



Reduced Workweek Pilot Report

A Nova Scotian Nonprofit Pilot

March 2024

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Executive Summary

Attraction and retention are serious concerns in the nonprofit sector, where organizations are limited in the benefits they can offer to employees. This action research study examines employee experiences of shifting to a reduced workweek schedule, an alternate work arrangement which may be an effective tool for promoting positive employee outcomes and retention. A total of 78 employees in four small nonprofit organizations provided qualitative and quantitative evaluations of their experiences as they participated in a six-month pilot of the schedule change from a 37-hour workweek over five days to a 32-hour workweek over four days. This project involved four Nova Scotia nonprofit organizations: Impact Organizations of Nova Scotia, Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design, Ecology Action Centre, and New Dawn Enterprises. A series of surveys including quantitative and qualitative questions were conducted on an ongoing basis, including longer initial, mid-point, and final surveys and short, monthly “pulse” surveys throughout the pilot. Survey outcomes included employee helping behaviours, work-life conflict, workload, burnout, and stress. This report describes the process of collecting this data and an interpretation of the results. In general, qualitative findings suggested that the compressed workweek had benefits such as stress reduction, improved work-life balance, and improved motivation and focus at work. Employees experienced challenges such as time pressure, challenges with meeting deadlines, and Monday morning email overload. Quantitative findings showed significant reductions in perceived stress, intent to quit, burnout, and presenteeism, and improvements in job satisfaction.

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Introduction

Employees in charities and non-profits are reporting historic levels of burnout due to funding cuts, limited salaries and benefits, and heavy workloads, leading to high rates of turnover (IONS, 2022). As a result, the sector is seeking evidence-based strategies that may address these challenges and promote organizational effectiveness. To improve employee work experiences and retention, an increasing number of organizations have successfully implemented alternate work schedules, which may be an effective tool for promoting transformation in the nonprofit sector. Past research has found that reduced workweek schedules (i.e., reducing the number of working hours per week) can improve work-life balance and productivity while reducing job stress, absenteeism and promoting recruitment and retention.¹ In practice, many organizations have successfully implemented compressed workweeks, including municipalities² and for-profit organizations such as Microsoft, Panasonic, and Samsung³. However, many studies conceptualize a compressed workweek as a 40-hour week spread over reduced workdays (i.e., four ten-hour days rather than five eight-hour days), which may increase employee fatigue and worsen work-life balance on their longer working days⁴.

¹ Bambra, C., Whitehead, M., Sowden, A., Akers, J., & Petticrew, M. (2008). "A hard day's night?" The effects of Compressed Working Week interventions on the health and worklife balance of shift workers: a systematic review. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 764-777. Fanelli, C., & Foggia, M. (2023). The four-day workweek and the future of work in Canada. Preliminary Research Report, York University. Moores, J. E. (1990). A meta-analysis of the effects of compressed work weeks. *Applied Human Resource Management Research*, 1(1), 8-14. Paje, R. C., Escobar, P. B. A., Ruaya, A. M. R., & Sulit, P. A. F. (2020, April). The impact of compressed workweek arrangements on job stress, work-life balance, and work productivity of rank-and-file employees from different industries in Metro Manila. In *Journal of Physics: Conference Series* (Vol. 1529, No. 3, p. 032055). IOP Publishing.

² Cuthbertson, R. (Nov 23, 2023). Cumberland joins growing list of N.S. municipalities turning to 4-day work week. CBC News. Retrieved February 16, 2024 from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/cumberland-joins-growing-list-of-n-s-municipalities-turning-to-4-day-work-week-1.7037897>

³ Cawley, C. (January 3, 2024). Companies that offer a 4-day workweek in 2024. Tech.co. Retrieved February 16, 2024 from <https://tech.co/news/companies-4-day-work-week#amazon>

⁴ Fanelli, C., & Foggia, M. (2023). The four-day workweek and the future of work in Canada. Preliminary Research Report, York University.

A limited number of studies have examined the effects of shortened work hours, over fewer working days, on employee outcomes. One large (unpublished) study did, however, find that reduced-hour workweeks (i.e., four-day workweeks for fulltime workers) across seven organizations resulted in improved work-life balance, life satisfaction, wellbeing, and sleep quality, and reduced stress, burnout, and fatigue and these improvements were sustained one year later⁵. Further, they found that six of seven companies maintained or improved their monthly revenue. In a UK four-day workweek pilot across 61 organizations, Autonomy Research Group found that 82% of companies reported positive impacts on staff wellbeing, 50% reported reduced turnover, and 32% reported improvements in recruitment⁶. This mixed-methods study examines the effectiveness of a six-month pilot project wherein full-time staff members in four small nonprofit organizations shifted from a standard full time work week of 37-40 hours per week to 32 hours/week. This reduction had no effect on their employment status nor their pay or benefits. The purpose of this study is to understand the benefits and challenges experienced by employees undergoing this schedule change. Based on prior research, we expected that the reduced work week could have a positive impact on work-life balance, employee wellbeing, and productivity and reduce feelings of burnout, stress, and intent to quit. We also assessed outcomes such as employee organizational citizenship behaviour, coworker support, and presenteeism as outcomes of the compressed workweek schedule because increased time pressure may leave less time available to help others and encourage employees to work when performance may be impaired (e.g., while sick).

