

The Future of Work?

Perceptions of a Shorter Workweek

A Qualitative Study Exploring How Swedish White-Collar Workers Perceive the Impact
of Shorter Workweeks Across Different Career Stages

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Abstract

The work landscape in Sweden is undergoing significant transformations, with the traditional 40-hour workweek increasingly being challenged by new ways of working. This study explores the potential impacts of a shorter workweek on both a personal and organisational level among Swedish white-collar workers and seeks to determine whether there are differences across career stages. Insights derived from this subject will provide guidance and support for organisations looking to implement shorter workweeks. This, together with a lack of previous literature on shorter workweeks and career stages combined, makes this report highly relevant to the academic field. Using a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews provided an in-depth exploration of individual perspectives for a comprehensive understanding of the subject. The findings reveal a generally positive outlook for reduced working hours due to anticipated personal benefits such as increased leisure time and improved work-life balance. Concerns about workload are common across all career stages, while worries about career progression are specific to those in the exploration and establishment phases. This confirms that perceptions of shorter workweeks do indeed vary by career stage. These results suggest that the successful implementation of a shorter workweek requires organisations to consider individual differences and provide robust support mechanisms to manage workloads effectively. This research contributes to the theoretical discourse of shorter workweeks and offers practical recommendations for organisations considering reduced working hours, highlighting the need for cultural and logistical shifts to support new work models.

Keywords: *Shorter workweeks, white-collar workers, Sweden, perceptions, impact, personal level, organisational level, career stages, work-life balance, productivity,*

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	5
1.1 Background.....	6
1.2 Purpose & Contributions.....	7
1.3 Research Questions.....	8
1.4 Delimitations.....	8
1.5 Structural Overview.....	8
2. Theoretical Framework.....	10
2.1 Work-Life Balance.....	10
2.2 Life Outside of Work.....	11
2.3 A Changing Work Environment.....	12
2.4 White-Collar Career Advancement.....	13
2.5 Career Stages.....	14
3. Methodology.....	17
3.1 Research Design.....	17
3.2 Sample Selection.....	17
3.3 Interviews.....	18
3.4 Analysis.....	20
3.5 Reliability, Validity & Generalisability.....	21
4. Findings.....	23
4.1 Personal Impact.....	23
4.1.1 Household Dynamics.....	23
4.1.2 Leisure & Social Life.....	24
4.1.3 Health & Stress.....	25
4.1.4 Individual Work-Related Concerns.....	26
4.1.4.1 Employee Image.....	27
4.2 Organisational Impact.....	28
4.2.1 Implementation Feasibility.....	28
4.2.2 Role Differences.....	29
4.2.3 Maintaining Productivity.....	29
4.2.4 Labour Market Competitiveness.....	30
5. Discussion.....	32
5.1 Personal-Level Impacts.....	32
5.1.1 Conflicting Commitments.....	33
5.1.2 The Appeal of Flexibility.....	34
5.2 Organisational-Level Impacts.....	35
5.2.1 Employee Adjustments For a Shorter Workweek.....	35
5.2.2 Organisational Adaptations For a Shorter Workweek.....	36
5.2.2.1 Workload Optimisation.....	36

5.2.2.2 Redefining Organisational Commitment.....	37
5.2.2.3 Maintaining the Social Dimension Despite Reduced Office Time.....	38
5.3. Managerial Implications.....	38
6. Conclusion.....	40
6.1 Summary.....	40
6.2 Future Research & Limitations.....	41
7. References.....	42
8. Appendix.....	47
Appendix A: Interview Guide in English.....	47
Appendix B: Interview Guide in Swedish.....	47
Appendix C: AI Transparency Note.....	48

1. Introduction

The idea of a shorter workweek has during recent years attracted global interest among political parties, researchers, and media outlets, challenging traditional labour norms and exploring whether *less is more* when it comes to hours worked (Jahal, Bardoel & Hopkins 2023). The discussion of shorter work hours relates directly to issues such as workers' well-being, productivity, and shifting norms regarding the role of work in individuals' lives (Barnett & Hall 2001; Chung 2022). Today Sweden is witnessing significant increases in burnout rates and work-related stress (IF 2023; Swedish Social Insurance Agency 2023), making the topic of reduced working hours highly relevant to ensure a thriving work environment in the future.

The 40-hour workweek is a common standard within the majority of the Swedish workforce (Svenskt Näringsliv 2023), however, it does not necessarily serve an optimal role in today's working practices. Recent technological advancements and the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic are driving considerable changes in the work landscape, redefining the way work is being conducted. These changes are particularly emphasised for white-collar workers, who have witnessed a rise in flexible work arrangements such as remote work (Stankevičiūtė and Kunsakaja 2022; Vyas 2022). In response to these changes, new digital tools in the workplace are setting new expectations for employers to be more flexible (Svenskt Näringsliv 2020). These shifts are not only a reflection of technological change but also of broader societal transformations that demand workplaces to accommodate a more flexible lifestyle, where the shorter workweek may allow individuals to achieve a better work-life balance and enhance overall well-being.

Swedish society is characterised by a strong norm of working full-time, where both regulations and expectations steer people towards full-time employment, potentially causing hesitation to adopt shorter working hours (Larsson et al. 2021). Consequently, this qualitative study aims to explore the perceptions of white-collar workers regarding the potential consequences of breaking this full-time norm by adopting a shorter workweek. By examining perceptions on both an individual and organisational level, and exploring how perceptions vary among different career stages, this research seeks to deepen the understanding of the broader implications of a transformative shift such as shorter workweeks.

1.1 Background

The growing interest in shorter workweeks is based on various potential benefits, including increased leisure time, increased well-being and a decrease in burnout cases (Chung 2022; Golden 2012; Larsson et al. 2021; Topp et al. 2022). However, the evaluation of these benefits may vary depending on one's career stage, with differing job attitudes, behaviours, and organisational commitments characterising each stage (Douglas & Swartz 2016; Flaherty & Pappas 2002). On an organisational level, a common judgement is that shorter workweeks bring benefits solely in favour of employees, and not for employers (Beňo, Hvorecký & Jenešová 2022). Contrary to this belief, the shorter workweek's contribution to organisational success has been found in several studies, highlighting revenue growth, reduced employee turnover, and enhanced abilities to attract talent (Bersin 2023; Bhattacharya et al. 2008; Golden 2011).

Internationally, various countries have implemented shorter workweeks through both individual organisations and large-scale initiatives. A notable example is 4 Day Week Global, which organises pilot programs guiding businesses in the planning, execution, and evaluation of reduced work-hour trials (4 Day Week Global, 2024). Within this initiative, the UK 4 Day Week Trial launched in 2022 as the largest research project of its kind involving 61 British workplaces adopting a shorter workweek for six months (Lewis et al. 2023). Similar initiatives have been noted in countries such as Finland, New Zealand, Iceland and Belgium (Anttila & Väisänen 2005; Delaney & Casey 2021; Haraldsson & Kellam 2021; Kaplan 2022)

In Sweden, various formats of shorter workweeks have appeared within the business sector. The city of Gothenburg experimented with a four-day workweek in 2015 (Larsson et al. 2021). Further, companies like Sandqvist and Bråth have successfully implemented reduced hours while maintaining full wages (Bråth 2016; Sandqvist n.d.). In partnership with Swedish research institutes, 4 Day Week Sweden is organising its first comprehensive pilot study on the four-day workweek in 2024 (4 Day Week Sweden 2024). Aligned with 4 Day Week Global standards, this research initiative will explore how Swedish companies adapt to shorter workweeks under the 100:80:100™ approach, promising full pay for 80 percent of work while aiming for 100 percent productivity (ibid.).

