variant to be less applicable. Employee interviews reiterated a similar theory, where if implemented, the four-day week variant should be available to all applicable staff, even if the nature of their role makes it less applicable.

7.2 Efficiency

From the nine employee interviews, four recognised that their productivity fluctuates throughout both the day, and the week. Approximately 44% of interviewees mentioned either delaying work to look busy later or doing idle tasks to fill time during the work week. One interviewee even admitted to maintaining the appearance of being productive since they experienced no benefit to finishing their work early. The below quote from one interview again highlights how perception plays a part in the dynamics of a workplace.

"A lot of people still align with an older school mentality where hours [worked equates to output]" – E7

Ongoing labour shortages as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic ("Food and Fibre sector insights," 2022; KPMG, 2023) impact productivity. Employee E3 noted that their team was currently short staffed, and as such the remainder of the team

were going above their individual performance measures to ensure business continuity. If their team was fully staffed, they believed that they would be able to adequately meet their performance measures under a four-day week structure.

For a four-day week to be successfully implemented, teams need to be fully resourced, and employees empowered to work autonomously.

"Now that there is more flexible working, if you're not outcomes based then how are they sure that people aren't already working 4.5 days a week?" – E7

7.3 Flexibility

On the topic of workplace flexibility, employee interviewees remarked that they find it helpful for life to be able to make appointments and other commitments without needing to take time off work, but rather making up their outputs later. As such it allows them to determine the best way to build their week around their commitments, both to work and their personal lives, such that they're delivering against the goals set for them by the business. When asked if they thought their current workplace was flexible, most interviewees agreed, while one pointed out that in a post COVID-19 world, they view workplace flexibility as an inherent industry standard rather than a point of difference relative to other employers. This reinforces the findings by Chan about the reduction in negative stigma related to workplace flexibility (Chan, 2023).

"COVID was a good example of proving that drastic change could work"
– E4

Another point of note regarding flexibility was related to COVID-19. During the COVID-19 response, E8 saw the line between personal and work time become very blurred. COVID-19 taught them that flexibility is the ability to balance both work and personal commitments in harmony. This employee has previously had experience with a four-and-a-half-day week and the extra time allowed them to pursue that which fulfils them. This aligns with (Cuadra, 2021), and how time is one thing that an employee truly values, since they can decide how to spend it.

7.4 Employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention

Although not directly asked, when talking about what they might do with the extra disposable time, older interviewees spoke more about family and giving back to the community, while the younger interviewees saw it as bringing more to the role through living a more balanced life and taking opportunities to upskill on their own time. One of the older interviewees explicitly mentioned how they were currently balancing work and giving back to their community.

"How can we bring more value to the community? I don't want to wait until I'm retired to have the discretionary time to be able to do it" – E8

The above quote by E8 reiterates how reducing work hours would better enable them to engage with their community and give back. This reinforces Henry Ford's theory (Blakemore, 2023) about increasing community engagement as worked hours decreases, as well as other research which highlights the same (Chung, 2022; Haar, 2018).

From a retention perspective, the HR interviews highlighted that the New Zealand dairy industry faces competition for staff from non-dairy industries. This makes the

employee value proposition that a company presents crucial to attracting and retaining good staff. The employee interviews reiterated this, with 100% of respondents saying that their core skill set were transferrable outside of the New Zealand dairy industry. An opportunity presents itself for the industry to use a four-day week variation as a distinguishing factor to differentiate itself via a unique value proposition for employees and become a leader in business. This would align with the research indicating that employers need to reconsider what their role looks like as an employer ("Food and Fibre sector insights," 2022; KPMG, 2023).

"Dairy shouldn't be seen as different to other industries. It should be trying to compete for the same top talent regardless of industry. We should be seen as a leader in business, rather than discreetly dairy" – E7

7.5 Perspectives from Human Resource employees

The HR interviews focused on the implementation from a company perspective. This included practical implications regarding business needs, but also other requirements such as equity across the employer base. All three of the HR interviews mentioned perception as one of the biggest barriers, and two spoke about equity across the different types of employees within the dairy supply chain.