⁵ Kelly, O., Schor, J., Fan, W., Bezdenezhnykh, T., Gu, G., & Bridson Hubbard, N. (2022). The Four Day Week: Assessing global trials of reduced work time with no reduction in pay: Evidence from Ireland. University College Dublin.

⁶ Pignon, T., Lewis, K., Mullally, L., Kikuchi, L., Kellam, J., Western, G., ... & White, J. (2024). Making It Stick: The UK Four-Day Week Pilot One Year On.

Methodology

The proceeding section provides an in-depth description of the process followed in the survey data collection. IONS, CBCCD, and New Dawn together implemented their reduced workweek pilot from June 2022 to December 2022 and EAC implemented their pilot from September 2022 to July 2023. Quantitative and qualitative surveys were conducted throughout these pilots for the two groups. IONS, CBCCD, and New Dawn took surveys at five timepoints, including longer 20-minute surveys at the start of the schedule change and the end of the six-month pilot as well as three short (5-minute), monthly “pulse” surveys in between these longer surveys. The EAC group completed longer 20-minute surveys prior to the change, at the three-month pilot mid-point, and the end of the six-month pilot as well as six short (5-minute), monthly “pulse” surveys (see Figure 1 for the timeline of survey administration). Surveys included quantitative measures of work-life balance⁷, burnout⁸, stress⁹, job satisfaction¹⁰ and intent to quit¹¹, organizational citizenship behaviour¹², co-

⁷ Kelloway, E. K., Mullen, J., & Francis, L. (2006). Divergent effects of transformational and passive leadership on employee safety. *Journal of occupational health psychology, 11*(1), 76.

⁸ Maslach, C., Jackson, S. E., & Leiter, M. P. (1997). *Maslach burnout inventory*. Scarecrow Education.

⁹ Lehman, K. A., Burns, M. N., Gagen, E. C., & Mohr, D. C. (2012). Development of the brief inventory of perceived stress. *Journal of clinical psychology, 68*(6), 631-644.

¹⁰ Brayfield, A. H., & Rothe, H. F. (1951). An index of job satisfaction. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 35*(5), 307–311. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0055617>

¹¹ Lounsbury, J. W., & Hoopes, L. L. (1986). A vacation from work: Changes in work and nonwork outcomes. *Journal of Applied psychology, 71*(3), 392.

¹² Williams, L. J., & Anderson, S. E. (1991). Job satisfaction and organizational commitment as predictors of organizational citizenship and in-role behaviors. *Journal of management, 17*(3), 601-617.

worker support¹³, and presenteeism¹⁴. Qualitative questions asked employees what benefits and challenges they experienced with the schedule change to a reduced workweek. A total of 78 full-time employees working in the nonprofit sector in Nova Scotia and who were part of the compressed workweek pilot participated in the study, but we saw attrition (loss of participants) over time. Due to unanticipated delays in starting data collection, we could not collect any baseline data from New Dawn or CBCCD and the initial survey took place after the schedule change began.

Pre-Pilot Data (IONS only)	• June 2022
Initial Survey	• July 2022/Sept 2022
Pulse 1	• September 2022/Early Nov 2022
Pulse 2	• November 2022/Late Nov 2022
Midpoint Survey (EAC Only)	• Dec 2022
Pulse 3	• Dec 2022/Feb 2023
Pulse 4 (EAC only)	• March 2023
Pulse 5 (EAC only)	• April 2023
Pulse 6 (EAC only)	• May 2023
Final Survey	• Dec 2022/July 2023

FIGURE 1. TIMELINE OF SURVEY ADMINISTRATION (DATES SHOWN FOR IONS, CBCCD AND NEW DAWN GROUP/EAC).

¹³ Eisenberger, R., Huntington, R., Hutchison, S., & Sowa, D. (1986). Perceived organizational support. *Journal of Applied psychology*, 71(3), 500.

¹⁴ Koopman, C., Pelletier, K. R., Murray, J. F., Sharda, C. E., Berger, M. L., Turpin, R. S., Hackleman, P., Gibson, P., Holmes, D. M., & Bendel, T. (2002). Stanford presenteeism scale: Health status and employee productivity. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 44, 14-20.

Monthly reports based on the pulse surveys were provided to the organizations as an indicator of the progress of the reduced workweek pilot and to assist with decision making. Quantitative pulse survey data were not analyzed as part of this report due to very low sample sizes. However, qualitative data from these reports are reviewed below.