Common variations of shorter workweeks include the four-day workweek – where employees work four eight-hour days – and the six-hour workday, which involves working six hours for five days a week, both with no reduction in pay (Jahal, Bardoel & Hopkins 2023; Larsson et al. 2021; Lewis et al. 2023; Åkerstedt et al. 2001). Other variations of a shorter workweek with maintained salary levels have been observed in other studies, including annualised agreements where employees on average work fewer hours a week, calculated on the scale of a year, and conditional agreements, entitling staff to a shorter workweek based on their ongoing performance (Lewis et al. 2023). Considering all variations of reduced work hours, the concept of a shorter workweek referred to in this study is based on an overall assessment capturing the broad range of shapes it may appear in. Thus, a shorter workweek is defined as *full-time employment that generally varies from 30 to 37 hours per week, in various forms, with a retained full-time salary.*

1.2 Purpose & Contributions

Despite practical implementations in Sweden, there remains a significant gap in focused academic research on the perceived impact of shortened workweeks on individuals and the organisations they work for, especially regarding variations across different career stages. This includes how individuals perceive the potential impact on their personal lives and professional roles, as well as the broader organisational level. This study aims to bridge this gap by exploring how employees at various stages of their careers perceive reduced working hours.

The themes of shorter workweeks (e.g., Chung 2022; Golden 2011; Topp et al. 2022), and career stages (e.g., Flaherty & Pappas 2002; Ornstein, Cron & Slocum 1989; Super 1980) are well-discussed matters, but research integrating the two has not been investigated. This research contributes to academic discourse by examining the intersection of career stage theory and shorter workweeks, considering how different career stages might influence employee perceptions and reactions to reduced working hours. By investigating these variations, this study provides practical recommendations for organisations considering the adoption of reduced working hours, ensuring they can cater to the diverse needs of their workforce. Ultimately, this comprehensive analysis enriches both theoretical understanding and practical applications in organisational management, offering valuable insights that support the academic inquiry and practical implementation of shorter workweeks.

1.3 Research Questions

To establish the purpose of the study, the following research question has been formulated:

How do Swedish white-collar workers perceive the potential impact of a shorter workweek on a personal and organisational level?

Further deepening the understanding of individual perceptions, the main research question is complemented with the following subquestion:

Do these perceptions vary among Swedish white-collar workers at different career stages, and if so, in what ways?

1.4 Delimitations

Due to constraints in time and resources, the study is limited to 15 interviews with white-collar workers across various corporate settings in Sweden. This approach, while capturing a diverse set of viewpoints, introduces variability that may stem from differences in company size, sector, and corporate culture, which could affect the consistency of the results. Furthermore, by refraining from narrowing the focus to a specific industry, the findings provide a general perspective but may lack the depth that could be achieved by examining a particular sector. A more extensive or targeted sample might provide deeper, more representative insights regarding the implementation and impact of a shortened workweek. Finally, financial implications are not considered within the scope of this study. Instead, the investigation focused on a shorter workweek with no change in pay, dedicating greater attention to non-monetary aspects.

1.5 Structural Overview

The report is structured into six main chapters, each designed to systematically explore the perspectives toward a shorter workweek. The introduction provides the background, relevance, and objectives of the study, thus framing the overall context for this study. Following this, the theoretical framework chapter examines existing literature, establishing the academic foundation upon which the study is built. The methodology section details the research methods employed and articulates how these methods address the research questions. In the findings chapter, the

results of the interviews are reported using an analytical narrative, highlighting the primary themes identified from an individual and organisational point of view. The discussion chapter interprets these findings, discussing broader implications and significance and providing managerial recommendations. Finally, the conclusion summarises the study, touching on its key conclusions, theoretical implications, limitations, and avenues for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

The following section is structured around key literature themes critical for addressing the research questions concerning the impact of a shorter workweek on Swedish white-collar workers. These themes encompass *Work-life Balance*, *Life Outside of Work*, *A Changing Work Environment*, *White-Collar Career Advancement* and *Career Stages*, each providing unique insights relevant to the research focus.

Work-life balance serves as the basis of this study as it pertains to both personal and organisational dimensions, directly relating to the main research question. *Life Outside of Work* extends the discussion of work-life balance by exploring the activities and responsibilities that employees have outside their professional lives. *A Changing Work Environment* focuses on the evolving nature of the workplace, particularly within the context of technological advancements and shifts towards more flexible work arrangements. *White-Collar Career Advancement* highlights the complex relationship between working long hours and career advancement, in the context of shorter workweeks. Finally, *Career Stages* are crucial for understanding how different career phases may influence perceptions, aligning closely with the research aims.

A comprehensive literature review underpins this study, with literature mainly sourced from Scopus and the Stockholm School of Economics library. Additional sources, such as 4 Day Week Global and Harvard Business Review, were obtained online and verified for credibility, accuracy, and relevance.

2.1 Work-Life Balance

This section explores the potential impact of reduced work hours on work-life balance among workers. Work-life balance is defined as the ability of individuals to successfully engage in their roles in both professional and personal dimensions, with minimum role conflict (Sirgy & Lee 2017; Wong, Chan & Teh 2020).

Achieving work-life balance is increasingly challenging due to the complexities of modern life, a consequence of the constant juggling of various professional and personal obligations (Larsson 2012; Whiston & Cinamon 2015). Evidence from Lewis and Humbert (2010) and a recent industry report on the UK 4 Day Week pilot (Lewis et al. 2023) demonstrate that shorter work

weeks can significantly enhance employees' ability to manage professional and personal responsibilities, leading to higher job satisfaction and enhanced well-being. Similarly, a trial in Iceland revealed that shorter work weeks enhanced worker well-being across various indicators, including work-life balance (Haraldsson & Kellam 2021). Roberts (2008) adds that individuals who gain more control over their working hours often experience better work-life balance, suggesting that flexible work schedules are essential in managing these obligations.

Reducing working hours alone, however, may negatively affect work-life balance as workers might face higher stress levels and work intensification from increased professional demands, thus it needs to be complemented by reduced workloads and supporting resources (Delaney & Casey 2021).

Further, the impact of reduced work hours on work-life balance may vary across career stages. For example, Smith (2010) and Sánchez-Hernández et al. (2019) note that the newer generations of workers place greater attention on work-life balance than the earlier generations. Providing another perspective, Darcy et al. (2011) elaborate that work-life balance is crucial for employees at all stages of their careers, albeit for varying reasons. Expanding on this, all career stages struggle to find and achieve their desired balance (ibid.).

2.2 Life Outside of Work

This section investigates how the introduction of a shorter workweek might influence the personal lives of workers, focusing on leisure, rest and household responsibilities. These factors are central to understanding the potential impact of reduced working hours on a personal level.

The traditional nine-to-five workday is increasingly losing its appeal, particularly among younger generations who prioritise flexibility over rigid work structures (Roberts 2008). As these conventional schedules become less dominant, employees experience a shift in how leisure time is allocated. This moves away from predefined job schedules that previously often limited the quality and availability of free time (Maklan 1977; Roberts 2008).

Adopting shorter workweeks could significantly enhance both the quantity and quality of leisure time available to employees. This change may extend weekends, providing greater opportunities for engaging in outdoor activities or spending time with family, which are often restricted by

traditional work schedules (Delaney & Casey 2021; Lewis et al. 2023). These enhancements in leisure time are essential for rejuvenating energy and maintaining social bonds, contributing to reduced job-related stress and improved mental health (Fritz & Sonnentag 2005; Sonnentag 2003; Viswesvaran, Sanchez & Fisher 1999; Westman & Eden 1997).

The advantages of additional free time vary depending on individual characteristics. Younger workers, particularly women with school-age children, tend to appreciate an extra weekday off, creating more time for child care and personal time management (Haraldsson & Kellam 2021; Jahal, Bardoel & Hopkins 2023). The time is valued, but may also lead to increased expectations for leisure, potentially causing higher levels of perceived work-family interference (Ruppanner & Maume 2016). Meanwhile, older employees might use the additional time for personal care or relaxation, indicating diverse needs and priorities across age groups (Anttila & Väisänen 2005).

Traditionally, women have taken on more responsibilities at home, affecting the distribution of household duties (Larsson 2012; Lewis & Humbert 2010). Interestingly, a study from the 1970s revealed that the inequalities within households were not relieved with a shorter workweek, as men did not take on more household chores (Maklan 1977). More recent studies, however, show a shift towards more equitable sharing of domestic responsibilities among men in heterosexual relationships employed with a shorter workweek (Haraldsson & Kellam 2021).