Workplace directives implemented post COVID-19 allowed habits formed during this global pandemic to be formally acknowledged and recognised within company practice. This offered employees the flexibility to choose how it best suits them. Being trusted with opportunity to choose how to make their workday fit within these directives was a positive change, and one that shone through various employee interviews as a key element of workplace flexibility that was valued. Although this added flexibility can be seen to create additional challenges for managers through learning to manage remote teams (Hamouche, 2021), it is clear than employees value this change.

The New Zealand dairy industry is structured in a way where there is a combination of both task-oriented workers, and knowledge-workers. All of the HR interviews highlighted the importance of any changes to workplace norms being equitable across the entire worker base. However, when queried further, some interviewees suggested that the different structures of the working week could already be inequitable. Some of these were seen as favourable for office-based knowledge workers, and others in favour of site workers who tend to be based on manufacturing sites.

For example, a standard work week (Monday to Friday, with a regular weekend) is an advantage to a knowledge worker due to consistency, but the more permeable barriers between work and life (Chan, 2023) is a disadvantage that comes with the higher innate flexibility that a knowledge worker has (Choi & Ruona, 2007).

E7 raised a point that current working arrangements are manager specific and open to interpretation. They highlighted that the current arrangements are somewhat hampered by the split between office based (knowledge) workers, and site based (task-oriented) workers. Given that the outputs of knowledge workers and task workers are inherently different (Kaczmarczyk & Murtough, 2002), structuring the ways of working around the outputs of a role becomes the logical equaliser across the different job types. This once again highlights the importance of clear performance measures to enable an output-based approach to ensuring business needs are met.

7.6 Drawbacks and potential issues with a four-day week variation

Two thirds of employee interviewees (67%) mentioned that implementing a four-day week could be especially hard because in their experience and anecdotally, some employees were already working beyond their contracted

hours on a regular basis. Therefore, a shift from a standard week to a four-day week (40 hours to 32 hours), could actually be a reduction from ~50 hours to the hypothetical 32.

World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Labour Organisation estimate that regular exposure to long working hours (55+ per week) causes attributable burdens on employee health (Pega et al., 2021). While the anecdotal reports of 50-hour weeks fall short of the WHO threshold, it is still worth considering as the evidence from the interviewee's experience and their anecdotal indications put regular hours as close to the WHO threshold. Chung highlights how longer work hours can negatively impact a worker's physical and mental health, as well as their relationships with hypothetical partners and children (Chung, 2022). Literature reviewed by Chung even goes as far to suggest that longer working hours of a parent can be detrimental for a child's socio-emotional, cognitive, and physical wellbeing. This materialises due to the parent spending less time with the children. A similar point was reiterated interviewee E7 regarding how flexibility in their workplace enabled more time with their family. They felt that it was significantly noticeable in terms of the connection to their youngest son, relative to when their eldest son was a comparable age.

Comments from multiple interviewee's about worked hours regularly going above the standard work week highlights that for some employees the work life balance scale is potentially misaligned. Research shows that employees with greater work life balance have greater satisfaction and lower psychological issues relative to employees with a lower work-life balance (Haar, 2013). It also highlights lower mental health issues (Haar, 2014). There is an opportunity for both employers and employees to rebalance this scale through a cultural reset, which will not only benefit the mental health and wellbeing of the employee but simultaneously benefit the company as employees engage better with their work (Haar, 2018). E7 highlighted the potential for a cultural reset to provide the opportunity to shift worker outlook away from "time in a chair" mentality towards a flexible and outcomes-based approach.

"If you become outcomes and results based, then it rewards the people who are really good and rewarding the people who work efficiently" – E7

Interviewees suggested that to reduce the influence that perception has in preventing a change towards a four-day week, a company could take a health and wellbeing approach to implementing a potential shift in the structure of a work week.