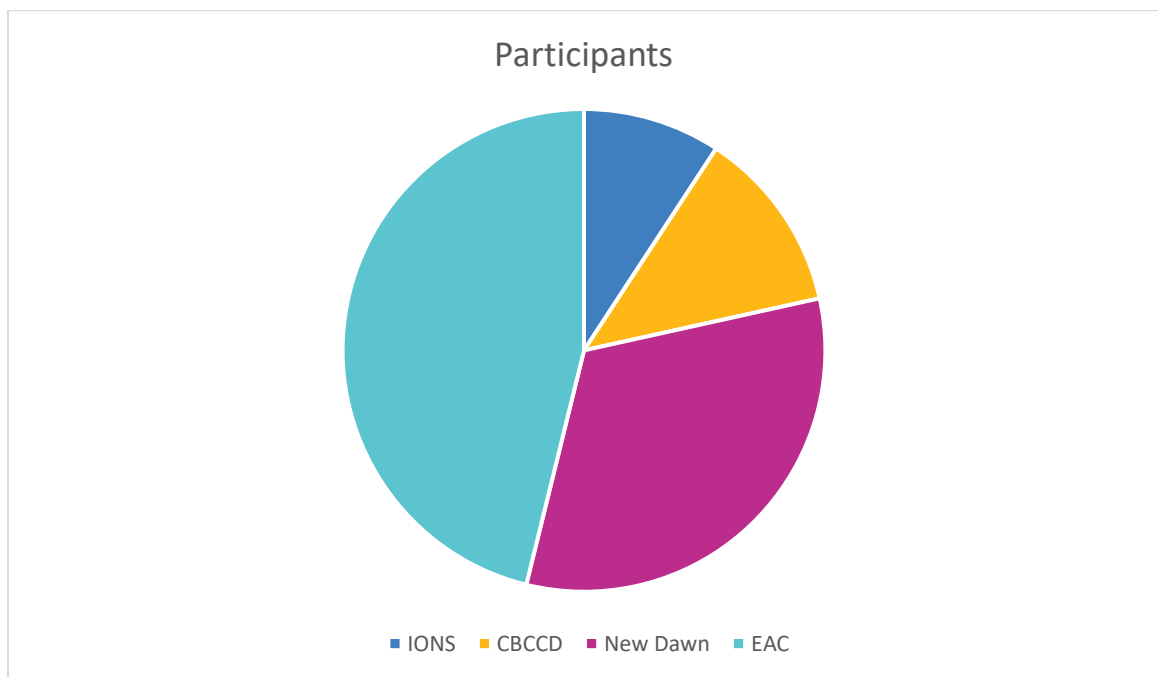


FIGURE 2. STUDY PARTICIPANTS BY ORGANIZATION.

Quantitative Results

Group 1: IONS, CBCCD, New Dawn

We had a total of 35 individuals take part in this study, 8 from CBCCD, 6 from IONS, and 21 from New Dawn. These organizations implemented the reduced workweek pilot at the same time, and so were examined together. Given the small sample sizes across organizations, we examined the data in aggregate to protect employee confidentiality and maximize sample size. The average organizational tenure was 5.14 years, with a range from 0 to 33 years, while the average position tenure stood at 3.63 years, ranging from 0 to 16 years. The average age was 39.54, with ranges from ages 24-64 years old. Twenty-four participants had

children and 10 were currently caring for aging community members and/or relatives. Regarding gender identity, 27 identified as women, 7 as men, and 1 as gender nonconforming. Three individuals identified as Indigenous, whereas the majority of 28, identified as white in terms of ethnicity. As for education, 23 participants had either a bachelor’s degree and/or master’s degree. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics for this group from the initial and final survey.

We assessed employees’ commitment to the change, including their affective (i.e., I want to implement this change), continuance (i.e., I must implement this change), and normative (i.e., I ought to implement this change) commitment to it. Generally, employees had a high affective commitment to the proposed schedule change from the outset, meaning that they identified with, wanted, and saw the importance of the change, and they had relatively low continuance commitment, and moderate normative commitment. These results suggest that employees were on board with the proposed changes, did not feel forced into such changes, and saw their value and importance. The initial survey also suggested that employees overall saw their workplaces as positive and healthy, characterized by opportunities to receive support, to recover from work after hours, to help others and their organizations (i.e., organizational citizenship behaviour), and by autonomy, psychological safety, good quality leadership, reasonable workloads. Employees reported limited work-family conflict and intent to quit and high job satisfaction, and affective commitment to their organizations.