2.3 A Changing Work Environment

This section explores how evolving workplace norms and the integration of technology are perceived about the potential impact of a shorter workweek.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the shift from viewing flexible work arrangements, such as remote work, as a specialised benefit to treating it as a standard practice (Amankwah et al. 2021; Beňo, Hvorecký & Jenešová 2022). Technological innovations, such as generative AI, have further reshaped work processes by automating routine tasks. This challenges the traditional notion that longer hours equate to greater productivity. By optimising tasks, these technologies can enhance efficiency during shorter work hours, counteracting fears of decreased output (Jahal, Bardoel & Hopkins 2023).

Empirical studies show that extended work hours can lead to fatigue and reduced work performance, while adequate rest and a balanced schedule enhance productivity and work quality (Bersin 2023; Cette, Chang, & Konte 2011; Barnett & Hall 2001), suggesting a shorter workweek might be more productive. Insights from Finland and New Zealand indicate that shorter workweeks can boost productivity, provided there are supportive work conditions and a focused effort during the operational hours (Anttila & Väisänen 2005; Delaney & Casey 2021).

2.4 White-Collar Career Advancement

This section examines the influence of shorter workweeks on career advancement in white-collar professions. Traditionally, these roles, largely office-based, have adhered to the “ideal-worker” model. This model associates longer working hours with higher productivity and greater commitment which is particularly prevalent in sectors such as law, consulting, and engineering (Hopp, Iravani & Liu 2009; Golden & Altman 2007; Peiperl & Jones 2001).

Emerging studies challenge the necessity of extended hours for career progression. Barnett and Hall (2001) found that more than a third of the participants in their study were promoted during periods of reduced working hours, indicating that career advancement need not be hindered by shorter workweeks. However, Drago, Wooden, and Black (2006) highlight that the ideal worker norm can still compel employees to exceed their contractual hours, suggesting that cultural expectations around work hours may persist even when official work hours change. Particularly, women may resist shorter workweeks due to fears of decreased visibility and limited career advancement opportunities, especially those with children who disproportionately suffer in career progression when reducing work hours (Beño, Hvorecký & Jenešová 2022; Lewis & Humbert 2010).

Anttila and Väisänen (2005) and Drago, Tseng and Wooden (2006) discuss how the number of hours one “should” work is socially constructed and largely driven by employer demands, not employee preferences. This expectation can influence career trajectories, particularly at mid-career stages according to Drago, Wooden and Black (2006). Aryee et al. (1994) further elaborate that earlier career stages are more concerned with career advancement and growth, with a strong desire for promotion compared to more senior stages. This is supported by Cron

and Slocum (1986), who emphasise that the earlier stage is very focused on establishing a professional self-image.

Golden and Altman (2007) suggest that longer work hours during these earlier stages may facilitate greater skills development or credentials that become beneficial in later career stages. On the same note, Darcy et al. (2011) highlight a significant barrier: the perceived negative career consequences of adopting work-life balance initiatives, which are a particular concern among early career-stage employees. In contrast, employees in the consolidating and pre-retirement stages are less concerned about these potential career impacts, focusing less on the drawbacks of reduced work hours compared to their younger colleagues (ibid.).

2.5 Career Stages

This section aims to explore how different career stages affect perceptions of a shorter workweek.

The concept of career stages offers a valuable framework for analysing how different periods in an individual's professional life might influence their views on a shorter workweek, shaping their job attitudes, behaviour, and commitment levels (Douglas & Swartz 2016; Flaherty & Pappas 2002). By classifying interviewees according to their career stages, researchers can pinpoint and dissect alterations in employees' needs, values, and concerns. This is exemplified in a study by Douglas and Swartz (2016), revealing that perceptions varied significantly between those in early and later career stages.

Super's Life-Career Rainbow Model (1980) outlines five career stages – growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline (also referred to as disengagement). This model details how each stage is influenced by an individual's current circumstances and perceptions (Ornstein, Cron & Slocum 1989), making it a robust tool for this study. Consistent with other studies, the growth stage is disregarded in this research, focusing instead on the four later stages that correspond to adult careers (Aryee, Chay & Chew 1994; Slocum & Cron 1985). The characteristics of these stages are detailed in *Table 1*.

Careers are not simply a sequence of job positions but are also deeply intertwined with various life phases, such as education, parenthood, and civic engagement, which collectively impact

career decisions and time allocation (Super 1980). Understanding this interplay is crucial for investigating how career stages may modify perceptions of workweek reductions.

Research by Cron and Slocum (1986) suggests that the stage of one's career significantly impacts how individuals perceive their work environment. For instance, those in the exploration stage often have unrealistically high expectations and aspirations, leading them to critically assess their work conditions. In contrast, individuals in the establishment and maintenance stages are more likely to perceive their work environment favourably, appreciating the stability and balance a shorter workweek may offer. Those nearing retirement, or in the decline stage, tend to view such changes less favourably, as adjustments in work patterns might not align with their retirement plans and overall life goals.

Career Stage	Description	Key Focus	References
Exploration	Traditionally those aged 15-25, characterised by exploring interests and capabilities without full commitment, striving for mastery, and seeking approval.	Task mastery, approval seeking, high mobility, tentative occupational commitment.	Aryee, Chay & Chew 1994; McCormick & Barnett 2008; Slocum & Cron 1985; Vilela & Casado 2021
Establishment	This stage traditionally covers ages 25-44 and is marked by a stronger identification with one's career, growth in capabilities, and some degree of stabilisation.	Career development, specialisation, personal goals, professional relationship building.	McCormick & Barnett 2008; Slocum & Cron 1985; Vilela & Casado 2021
Maintenance	Traditionally spanning ages 45-64, this stage focuses more on maintaining current career achievements rather than further growth.	Career maintenance, organisational status, security, and commitment to the current role.	Aryee, Chay & Chew 1994; McCormick & Barnett 2008; Slocum & Cron 1985; Vilela & Casado 2021
Decline	Post-65 years, traditionally, this stage involves preparing for retirement and a decreased focus on career advancement.	Transition planning, retirement preparation	McCormick & Barnett 2008; Vilela & Casado 2021

Table 1

Table outlining the characteristics of the career stages as defined in *Super's (1980) Life-Career Rainbow*.

In the theoretical framework, we explored key themes and theories related to *work-life balance*, *life outside of work*, *evolving work environments*, *white-collar career advancement*, and *career stages*, all relevant to the research focus. The existing literature addresses practical and theoretical contributions relevant to this study and provides implications, but no clear evidence,

that various career stages have different perceptions of the concept of a shorter workweek. Building on the presented literature, the study employs a qualitative approach to investigate how Swedish white-collar workers perceive the potential impact of a shorter workweek on personal and organisational levels, and whether these perceptions differ by career stage.

3. Methodology

This section outlines the research method employed and describes the chosen approach to address the established research questions.

3.1 Research Design

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach to gather nuanced insights relevant to the research question. The insights were gathered through interviews where the participating interviewees described and explained their various viewpoints regarding shorter workweeks' impact on a personal and organisational level. While a quantitative approach may have provided precise and comparable measures, the interview method was selected for its ability to capture complex perceptions and come across unexpected issues surrounding the concept of shorter workweeks (Bell, Bryman & Harley 2019, pp. 35, 168).

The format of semi-structured interviews was chosen for its flexibility, allowing for in-depth responses and facilitating a more comprehensive analysis beyond simple binary answers (Kvale 1997, p. 45). The interviewing process spanned one month, enabling repeated analysis based on insights gained from each interview as an ongoing process. This approach enhanced the capacity to build on each interview, progressively building a more detailed and broader understanding of the topic (Bell, Bryman & Harley 2019, p. 392).

3.2 Sample Selection

The selected sample comprised 15 white-collar employees working in Sweden, from a variety of industries and roles, reflecting an intention to capture a wide range of perspectives (Bell, Bryman & Harley 2019, p. 395). Interviewees were chosen using theoretical purposive sampling, selecting interviewees based on career stage criteria and allowing insights emerging from each interview to guide the selection of new interviewees (Bell, Bryman & Harley 2019, p. 390). This method ensured a balanced representation across different career stages. The distribution was three interviewees in *exploration*, four in *establishment*, four in *maintenance*, and four in *decline*. The gender distribution was also balanced, with seven women and eight men, representing different white-collar roles such as engineers, consultants, and various managerial positions.