8.0 Conclusions

While both the interviews and the literature review highlight the undoubtable benefit that implementing a four-day week variation could have for the employees, one crucial element remains. As highlighted throughout the discussion with L1, it is vital that there is either benefit to, or no harm to business outcomes as a part of this process. Clear performance metrics is central to ensuring that business outcomes are being achieved

Any variation to the current work week should be centred around the health and wellbeing of employees. This will help to overcome the perception issues from across the business that were identified as one of the key barriers that will need to be overcome. Empowering each individual team to decide the finer points of their specific implementation helps to overcome the second key obstacle: availability to stakeholders. If a team needs coverage every day of the week, then the team can decide the best way to manage this while still implementing reduced work hours.

A four-day week variation gives an employee the option as to how they spend the extra time. Multiple interviewees discussed engaging with their community to give back. Others mentioned upskilling themselves, while some mentioned pursuing interests that which fulfils them personally, such as coaching a child's sports team. This then lowers stress levels, and heightens satisfaction levels with both work and life, which subsequently creates a more engaged employee (Haar, 2018).

The key limitation of this research is the range of interviewees that were interviewed as a part of this study. This study could be expanded by interviewing a wider range of employees within the New Zealand dairy industry. This would include differing levels of seniority, roles, and leadership experience. The most crucial inclusion would be employees at other dairy companies with an independent interviewer to ensure open and honest discussion. Senior leaders from non-dairy companies that have implemented a four-day week variant could further the insights garnered from the interview process.

A change from a standard five-day week to a four-day week could be considered too drastic a change as highlighted by the repeated mentions of perception during the employee interviews. Despite this, multiple sources across both literature and interviews indicate that worker engagement lifts with both work and personal life as work hours decrease or flexibility increases (Blakemore, 2023; Chung, 2022; Haar, 2018). Therefore, a four-day week variation could be used as an intermediary to help prove the efficacy of a reduced week. This proof of concept could then pave the way to facilitating radical change in the workplace norms of the New Zealand dairy industry.

9.0 Recommendations

As a result of this study the following recommendations are suggested. These recommendations are for any dairy company within New Zealand who is exploring the efficacy of a four-day work week.

Recognize different worker types: The company should firstly acknowledge the difference between task-oriented workers and knowledge workers within their employee base. This can then drive adjustments to working week structures and other workplace expectations more specific to the nuances of each worker type.

Formalise changes using senior leaders for support: By utilising support from senior leaders within the company to formalise any structural changes, it will help to overcome opposing perception and any negative stigmatism from current workplace attitudes.

Generate clear measures of performance: By establishing clear performance measures for both employee and business, it ensures business needs are still being met. It also gives employees have a clear understanding of what the business requires of them.

Adopt a team-driven implementation: This will empower teams to implement a four-day week variation in a way that is most appropriate to them. Should a team wish to implement it, let each team determine how to best make it work for them. This will bridge any "one size fits all" approach as each team is best placed to understand and implications specific to their team which need to be considered.

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11.0 Appendices

Appendix one: Interview questions for employee interviewees

Employee background

1. Age range
 - a. 18-24
 - b. 25-34
 - c. 35-44
 - d. 45-54
 - e. 55+
2. How long have you been with your current employer?
3. How long have you been in your current role?
4. How long have you been in the workforce?
5. What is your educational background?

General questions on current state

6. When someone says, "flexible working", what does this mean to you?
7. Do you consider your company to be flexible in their workplace arrangements?
8. Including both upsides and downsides, what is your perception of flexible working arrangements now?
 - a. Follow up with SWOT of this
9. What is the most important element of workplace flexibility to you?
 - a. Why?
10. If you had less time to produce the same output, is that feasible?
11. Would you like reduced hours for the same pay if you could still produce the same output?