Table 1. Initial and final survey data for IONS, CBCCD, and New Dawn.						
	Initial Survey			Final Survey		
	N	Min/Max	Mean (Standard Deviation)	N	Min/Max	Mean (Standard Deviation)

Affective Commitment to Change	25	4.17/5.00	4.88 (.22)	----	----	----
Continuance Commitment to Change	25	1.00/3.83	1.42 (.71)	----	----	----
Normative Commitment to Change	25	1.00/3.83	2.63 (.75)	----	----	----
Workload	25	1.00/4.80	2.46 (1.14)	25	1.40/ 4.00	2.64(.79)
Work family conflict	25	1.00/4.00	1.77 (.91)	25	1.00/3.83	1.71(.90)
Recognition	25	2.67/5.00	4.49 (.79)	25	2.67/5.00	4.44(.70)
Co-worker support	25	3.88/5.00	4.72 (.33)	25	3.13/5.00	4.66(.43)
Affective Organizational Commitment	25	3.17/5.00	4.28 (.55)	25	3.33/5.00	4.38(.59)
Transformational Leadership	25	2.43/5.00	4.52 (.63)	20	1.86/5.00	4.51(.73)
Autonomy	25	3.33/5.00	4.68 (.51)	25	3.67/5.00	4.61(.46)
Detachment	25	1.00/4.75	3.31 (.89)	25	1.00/4.25	3.10(.87)
Relaxation	25	3.00/5.00	4.45 (.68)	25	3.00/5.00	4.31(.73)
Mastery	25	2.67/5.00	3.81 (.74)	25	1.00/5.00	3.45(1.01)
Psychological safety	25	3.29/5.00	4.37 (.47)	25	3.50/5.00	4.61(.47)
Perceived Stress	25	1.20/3.60	2.08 (.56)	25	3.33/5.00	4.29(.45)
In role performance	25	4.00/5.00	4.63 (.32)	25	3.14/5.00	4.51(.47)
Organizational citizenship behaviour – individual	25	2.71/5.00	4.21 (.68)	25	3.18/4.82	4.02(.50)
Organizational Citizenship	25	4.20/5.00	4.68 (.26)	25	1.40/3.20	2.08(.47)

behaviour – organizational						
Presenteeism	23	1.00/4.75	2.66 (.79)	25	4.00/5.00	4.63(.32)
Job Satisfaction	25	3.20/5.00	4.55 (.46)	25	1.86/5.00	3.99(.95)
Intent to quit	25	1.00/4.00	1.52 (.75)	25	3.60/5.00	4.64(.34)

Paired t-tests were conducted in SPSS to examine changes in outcome variables from the initial (time one) to the final survey (time five). No significant differences were observed across these surveys. However, it is important to note that a full set of baseline data was not collected prior to the beginning of the reduced workweek pilot, as the pilot had already begun before the researcher had ethics approval to collect data. As such, changes may have already occurred before data was collected that were not captured in these data.

Although the researcher could not collect baseline data, IONS collected some of their own baseline data, which enabled some limited comparisons before and after the reduced workweek pilot. The findings in the table below compare some questions asked by IONS in June 2022, to the same questions asked in a pulse survey (Pulse Survey 3, November 2022). T-tests were conducted to compare the means across the two timepoints. Despite the very small sample size (n = 6), which limits power to detect significant effects, we still observed some significant changes in coworker helping behaviours (significantly increased), work-family conflict (significantly decreased), and coworker respect (significantly increased). Table 2 presents these results, showing variables that significantly increased highlighted in green and variables with significant decreases over time highlighted in blue. Variables that are not highlighted did not change over time.

Table 2. IONS baseline data compared to pulse survey 3 data.			
	Pre-Pilot (n=6) Mean (standard deviation)	Nov Pulse Survey (n = 5) Mean (standard deviation)	T-Test

To what extent/how often do you help other employees with their work when they have been absent?	3.17 (.75)	3.80 (1.09)	Not significant
To what extent/how often do you help your coworkers when they have too much to do?	3.17 (.41)	3.20 (1.09)	Not significant
To what extent/how often do you help coworkers with questions they have about their work?	3.33 (.516)	4.40 (.89)	t = 2.4933* df = 9
To what extent/how often are you willing to work harder in order to help your employer succeed?	3.33 (1.63)	4.40 (.55)	Not significant
It is hard for me to keep up with my workload	3.33 (1.63)	3.00 (1.00)	Not significant
It is difficult to balance my work and family demands	4.33 (.516)	2.40 (1.51)	t = 2.9577* df = 9
My job allows me to use my skills and abilities	3.83 (.75)	4.60 (.55)	Not significant
My work is important to the organization	4.67 (.81)	4.60 (.89)	Not significant
My co-workers treat me with respect and courtesy	4.17 (.41)	4.80 (.447)	t = 2.4295* df = 9
NB: Blue indicates a significant decrease over time (*p < .05); green indicates significant increase over time (*p < .05).			

Group 2: Ecology Action Centre

A total of 30 individuals from the Ecology Action Centre took part in this study. The average organizational tenure was 3.87 years, with a range from 0 to 18 years, while the average position tenure was 2.16 years, ranging from 0 to 6 years. The average age was 36.09, ranging from 22-56 years old. Five

participants had children, and 4 participants were caring for aging community members and/or relatives. With respect to gender identity, 17 identified as women, 3 as men, and 2 as gender nonconforming. One individual identified as Indigenous, and the majority (n = 21) identified as white in terms of ethnicity. See Table 3 for a summary of the descriptive statistics (i.e., means, ranges) for all study variables across three time points (the initial survey pre-pilot, the midpoint survey, and final survey). Variables that significantly increased over time are highlighted in green and variables that significantly decreased over time are highlighted in blue. Variables that are not highlighted did not change over time.