3.3 Interviews

The study collected data through 13 online interviews via Microsoft Teams and two in-person interviews. Conducting most interviews online offered flexibility and convenience for the interviewee and authors (Bell, Bryman & Harley 2019, p. 453). All interviews utilised face-to-face or video calls to capture visual cues, enhancing the analysis of the conveyed information (Kvale 1997, p. 171).

The interview process started with reviewing potential interviewees on *LinkedIn* to assess their career stages based on organisational- and job tenure (Bedeian et al. 1991), allowing preliminary classifications before each interview. A targeted question was included during interviews to confirm the preliminary classifications of career stages (see Appendix A , question 1). Following each interview, the authors allocated time for individual reflection for a potential reassessment of the initial career stage categorisations. Through group discussions a consistent consensus on classifications was reached, enhancing the reliability of the study (Bell, Bryman & Harley 2019, p. 362).

Using semi-structured interview formats, interviewees had the freedom to guide the conversation, which not only addressed key topics but also revealed new insights and unexpected subjects (Kvale 1997, p. 172). The format's flexibility was crucial in customising each interview to fit individual perspectives while maintaining a consistent set of questions through an interview guide for comparative purposes and coherence (Bell, Bryman & Harley 2019, p. 436). To further support this coherence and facilitate comparative analysis, the study's definition of a shorter workweek was provided during all interviews.

The interview guide consists of a structured sequence of topics aimed at addressing the research question, containing suggested questions relating to each topic (see Appendix A). The chosen set of questions served as a guide to ensure balance between specificity and breadth and was framed in simple language to facilitate understanding (Bell, Bryman & Harley 2019, p. 440). The order and the exact wording of questions varied between interviews to accommodate the flow of each discussion (Bell, Bryman & Harley 2019, p. 211; Kvale 1997, p. 166).

All interviews except for one were conducted in Swedish, with one in English. Anticipating different language preferences, both Swedish and English versions of the interview guide were

prepared in advance (see Appendix A, Appendix B). Before each interview, interviewees were briefed on the study's general research focus but received no specific questions beforehand. This approach maintained the dialogue's spontaneity and openness, aligning with the study's exploratory aims rather than hypothesis testing (Kvale 1997, p. 148). The intent was to create a setting where interviewees could authentically express their thoughts unrestricted by predetermined ideas.

To ensure accurate and detailed data collection, all interviews were audio recorded, allowing the interviewers to fully engage in the conversation. Both online and in-person interviews were recorded using a smartphone app. The in-person interviews were transcribed manually, while the online interviews utilised Microsoft Teams' transcription features. Both transcription methods were meticulously checked by both authors to ensure consistency and accuracy across all transcriptions. (Bell, Bryman & Harley 2019, p. 444; Kvale 1997, p. 225).

Ethical considerations were taken, with informed consent obtained from all interviewees, ensuring they understood the study's purpose and their rights (Kvale 1997, pp. 107-109). The study adhered to GDPR standards for data management, emphasising confidentiality and the option for interviewees to withdraw at any time, thereby respecting all interviewees' autonomy and comfort. A detailed summary of the interviewees, including their career stage, interview date, language, format, and duration, is presented in *Table 2*.

Interviewee	Career Stage	Date	Language	Setting	Duration
Interviewee 1	Maintenance	2024-03-06	Swedish	Online (Microsoft Teams)	43:33
Interviewee 2	Establishment	2024-03-06	Swedish	Online (Microsoft Teams)	37:17
Interviewee 3	Maintenance	2024-03-06	Swedish	Online (Microsoft Teams)	28:07
Interviewee 4	Decline	2024-03-06	Swedish	Physical meeting	42:35
Interviewee 5	Maintenance	2024-03-07	Swedish	Online (Microsoft Teams)	43:04
Interviewee 6	Exploration	2024-03-07	Swedish	Online (Microsoft Teams)	48:57
Interviewee 7	Establishment	2024-03-07	Swedish	Physical meeting	30:31
Interviewee 8	Exploration	2024-03-07	Swedish	Online (Microsoft Teams)	41:40
Interviewee 9	Decline	2024-03-13	Swedish	Online (Microsoft Teams)	23:59
Interviewee 10	Decline	2024-03-15	Swedish	Online (Microsoft Teams)	44:43
Interviewee 11	Maintenance	2024-03-15	Swedish	Online (Microsoft Teams)	32:48
Interviewee 12	Exploration	2024-03-15	English	Online (Microsoft Teams)	30:46
Interviewee 13	Decline	2024-03-18	Swedish	Online (Microsoft Teams)	28:25
Interviewee 14	Establishment	2024-03-20	Swedish	Online (Microsoft Teams)	39:59
Interviewee 15	Establishment	2024-03-25	Swedish	Online (Microsoft Teams)	42:43
					$\mu = 37:16$

Table 2

Summary of Interviewees including career stage, interview date, language, format, and duration (in minutes).

3.4 Analysis

The data in this study were analysed comprehensively, through discussions, reflections and continuous evaluations.

The interview transcripts were analysed by identifying, coding, and sorting the data into themes, distinguishing between the career stages. To facilitate comparison within and across themes, the digital tool NVivo 14 was used to organise the data according to the authors' coding. Following a

thematic analysis, each author independently read and coded the interviews, pinpointing recurring topics and themes relevant to the research focus (Bell, Bryman & Harley 2019, p. 519; Braun & Clarke 2006). This thematic inductive approach allowed themes to naturally arise from the data without the constraints of a predetermined coding scheme or framework (Bell, Bryman & Harley 2019, p. 518; Braun & Clarke 2006).

As themes were developed, the authors engaged in group discussions to compare findings and resolve any discrepancies, ensuring a coherent thematic structure. When no new themes could be identified within the data, empirical saturation was reached (Bell, Bryman & Harley 2019, p. 397). This meant the coding process was deemed complete and no further data collection was required. Themes were then categorised based on their similarities and differences, particularly with respect to career stages, forming broader concepts that facilitated a deeper understanding of the interview data.

The final stage of the analysis involved refining the identified categories to ensure they were logically coherent and aligned with the study's research questions (Braun & Clarke 2006). Consequently, the *findings* section of this report is structured to guide the reader through the interview data using an analytical narrative, highlighting its contribution to the research focus. Quotes have been selected and emphasised, corresponding to the research's main focus to ease the understanding of the findings and present the result. By employing the methodology outlined, the analysis is designed to go beyond a mere description of the data and to contribute effectively to understanding individual perceptions on a shorter workweek. The conducted analysis ensures that analytic claims extend beyond the surface level of the data, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the underlying themes.

3.5 Reliability, Validity & Generalisability

Active measures were taken to collect and document data with objectivity, ensuring the study's reliability. Interview transcriptions were reviewed using the interview's corresponding audio recording, capturing the interviewees' statements with precision while excluding unnecessary filler words. Quotes presented in this study which were originally in Swedish have been manually translated into English, carefully preserving the original intent and nuances of the expressions, as reinforced by Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019, p. 450). The authors

collaboratively managed this task to maintain consistency and accuracy, ensuring valid comparisons across interviews (Kvale 1997, p. 225).

Although the absence of quantitative data in the study limits the statistical applicability of the findings, the chosen qualitative in-depth approach provides concrete, context-specific insights into the subject matter (Bell, Bryman & Harley 2019, p. 65). Additionally, data analysis continued until empirical saturation was reached, thereby ensuring validity within the results (Bell, Bryman & Harley 2019, pp. 46-47).

The study did not restrict participation within any specific industry, as the goal was to capture overarching perceptions, concerns and expected benefits rather than industry-specific views. This approach was chosen to ensure that the findings would reflect broader theoretical insights into general perceptions about the impact of a shortened workweek, rather than producing quantitatively precise and generalisable data applicable to all demographics (Bell, Bryman & Harley 2019, p. 375; Kvale 1997, p. 310).