4-day week specific questions

12. What is your perception of flexible working arrangements/4-day week?
 - a. SWOT
13. Within your work sphere, what do you think the biggest barrier would be in shifting to a 4-day work week?
 - a. How do you think this could be mitigated?
14. What other flexible working arrangements could be used, if a 4-day week isn't viable?
 - a. Compared to 4 on/4off, annualised hours etc
15. If you had full reign to design your own workplace approach for yourself, what would your ideal state in terms of flexibility look like?
 - a. Follow up: Do you want a 4-day week?
 - b. Follow up: Instead of a 4-day week, would you like reduced hours but remaining at 5 days per week?
16. Do you think that a 4-day week would only be appropriate in certain types of roles, or at certain levels?
17. Do you think anyone should be able to do it?
18. Would the skillset of your current role be applicable in non-dairy industries if you were to look for a new external job?
19. Given the topic we've gone over today, do you have any last comments that you think might be useful for my research and report?

Appendix two: Interview questions for HR interviewees

Efficiency

1. In terms of your workplace, what does efficiency mean to you?
2. Do you think office-based staff are adequately incentivized towards working efficiently?
 - a. If yes, what do you think the biggest contributor/incentive is?
 - b. If no, what do you think could realistically be done to change this?

Flexibility in working

3. When someone says, "flexible working", what does this mean to you?
4. Do you consider your company to be flexible in their workplace arrangements?
5. Are there any themes in requests from employees regarding workplace culture/flexibility?
 - a. If yes, what are these?
 - i. Do you have any intention of implementing these?
 - ii. No → Why not?
 - iii. Yes → which is the highest priority in your opinion
 - b. If no, do you think you've got a reasonably balanced approach
 - i. Do you think there is more there that people aren't asking for because they don't know/feel comfortable asking?
6. Over COVID lockdowns and the resulting 'return to normality', what were the biggest learnings in terms of changing the way people work?
 - a. Do you foresee any of these reverting to the old way of normal?
 - b. What do you think the biggest positive change has been?
 - c. On the flipside, the biggest negative change?

4-day week

7. Including both upsides and downsides, what is your perception of flexible working arrangements?
8. Including both upsides and downsides, what is your perception of a 4-day week?
9. What do you think the biggest barriers to a 4-day working week are for your current office workers?
10. Given the different nature of work across the industry (sites, manufacturing, distribution, office etc) do you think a 4-day week will be viewed as fair?
 - a. If not, what could be done to make it more equitable?
 - b. If not, do you then think the 4on/4off model could be viewed as equally unfair
11. Do you think that a 4-day week would only be appropriate in certain types of roles/levels, or do you think a variation could be implemented across the board?
12. How do you think the likes of annualised hours, 4 on 4 off type shifts etc that site workers often do, impact office workers? Could similar arrangements be made?
13. What other flexible working arrangements could be used, if a 4-day week isn't viable?

Retaining Talent

14. Do you see other non-dairy (or F&F sector) industries as competition when it comes to finding/retaining talent?
 - a. If yes, what do you think the biggest point of difference is?
 - b. If yes, how are you trying to set yourself apart from them as an employer?
 - c. If no, is there any specific reason why not?
 - d. Do you prefer to focus inwards rather than who your competition might be?
15. Given the topic we've gone over today, do you have any last comments that you think might be useful for my research and report?

Appendix three: Further information on four-day week trial

Table 6: Breakdown of country of residence of employees involved in the trial (Schor & Bridson-Hubbard, 2022)

Country of Residence	Frequency	Percentage
US	198	40.9%

Australia	102	21.1%
Ireland	89	18.4%
UK	56	11.6%
NZ	26	5.4%
Canada	8	1.7%
Other	5	1.0%
Total	484	

Table 7: Breakdown of gender split of employees involved in the trial (Schor & Bridson-Hubbard, 2022)

Employee Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	250	50.8%
Male	234	47.6%
Other	8	1.6%
Total	492	

Table 8: Breakdown of age split of employees involved in the trial (Schor & Bridson-Hubbard, 2022)

Age of employees	Frequency	Percentage
18-24	23	4.8%
25-29	100	20.7%
30-34	111	22.9%
35-44	145	30.0%
45-54	69	14.3%
55-64	34	7.0%
65+	2	0.4%
Total	484	