Table 3. Initial, midpoint, and final survey means for EAC.

	Initial Survey			Midpoint Survey			Final Survey		
	N	Min/Max	Mean (Standard Deviation)	N	Min/Max	Mean (Standard Deviation)	N	Min/Max	Mean (Standard Deviation)
Affective Commitment	27	3.67/5.00	4.70 (.39)	---	----	----	17	3.67/5.00	4.66 (.39)
Continuance Commitment	27	1.00/3.17	1.83 (.66)	---	----	----	17	1.00/3.17	1.85 (.66)
Normative Commitment	27	1.67/4.50	3.14 (.71)	---	----	----	17	1.67/4.50	3.19 (.78)
Workload	27	1.40/4.80	3.18 (.77)	18	1.40/4.20	2.93 (.82)	14	2.40/4.60	3.01 (.56)
Work family conflict	26	1.00/3.83	2.45 (.89)	18	1.17/3.83	2.36 (.91)	14	1.00/3.83	1.82 (.75)
Recognition	26	2.00/5.00	3.91 (.95)	18	2.00/5.00	4.07 (.87)	14	2.00/5.00	3.90 (1.22)

Co-worker support	27	2.75/5.00	4.45 (.55)	18	3.50/5.00	4.38 (.48)	14	3.88/5.00	4.54 (.39)
Affective Organizational Commitment	26	2.83/5.00	3.90 (.55)	17	2.17/5.00	3.85 (.85)	13	2.83/4.83	4.13 (.55)
Transformational Leadership	27	3.00/5.00	4.28 (.65)	17	2.43/5.00	4.18 (.82)	14	3.14/5.00	4.48 (.52)
Autonomy	26	1.67/5.00	4.44 (.78)	17	2.17/5.00	4.39 (.76)	13	3.67/5.00	4.61 (.58)
Detachment	26	1.50/5.00	3.29 (.86)	17	1.75/5.00	3.39 (.85)	13	2.25/4.75	3.77 (.75)
Relaxation	26	2.00/5.00	4.06 (.86)	17	2.25/5.00	3.98 (.80)	13	4.00/5.00	4.42 (.44)
Mastery	26	1.33/5.00	3.69 (.93)	17	2.33/5.00	3.87 (.77)	13	3.00/5.00	4.03 (.55)
Control	26	2.75/5.00	3.96 (.73)	17	2.50/5.00	4.26 (.69)	13	4.00/5.00	4.56 (.47)
Engagement	24	2.78/5.00	3.84 (.61)	17	2.22/5.00	3.78 (.77)	13	3.44/4.78	4.28 (.35)
Psychological safety	26	3.00/5.00	4.32 (.52)	17	2.71/5.00	4.36 (.57)	13	2.71/5.00	4.49 (.58)
Perceived Stress	24	1.80/3.40	2.50 (.39)	17	1.60/3.50	2.29 (.51)	13	3.09/4.64	3.90 (.47)
In role behaviour	23	3.50/4.90	4.29 (.41)	16	3.00/5.00	4.37 (.57)	13	4.00/5.00	4.58 (.28)

Organizational citizenship behaviour – individual	23	1.71/4.57	3.35 (.90)	16	2.00/4.67	3.35 (.83)	13	2.43/5.00	3.80 (.82)
Organizational Citizenship behaviour – organizational	23	3.80/5.00	4.47 (.28)	16	3.8/5.00	4.51 (.32)	13	2.80/5.00	4.57 (.49)
Burnout	24	1.83/3.82	2.73 (.58)	17	1.59/4.00	2.38 (.67)	13	1.29/3.00	2.13 (.49)
Presenteeism	21	1.00/4.75	3.48 (.90)	14	1.00/4.75	3.04 (1.14)	11	2.00/4.5	3.11 (.87)
Job Satisfaction	26	3.40/5.00	4.35 (.45)	17	2.20/5.00	4.20 (.67)	11	3.60/5.00	4.43 (.37)
Intent to quit	25	1.00/5.00	2.60 (.98)	17	1.00/4.00	2.49 (.83)	13	3.60/4.33	2.31 (.37)
<p>NB: Blue indicates a significant decrease over time ($p < .05$); green indicates significant increase over time ($p < .05$). Significant changes are highlighted across relevant time points (i.e., if only waves one and two are highlighted, change was only detected between these waves).</p>									

Generally, the results from the initial survey show that EAC employees had positive perceptions of their work environment before the pilot began. Employees reported high affective commitment to the proposed reduced workweek changes pre-pilot, low continuance commitment to the change (reflecting a sense that they must implement the change), and moderate normative commitment (i.e., “I ought to implement this change”). Pre-pilot, employees reported especially high coworker support, transformational leadership, autonomy, psychological safety, job satisfaction, and helping behaviours aimed at their organization (organizational citizenship- organizational).