4. Findings

The majority of the interviewees, across various career stages, recognised the personal advantages gained from a shorter workweek. Notably, its perceived flexibility is highly appealing, because it is seen as a chance to devote more time to leisure, family activities, hobbies, or household tasks. Despite these benefits, there were prevalent concerns about work-related stress due to increased workloads, and a potential negative impact on competitiveness due to decreased output from an organisational viewpoint. Distinctions between career stages are highlighted where notable similarities or differences have been found. The interviewees' perspectives and concerns regarding these issues are detailed in the following section, organised by *personal* and *organisational* impact.

4.1 Personal Impact

4.1.1 Household Dynamics

The interviewees express that a shorter workweek could significantly alter family life and household dynamics, offering more time for children, partners and themselves.

“I have an almost three-year-old and one who is four months old, so if I were offered [a shorter workweek] today, I would say yes for that reason.” (Interviewee 14, establishment)

“When it comes to people with children, I believe they would really appreciate a day to themselves. I know from colleagues that there's always something, and they try to leave early for soccer practice or a doctor's appointment, for example.” (Interviewee 15, establishment)

A notable concern among interviewees with children, particularly those in the *maintenance* stage, is the guilt associated with not spending enough time with their family due to work commitments. For these individuals, a shorter workweek is seen as a potential remedy for this, offering a chance to mitigate guilt by making daily pickups more manageable.

“If you have small children, this is a golden opportunity to spend more time with them. I had constant feelings of guilt when dropping off and picking up at daycare.” (Interviewee 5, maintenance)

The discussion around family life highlighted the challenge of balancing work and personal commitments, underscored by societal norms that impose personal obligations and contribute to increased stress. Interviewees emphasised the value of flexible work arrangements that allow schedules to be adjusted to accommodate family needs.

“Previously, kids had one activity each. Today, they have 3 different activities. Parents are at sports games and tournaments all weekend. On top of that, you also need to exercise, and the house should be spotless. If you have a garden, it should be perfect too. So, there are quite high external social expectations that you carry with you [that is quite stressful]” (Interviewee 11, maintenance)

The perceived gender-specific implications of a shorter workweek were mixed among the interviewees. Some interviewees thought of reduced hours as an opportunity to balance domestic responsibilities between partners more equitably. In contrast, other interviewees raised concerns that a shorter workweek might reinforce traditional gender roles. This was especially emphasised by *maintenance* and *decline* interviewees, explaining that women might end up shouldering a greater share of domestic and childcare responsibilities, worrying this could inadvertently become a burden specifically for women (Swedish: *Kvinnofälla*¹).

4.1.2 Leisure & Social Life

Increased leisure time is seen as a potential pathway to enhance social life, as it allows more time to spend with friends and family.

“I would have seen my friends a lot more or spent more time with my girlfriend. It’s really hard to find the time. You have your own hobbies, and friends and family whom you almost never have time for. The week isn’t that long, and you don’t have time for everything, so [a shorter workweek] would make a big difference on the social front.” (Interviewee 15, establishment)

Desires to travel and party more were mainly expressed by individuals in the *exploration* and *establishment* stages, three of them also considered starting their own business with extra free time. Meanwhile, interviewees in the *maintenance* stage preferred engaging in home renovation projects, spending time at their country houses, or pursuing other personal hobbies. Within the

¹Kvinnofälla: phenomenon that (unintentionally) causes negative consequences for women (Cambridge Dictionary 2024)

decline career stage, many explained a common interest to spend more time outdoors or spend time studying new subjects. Interviewee 13 (*decline*) mentioned they would likely use extra time for everyday tasks without significant lifestyle changes.

Interviewees in the *exploration* and *establishment* stages expressed the view that despite having more free time, their social life would only be enhanced if the rest of their surroundings also had time off at the same time.

"You still have friends who work full-time and have other commitments in their lives, like just because I have more time off doesn't mean that one would expand their social circle of friends because it's not physically possible." (Interviewee 7, *establishment*)

4.1.3 Health & Stress

Thoughts on personal stress and health were mixed. Some interviewees expect a positive impact on well-being and reduced stress because of an increase in personal time, while others fear increased work intensity would lead to more stress. Particular concerns were raised that the transition to shorter work hours might initially raise stress levels as employees adjust to reduced working hours.

There is a consensus among the interviewees that burnout is a prevalent issue in Sweden's current work environment, yet interviewees express varying views about whether a shorter workweek would effectively reduce stress and burnout. Interviewee 1 (*maintenance*) offers a nuanced view on the matter, highlighting the complex relationship between personal life and work stress:

"We have a lot of stress, and the problem with work-related stress is that it is often just as linked to free time as it is to work. I would say that if things work well privately, then one can handle an extremely stressful job. But if it doesn't work privately? [...] I've had people who have been on long-term sick leave [...] and it's always been a combination of poor physical health, problems in private life, and a stressful job. It's a cocktail that leads to those serious situations."

To mitigate potential increases in stress, it's suggested that organisational changes must support the reduced workweek; otherwise, the same workload in fewer hours could simply heighten pressure and stress.

“If the workload decreases, it will only improve my private life. If the workload stays the same in fewer hours, then I’ll just feel more stressed, and I’ll end up working those hours anyways.”
(Interviewee 13, decline)

Moreover, the stress of a shorter workweek depends on its integration within an organisation. Interviewee 5 (maintenance) noted that starting a job where a shorter workweek is already established is likely to be a positive experience. Conversely, being part of an organisational shift towards a shorter workweek can be stressful due to the uncertainties linked to such a significant change.

4.1.4 Individual Work-Related Concerns

Workload management and efficiency are major concerns among the interviewees, with some fearing they would not be able to complete tasks within shorter hours without additional staffing or job redesign.

“I don't sit still for even a second at work, so I don't even know if I could manage with just a six-hour workday [...] we would have to hire one more [person].” (Interviewee 15, establishment)

Many interviewees admitted they already work beyond their contracted hours to effectively manage their workloads, especially during busy periods or before deadlines. Given this context, some interviewees view a shorter workweek not as a mandatory reduction in hours, but rather as an optional flexibility, described by Interviewee 1 (maintenance) as voluntary work hours depending on workload. This suggests that, even with a shorter workweek, individuals still show a tendency towards working longer hours to meet their obligations.

“A shorter workweek would be like an extended version of remote work for me. I would use it to not be in the office. I don’t know how much less I would work, but it would be more legitimate for me to say ‘no, I don’t work on Fridays’” (Interviewee 1, maintenance)

Optimistic thoughts were also expressed based on the expectation that smarter and more effective work practices and digital tools, such as generative AI applications like ChatGPT, could enable reduced hours.

“A lot is going to happen, and is already happening, but we have only scratched the surface. We must also find a way to apply [AI], take care of it, and validate it, but it will definitely help in the future. But the question is how?” (Interviewee 11, maintenance)

However, concerns also emerged about the quality of output and work when adapting to shorter work hours. Interviewee 8 (exploration) elaborated on this, mentioning that they would likely be able to complete all their assigned tasks, but anticipate lower quality as a result.

Interviewees had mixed perceptions about reduced work hours' impact on workplace social dynamics. On one hand, several interviewees highlighted the importance of spontaneous interactions in building strong relationships and enhancing effectiveness, while others were indifferent to these interactions. Interviewee 15 (establishment) commented on the importance of maintaining fulfilling social relationships among colleagues:

“I think it's important to become good friends with your colleagues, as they are the ones you will be working with for many, many years. I think it would be difficult and very boring. It would create a dull atmosphere... just being professional.”

Many noted that, although flexible work solutions such as remote work is favourable, meeting colleagues at the office is still preferred for the collaborative aspect.

“I am entitled to often work remotely, but personally, and many at the company, prefer being at the office. It is easier to discuss things and to ask questions.” (Interviewee 6, exploration)

4.1.4.1 Employee Image

Within the interviews, there is a noticeable tension between the desire for a shorter workweek and the fear of being perceived differently for accepting such an offer. Specifically, those in the *exploration* and *establishment* stages fear that reducing work hours could negatively impact their professional reputation and hinder career progression, with concerns about being labelled lazy and unambitious. An interviewee within the *exploration* stage adds to this by highlighting the pressure from their organisation.