Paired t-tests were conducted to examine change from the initial survey to the midpoint survey. This analysis retains a larger sample size (as we had fewer participants take part as data collection progressed), so there is greater chance of detecting significant effects. In these analyses, we noticed mixed early results of the pilot which likely, in part, reflect an initial adjustment period to the schedule change. Positively, there were significant decreases in: workload, perceived stress, burnout, presenteeism, and intent to quit during the first three months of the pilot. Participants also reported significant increases in opportunities to detach from work (i.e., “shut off” at the end of the workday), mastery (i.e., to learn new things outside of work), and control over free time- all indicators of workplace recovery, which offer employees the chance to recharge and rejuvenate at the end of the workday. Participants also reported significantly higher in-role behaviour (i.e., work performance). However, during this time there were also decreases in some positive job attitudes including affective organizational commitment and job satisfaction and employees also reported significantly lower autonomy, transformational leadership, engagement, and psychological safety during this time. It is important to note, that for these variables, sustained significant change was not observed at the final survey, so for many of these variables, negative changes may be attributed to an adjustment period to the schedule change, and may have returned to baseline levels by the time of the final survey. Alternatively, some external factors besides the reduced workweek pilot (e.g., continued effects of the pandemic, economic changes, other changes within the organization) may have influenced these variables, and such external factors cannot be accounted for without a control group. It is also important to note that due to the small sample size, there

may have been positive effects that we did not have the power to detect and as such were not statistically significant. For example, work-life balance increases over the course of the study, but the change is not statistically significant.

To examine longer-term effects of the pilot, repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to examine the changes in average levels over all three time points (the initial, midpoint, and final surveys). This analysis gives a better sense of effects of the pilot once adjustment has occurred. Significant decreases in burnout were observed over the course of the pilot, with the largest decrease observed between time one and the midpoint survey (see Figure 3 below). Significant increases were also observed in participants’ perceptions of control over their free time, with the greatest increases taking place from time one to time three (see Figure 4 below).

FIGURE 3. BURNOUT OVER TIME (EAC)

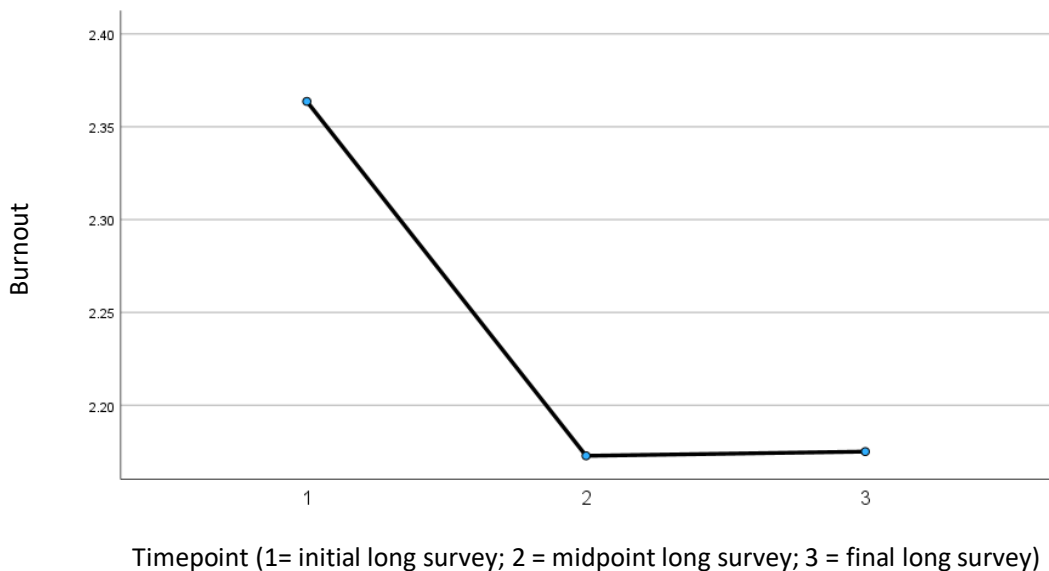
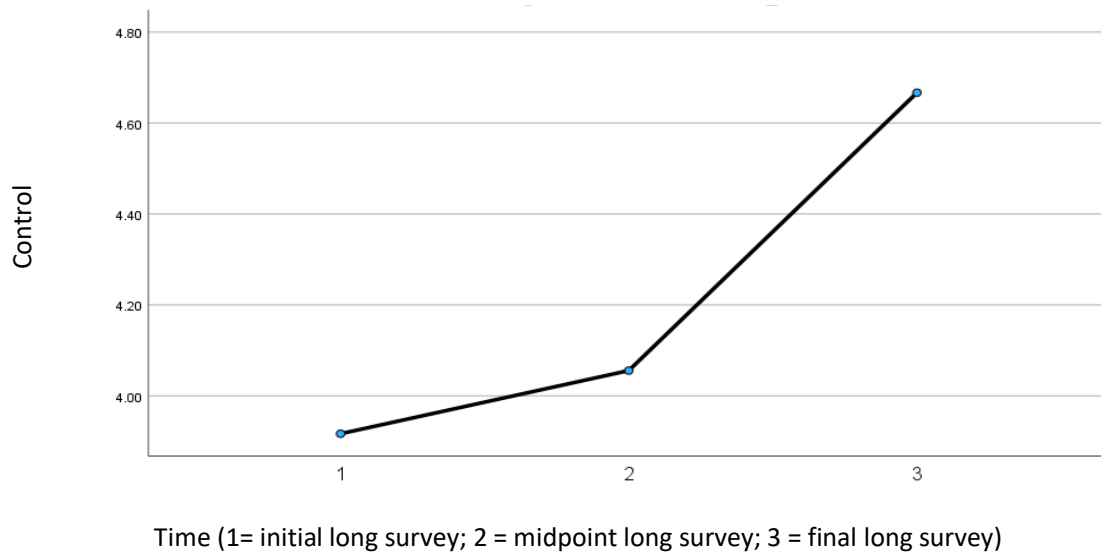


FIGURE 4. CONTROL OVER PERSONAL TIME (EAC)



Qualitative Results

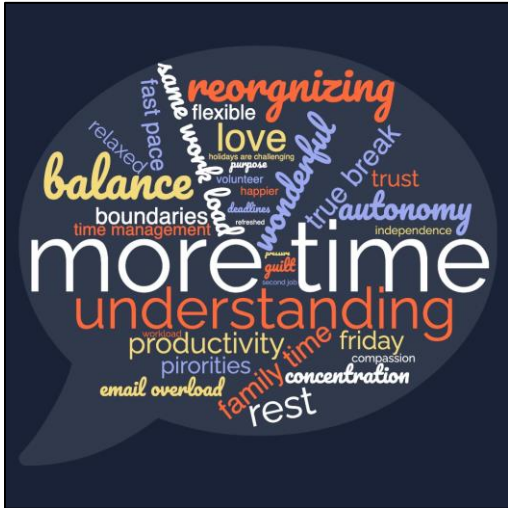
In our shorter pulse surveys, we asked the following two open-ended questions:

- ▶ What are the benefits you are experiencing with the reduced workweek?
- ▶ What challenges are you experiencing with the reduced hour workweek?

Thematic analysis¹⁵ was conducted to identify key concepts that emerged in the qualitative comments, which were then grouped into higher-order interrelated themes. We examined the comments related to benefits and challenges separately. All qualitative data was examined from all organizations together, so comparisons were not made across organizations.