"Some senior members appreciate the 'grind culture' and often say that 'you won't get anywhere without it,' emphasising the importance of working long hours. They would likely view a shorter workweek as a sign of laziness." (Interviewee 6, exploration)

Interviewee 12 (exploration) emphasised the importance of setting targets and KPIs to effectively measure employee performance and productivity. They shared an anecdote about certain work cultures where employees are expected to stay in the office until 7:00 PM, even when they have no tasks to complete.

Further, several interviewees worry that if only some team members choose to work fewer days, it could lead to conflicts, uneven workloads, and disparities in performance evaluations, fostering jealousy and perceived unfairness. As one interviewee highlights, the transition to a shorter workweek might not be uniformly embraced.

"I think many would continue to work five days, and that could create problems. If we're a team where some choose to keep working five days because they feel their life situation allows it, what happens to those who want to take advantage of the four-day week? It becomes an important issue and will create a gap in performance and development at work" (Interviewee 14, establishment).

4.2 Organisational Impact

4.2.1 Implementation Feasibility

The interviews reveal a consensus that implementing a shorter workweek would have to involve complex and substantial organisational changes. Interviewee 7 (establishment) observed that the deeper they thought about the concept, the more complicated its execution appeared. Echoing this sentiment, Interviewee 11 (maintenance) expressed:

"To make this sustainable in the long term, it sets enormous demands on having a clear set of expectations and clear goals. And you somehow have to validate the amount of work assigned to individuals. So, I think it's going to be a long transition. It may sound quite simple to just reduce the time, but changing both the mindset and structural working methods takes a long time."

The perceived impact of a shorter workweek varies depending on its format. Generally, a four-day workweek was favoured by the interviewees for its potential to enhance personal

efficiency and provide extended breaks from work. However, concerns were raised about the potential increased workload; the interviewees specifically highlighted the issue of excessive and lengthy meetings that could intensify if the workweek was condensed.

“With the meeting structure that most organisations struggle with today, I think there’s also a risk that losing a whole workday for both tasks and meetings will make the other four days too meeting-intensive.” (Interviewee 11, maintenance)

A six-hour workday was preferred by some interviewees for its alignment with school hours, offering significant benefits for parents specifically. This schedule was also seen as advantageous for maintaining continuous workflow in the organisation without the disruption of a full day off.

4.2.2 Role Differences

The feasibility of adopting shorter workweeks largely depends on the job type and organisation, according to the interviewees. A majority of the interviewees indicated that transitioning to a shorter workweek as white-collar workers would be easier compared to blue-collar professions. The reasoning behind this is mainly based on the argument that the lack of tangible output measures within office-based roles allows for more flexible scheduling.

Furthermore, the interviews revealed role-dependent differences regarding increased efficiency. Roles that depend heavily on team collaboration may see less benefit from reduced hours due to necessary coordination times with others who may still operate on traditional schedules.

“Some things simply require calendar time when you work with them. I can’t complete anything without the help of others [...] and that takes time.” (Interviewee 3, maintenance)

4.2.3 Maintaining Productivity

Interviewees expressed concerns about maintaining productivity and competitiveness with fewer work hours, specifically in global settings. Interviewee 5 (maintenance) acknowledged that reducing work hours may lead to a decrease in productivity, but not necessarily in proportion to the reduction in time as effective task prioritisation could help lessen the impact. Further, Interviewee 6 anticipated productivity decreases due to difficulties in sustaining business

momentum, especially with fewer days available for client interactions, which could slow progress and output. On a similar note, Interviewee 1 (maintenance) remarked:

"There are many things we can't control ourselves, and it would be very difficult for those of us with responsibilities in different areas to say, 'No, we can't attend that conference because we're not working then.'"

Additional concerns about international competitiveness drew attention to the demands of global markets, with their expectations of round-the-clock availability.

"We also have offices in the US, Dubai and Mexico [...] One must be available 24/7."
(Interviewee 6, exploration)

4.2.4 Labour Market Competitiveness

Interviewees agree that benefits like shorter workweeks and flexibility are attractive characteristics in an organisation but must align with workload demands. Implementing a shorter workweek alone may not suffice; the company's overall image and support structure are seen as crucial contributing aspects. Interviewee 12 (exploration) pointed out that a shorter workweek does not automatically translate to a better work environment due to potential work pressure. Interviewee 11 (maintenance) cautioned against offering benefits solely for employer branding without robust support:

"There's a lot of structural capital behind it if you're just offering it as a form of employer branding and selling, then I think the risk is that if you haven't built the structure in the organisation to support this type of working, it could be tough."

Concluding all findings, the interviews suggest a growing consensus against the traditional workweek. It is becoming increasingly clear that the conventional five-day, 40-hour schedule may no longer suit the evolving needs of today's workforce.

"Our society is structured in a way that you spend more time at work than with your children, deeply tying your identity to your job role." (Interviewee 14, establishment)

The appeal of a shorter workweek lies in its potential to improve work-life balance by increasing time for personal and family activities. However, challenges such as heightened workloads and potential impacts on productivity remain significant concerns.

5. Discussion

This section explores the perceived impacts of shorter workweeks building on the findings to address the research question and highlight significant relationships and patterns within the data. The interviews emphasise the role of family, illustrating how personal aspects influence perceptions of shorter workweeks. Subsection 5.1 focuses on the personal level research focus, examining how interviewees balance work and non-work commitments. From an organisational perspective, subsection 5.2 addresses the substantial impacts that shorter workweeks could have on both the organisation and its employees. These sections analyse the necessary adjustments required by both employees and employers to effectively manage the shift to a shorter workweek, based on the perceptions from the interviews. The discussion not only interprets these findings but also examines their alignment with, or challenges to existing research, providing valuable insights for future studies and policy development. To conclude this chapter, the managerial implications will be discussed in subsection 5.3, offering recommendations on how managers can better support employees during the transition to a shorter workweek. This discussion aims to equip other researchers with a deeper understanding of the results' implications.

5.1 Personal-Level Impacts

Our sample of white-collar workers viewed reducing work hours positively, primarily due to the anticipated increase in leisure and family time, suggesting personal circumstances and family responsibilities shape perceptions of a shorter workweek. Supporting this, Larsson (2012) suggests that the multiplicity of roles an individual juggles affects the time they can dedicate to each role, implying that both family and career roles significantly influence attitudes towards work hours. This finding is confirmed by Ornstein, Cron, and Slocum (1989), who argue that life development and career stage models can effectively explain variations in work-related perceptions and behaviours.

Despite initial enthusiasm for reduced hours, the findings also reveal that individuals in the *exploration* and *establishment* career stages are concerned about how shorter workweeks might impact career progression, creating a hesitant perception towards it. Previous literature gives reason to assume that younger individuals, typically part of more junior roles in an organisation,

are less likely to welcome shorter workweeks than older generations (Beňo, Hvorecký & Jenešová 2022; Vilela & Casado 2021). Our findings provide a potential explanation for this, suggesting that career advancements may be a contributing factor to such hesitation

While the interviewees prefer more time outside of work, implementing a shorter workweek presents both challenges and opportunities. The study underscores the necessity of considering individual situations in shaping perceptions of and potential success for shorter workweeks.

5.1.1 Conflicting Commitments

Interviewees reported struggles with balancing personal and professional commitments, suggesting a shorter workweek as a potential solution. This sentiment was particularly evident among working parents, who often feel guilt when prioritising family over work, or vice versa. It is explained by Super (1980) that for each role a person occupies, there is a set of expectations from others that makes committing to one role challenging without neglecting another. Similarly to the interviewees, Sousa et al. (2020) also establish a correlation between work-family conflict and increased feelings of guilt related to family-related responsibilities, which in turn lowers life satisfaction. These findings suggest that a shorter workweek could minimise role conflicts, alleviate the guilt associated with balancing work and family commitments, and potentially enhance overall life satisfaction. Anittila and Väisänen (2005) support this, observing individuals with children benefit more distinctly from reduced working hours compared to those without.

The findings reveal diverse views on the impact of shorter work hours on gender inequalities. One interviewee highlighted societal pressures to maintain a "perfect lifestyle," reflecting concerns outlined by Lewis and Humbert (2010) about women facing conflicting commitments between career advancement and fulfilling the 'good mother' standard. While several interviewees feared that reduced hours might disproportionately disadvantage women, others saw it as an opportunity to promote more equitable household roles. This optimistic perspective is supported by Haraldsson and Kellam (2021), who illustrate that shorter workweeks could enhance gender balance at home.

Many interviewees view overtime as crucial for managing workloads and advancing careers, a perception rooted in a workplace culture that equates longer hours with greater commitment (Barnett & Hall 2001). However, despite the opportunities to reduce hours, those in early career

stages (*exploration* and *establishment*) express concerns over potential conflicts and fears that they will be judged unfairly, aligning with evidence from Golden and Altman (2007). In contrast, our findings reveal individuals later in their careers (*maintenance* and *decline*) are more inclined to a shorter workweek, prioritising consolidation over career growth (McCormick & Barnett 2008). This contrasts with earlier findings by Ornstein, Cron, and Slocum (1989), who observed that workers in later career stages were more committed to their jobs than those in earlier stages, suggesting that attitudes towards work commitments have evolved.

To address conflicting commitments and facilitate a successful transition, managers should focus on acknowledging individual differences. Recognizing the diverse needs and preferences of employees regarding their personal and professional commitments is vital.

5.1.2 The Appeal of Flexibility

The findings highlight that the appeal of a shorter workweek lies not just in reduced hours but in the potential for more flexible work arrangements. This flexibility allows employees to use their additional free time as "voluntary work hours," and adapt their schedules to better meet personal commitments like doctor appointments or school events, thus fostering improved work-life balance.

Flexibility in work schedules has the potential to significantly alleviate the stress of balancing multiple life roles and commitments, as evidenced by the interviews. Research supports that flexible work arrangements bring numerous benefits, including reduced stress, heightened job satisfaction, and increased productivity (Golden 2011; Golden & Altman 2007; Hammermesh & Lee 2007).

Therefore, the true benefit of a shorter workweek extends beyond simply cutting back hours – it enhances flexibility, empowering employees to manage their work times more freely. Successfully implementing this requires a deep understanding of employee needs and desires, with Barnett and Hall (2001) noting that the best organisational solutions begin by consulting staff members about the balance they wish to achieve.

5.2 Organisational-Level Impacts

5.2.1 Employee Adjustments For a Shorter Workweek

The findings suggest that adopting a shortened workweek at an organisational level necessitates significant adjustments in employee mindsets regarding workload management and efficiency. Employees individually need to adjust their approach to effectively manage their workloads, as they control the intensity of work applied, but not the volume of tasks assigned. With fewer working hours, maintaining or even increasing productivity becomes crucial to handling the current workload. This underscores the importance of assessing whether productivity per hour can be enhanced.

Interviews reveal mixed feelings about the potential to boost productivity. Some employees are optimistic, highlighting advancements in AI technology as a key factor in improving efficiency, as supported by research from Jahal, Bardoel, and Hopkins (2023). However, others are concerned about maintaining quality and the potential need for additional staff to manage the workload, with Delaney and Casey (2021) noting observations from a senior manager about decreased work quality when tasks are compressed into fewer hours.

The challenge may be particularly pronounced in global organisations where reduced hours may limit collaborative time with international colleagues, as suggested by our findings, complicating coordination due to time zone differences and potentially disrupting the flow of work. Flynn (2014) points out the difficulties in global operations and collaborations, suggesting that reduced hours could emphasise these challenges.

Overall, the feasibility of enhancing productivity during a shorter workweek varies significantly, influenced by individual capabilities, technological integration, and organisational context. The varied outcomes experienced by businesses when implementing a shortened workweek underscore the need for tailored approaches that consider specific organisational and operational dynamics.

5.2.2 Organisational Adaptations For a Shorter Workweek

Transitioning to a shorter workweek requires employers to offer extensive support and guidance. Key considerations include adjusting workloads, redefining organisational commitment and maintaining workplace social dynamics. Barnett and Hall (2001) emphasise the importance of collaboration between employees and management to make flexible arrangements work. This section underscores aspects that employers are expected to consider when adapting to a shorter workweek, based on our findings.

5.2.2.1 Workload Optimisation

The interviewees emphasise the importance for employers to initiate and implement realistic strategies to ensure the workload remains manageable and does not compromise overall efficiency with the introduction of a shorter workweek. This aligns with insights from Bersin (2023), who argues that significant work redesign is crucial for companies adopting a shorter workweek without sacrificing business outcomes.

The findings resonate with existing academic perspectives, suggesting that managing heightened work intensity presents a considerable challenge for many organisations (Larsson 2012). To address these challenges, employees need support from their employers as they adapt to the increased demands of a shorter workweek. Training employees to enhance their time management may be an effective tool during workforce transitions, such as the shift to a shorter workweek (Vyas 2022; Wong, Chan & Teh 2020). Other means of organisational support suggested by the interviewees include the establishment of clear performance metrics. Sirgy & Lee (2017) argue that employees who perceive a high degree of uncertainty regarding work expectations may experience negative effects on job satisfaction, life satisfaction and psychological well-being, confirming our findings' take on the importance of establishing clear metrics.

A key area for improvement when optimising time management is the prevailing "meeting culture" within organisations, as meetings are often emphasised within our findings as frequent, lengthy, and unproductive. A common agreement among the interviewees is that inefficient meetings could be problematic in a shorter workweek, which aligns with Bersin (2023) who identified meetings as a significant source of unproductive time. This calls for a critical

restructuring of current meeting practices to enhance productivity. Measures such as establishing clear meeting objectives, and emphasising outcome over attendance could improve time management and overall efficiency in a shorter workweek context (Haraldsson & Kellam 2021; Lewis et al. 2023).

Understanding the need for structural organisational support during the transition to shorter hours is crucial for aligning employee expectations with operational realities. There is a clear necessity for employers to develop and implement realistic strategies to keep workloads manageable and maintain efficiency with a shorter workweek. Supporting employees through training, establishing clear performance metrics, and restructuring the current meeting culture, will be critical to ensure a successful transition to a shorter workweek.

5.2.2.2 Redefining Organisational Commitment

The findings reveal a tension in the workplace; employees are torn between a desire for shorter work hours and concerns about how this might affect their career progression. The traditional "ideal worker" image is strongly linked to long working hours and high visibility, especially prevalent within the *exploration* and *establishment* career stages from our findings. To address the expressed tension, organisations need to redefine commitment and success by recognizing that dedication is not solely measured by hours spent at work.

Interviewees in earlier stages are focused on mastering tasks and earning the respect of peers and superiors, with the perception that reduced work hours could damage their professional reputation and limit their advancement opportunities. This fear is reflected in the findings of Flaherty and Pappas (2002) and Vilela and Casado (2021), suggesting that those who work less are seen as less committed in environments where long hours are the norm, potentially affecting their chances of recruitment and promotions (Golden & Altman 2007).

Addressing these fears requires a shift in corporate culture. Promoting a culture where shorter hours are normalised and do not hinder career progress is essential. Barnett and Hall (2001) suggest that instead of trying to restructure a culture entirely, organisations should focus on smaller changes at the work unit level. Over time, these small changes will accumulate, gradually transforming the broader workplace culture.

5.2.2.3 Maintaining the Social Dimension Despite Reduced Office Time

The transition to a shorter workweek may reduce social interactions at work, according to interviewees. This reduction is anticipated to affect both task-related and non-work-related interactions, potentially impacting professional and social dynamics at the workplace. Remote work may emphasise this issue, as in-person social engagement opportunities may decrease further if employees work from home during parts of the shortened workweek.

Despite variations in the perceived importance of workplace social life among the interviewees, there is a consistent recognition of its benefits. Social interactions at work facilitate spontaneous exchanges of work-related information and enable fulfilling relationships among colleagues, leading to higher job satisfaction and well-being, as highlighted by Rousseau et al. (2008) and Tschan, Semmer, and Inversin (2004). Regardless of individual perceptions, it may be valuable for firms to maintain a fulfilling social atmosphere at work. This is important not only because of the proven health benefits but also because it allows for generating new ideas and finding more meaningful connections between colleagues (Vyas 2022).

Organisations should proactively support and enhance social interactions and engagement, especially in shorter workweeks. This has the potential to mitigate the isolating effects and ensure continued employee well-being and productivity.

5.3. Managerial Implications

To help managers successfully transition to shorter workweeks within organisations, four strategic recommendations are provided.

1. **Acknowledge individual differences.** It is important to recognize that a shorter workweek is not a one-size-fits-all solution. While many see potential benefits, its implementation must be tailored to fit the unique and diverse needs of different employees and fit various organisational contexts. Flexible work schedules help acknowledge individual differences. Managers should consider these individual preferences, together with organisational feasibility, when planning shorter workweeks. For example, in deciding between reducing daily hours or reducing the number of

working days, it is crucial to engage in open dialogue with employees to understand how the chosen format is perceived within the team and the organisation.

2. **Educate both employees and managers on productivity** to address the complexities of increased workload whilst maintaining productivity. For managers, training should focus on creating efficient workflows, communication, and setting strategic, realistic goals. Employees should focus on task prioritisation, time management, and the use of productivity tools. Considering challenges, such as today's time-demanding meeting culture, training can help manage the potential for an overly meeting-intensive four-day week by restructuring how meetings are conducted. Additionally, strategically leveraging advancements in AI has the potential to boost productivity. By equipping both managers and employees with these skills, organisations can ensure a smooth transition to a shorter workweek while also ensuring sustained long-term success.
3. **Reinvent the ideal worker culture.** Performance metrics require a shift from focusing on the quantity of hours to evaluating the quality of output and results achieved instead. Managers need to develop new metrics focused on assessing performance based on efficiency and overall contribution. This shift also includes transparent communication about career paths to assure employees that reduced hours will not negatively impact career progression opportunities. Ensuring that performance evaluations are aligned with these new metrics will help to create a culture where quality and results are prioritised over mere hours spent working.
4. **Organisations should proactively take measures to support and enhance social interactions** while considering employees' personal and work commitments. Ensuring that a shorter workweek and increased remote work do not diminish the social fabric of the workplace is crucial for maintaining an attractive workplace. This can be achieved by organising flexible social activities that cater to different schedules and preferences, such as virtual coffee breaks or in-person gatherings. Encouraging regular in-office days, with flexibility to accommodate personal commitments, can help balance the potential isolating effects of remote work arrangements. As a result, organisations can sustain employee morale, job satisfaction, and overall well-being, making the workplace more appealing to current and prospective employees.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary

This study has investigated Swedish white-collar workers' perceived impact of a shorter workweek on a personal and organisational level, across various career stages. Triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and rapid technological advancements, the traditional 40-hour week is increasingly challenged by alternative working agreements including shorter workweeks.

The main findings provide insights that on an individual level, the interviewees, regardless of career stage, are favourable towards a shorter workweek, anticipating significant personal benefits such as increased leisure time. They believe this would enhance their ability to engage more fully with family and friends, thereby improving overall personal well-being. On an organisational level, there is a need for managerial support regarding workload, otherwise, employees expect to face overwhelming work-related demands and increased stress levels.

Existing literature suggests that perceptions vary across different career stages. The findings also indicate differences; notably, early-career professionals are primarily concerned with career progression and meeting the expectations of the “ideal worker” culture. In contrast, more experienced professionals (maintenance and decline) are influenced by factors related to their domestic situation, specifically family commitments and parental responsibilities. This suggests that life stages and career stages both play a role in shaping attitudes toward shorter working hours, presenting an area for further research.

This paper contributes to the theoretical field of shorter workweeks by exploring practical observations integrated with career stage theory. It highlights both the similarities and differences across career stages. This approach enriches the academic dialogue on work-life balance by considering not only the direct effects on productivity and personal well-being but also the broader implications for career development within a modern work environment. This study also reveals insights into the cultural shifts required within organisations to support a shorter workweek. Ultimately, this research not only contributes to theoretical knowledge but also paves the way for practical implementations that could lead to more balanced and fulfilling lives.

6.2 Future Research & Limitations

This study encountered limitations that may influence the results. Cultural and economic variations across countries and regions could limit the broader applicability of the findings regarding perceptions toward reduced working hours. Social desirability bias, as noted by Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019, p. 227), may have occurred if respondents provided answers they believed were expected or desired.

Difficulties in clearly defining and distinguishing between the different career stages among interviewees could affect the accuracy of comparing perceptions across early, mid, and late career stages. This ambiguity might limit the analysis of how career progression impacts views on a shorter workweek. The decision to withhold the interview guide to elicit spontaneous responses may have also impacted the authenticity and depth of the insights gathered, potentially restricting interviewees' ability to provide thoughtful, reflective responses based on their experiences and views of their organisations.

Future research should include a managerial perspective to understand the feasibility and implementation of shorter workweeks. While this study focused on employee viewpoints, exploring managers' perceptions and strategies could provide deeper insights into organisational challenges and opportunities. Expanding the research beyond white-collar workers in Sweden to include diverse worker groups from multiple countries would be valuable. This would reveal how different cultural, economic, and regulatory environments affect the perception and effectiveness of reduced working hours. Additionally, future research should investigate the financial implications of transitioning to a shorter workweek at societal, organisational, and individual levels to fully understand the consequences and inform long-term work practices.

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8. Appendix

Appendix A: Interview Guide in English

Interview Guide (English)
1. Could you share some insights about your current role and your experience in this field? How do you see your future, careerwise?
2. What does a typical work week look like for you, in terms of working hours and the possibility of remote work?
3. What are your initial thoughts when I say "shorter workweek"?
4. In your opinion, is your organisation logistically capable of managing a shorter workweek? Why or why not?
5. Would you be willing to accept a shorter workweek if it was offered to you now? Why or why not?
6. How would a shorter workweek affect your work life?
7. How would a shorter workweek affect your personal life?
8. What benefits and concerns do you perceive a shorter workweek would bring?
9. How might the impact of a shorter workweek differ among individuals at various stages in their careers?
10. Would you prefer a 4-day workweek or 6-hour workdays, and why?
11. What activities do you believe most of your colleagues would pursue with extra time off? How would you spend this time yourself?

Appendix B: Interview Guide in Swedish

Intervjuguide (Svenska)
1. Skulle du kunna berätta om din nuvarande roll och din erfarenhet inom området? Hur ser du på din framtid, karriärmässigt?
2. Hur ser en typisk arbetsvecka ut för dig, med avseende på arbetstiderna och möjligheten till distansarbete?
3. Vad är dina första tankar när jag säger "kortare arbetsvecka"?
4. Enligt din uppfattning, är din organisation logistiskt kapabel att hantera en kortare arbetsvecka? Varför eller varför inte?
5. Skulle du acceptera en kortare arbetsvecka om det erbjöds till dig idag? Varför eller varför inte?

6. Hur skulle en kortare arbetsvecka påverka ditt arbetsliv?
7. Hur skulle en kortare arbetsvecka påverka ditt privatliv?
8. Vilka fördelar och nackdelar ser du med en kortare arbetsvecka?
9. Hur kan påverkan av en kortare arbetsvecka variera mellan individer i olika karriärstadier?
10. Skulle du föredra en 4-dagars arbetsvecka eller 6-timmars arbetsdagar, och varför?
11. Vilka aktiviteter tror du att de flesta av dina kollegor skulle ägna sig åt med extra ledig tid? Vad skulle du själv göra under den extra lediga tiden?

Appendix C: AI Transparency Note

Two AI tools were utilised to boost both quality and efficiency. ChatGPT was used for coming up with ideas and used for text refinement, focusing on grammar and conciseness. Grammarly was employed to ensure grammatical accuracy and improve clarity. These tools helped the writing process by optimising the research process and enhancing the already existing written text. However, potential risks such as false information and the risk of overreliance were acknowledged. These were mitigated through continuous critical thinking, fact-checking and actively evaluating the use of the tools.