¹⁵ Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

FIGURE 5. WORD CLOUD OF OVERALL QUALITATIVE COMMENTS



Benefits of the Reduced Workweek Schedule

FIGURE 6. WORDCLOUD OF REDUCED WORKWEEK BENEFITS

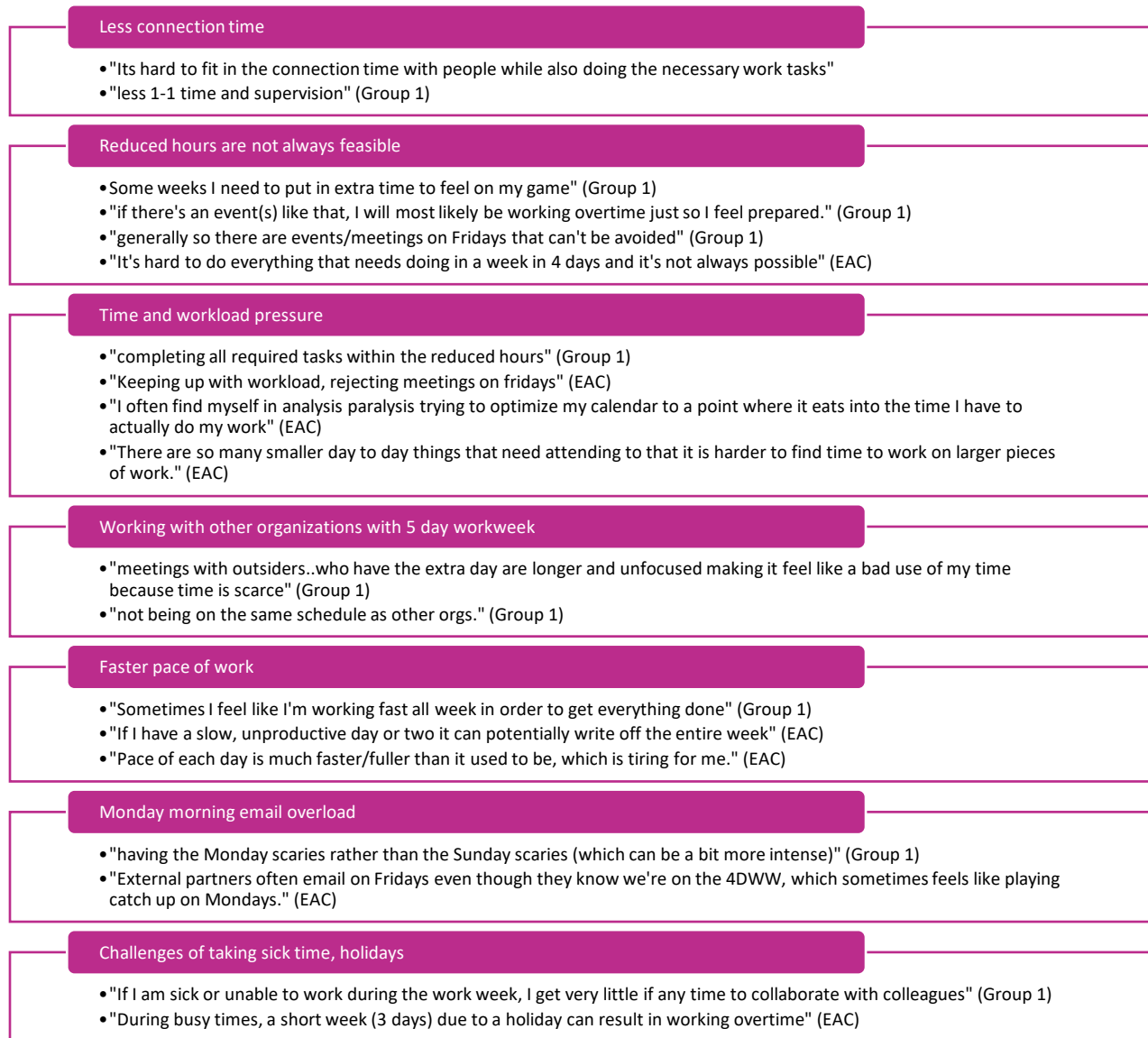


FIGURE 7. BENEFITS OF REDUCED WORKWEEK



The most prevalent benefit that employees discussed was better work-life balance because Fridays off allowed time to go to appointments (e.g., healthcare, dental, hair), to run errands, have more leisurely weekends, have more time for hobbies and volunteering, rest, time to spend with friends and family. Related to this, many participants noted reduced stress and burnout and sometimes better mental health. Some even mentioned having improved sleep and physical health because of reduced stress, and greater time to engage

FIGURE 9. CHALLENGES OF REDUCED WORKWEEK



We also asked participants what challenges they have experienced because of the reduced workweek. Notably here, some participants noted that they had no challenges to report (e.g. "None, this is a blessing!" Group 1). The first theme was reduced time available for connection, including one to one work, supervision, and building relationships. Some participants noted that the reduced workweek was not feasible on certain weeks when the workload was especially high, events were being organized, or a deadline was

approaching. On these weeks, participants would work on Fridays to catch up. Some participants noted that they still regularly worked on the day off, but that they still appreciated having flexibility about how long and where they work. The third key theme was around time and workload pressure, and this was the most prevalent challenge which involved difficulty keeping up with workload, meeting deadlines, and prioritizing work. Some participants noted that working with other organizations that have a five-day workweek could be a challenge because they received emails or meeting requests on Fridays and because they had a different culture or expectations around work time (i.e., holding longer, more frequent, and less productive meetings). Related to this, some participants noted experiencing email overload, difficulty catching up, and feeling behind on Monday mornings, leading to more stress at the start of the week. Many participants remarked on the fast pace of work that is required to get everything done in the week, which can feel tiring, and which provides very little wiggle room to allow for less productive days or unexpected issues and tasks. And finally, a few participants noted that the challenges of the reduced workweek can be exacerbated when the employee needs to take a sick day on another day of the week, when there is a holiday weekend, or if they take vacation, which might mean an even shorter week in which to finish one's work. During these weeks, employees may need to put in overtime to make up for time lost.

Discussion and Recommendations

This study examined employee experiences of moving to a reduced workweek schedule in four nonprofit organizations in Nova Scotia. Together, the quantitative findings suggest that employees may have reduced levels of burnout and increased control over their nonwork time because of taking part in the change. These findings are significant because burnout has been associated with adverse outcomes such as

greater absenteeism, turnover, and reduced job performance¹⁷ and control has been associated with reduced fatigue, greater vigor, and wellbeing¹⁸. The comparisons of the initial EAC survey and midpoint EAC survey also suggest that other benefits may include improved work-life balance, decreases in workload, perceived stress, presenteeism, and intent to quit, increases in opportunities to detach from work (i.e., “shut off” at the end of the workday), mastery (i.e., to learn new things outside of work), control over free time, higher in-role behaviour (i.e., work performance). These findings align with work by Schor et al., who found similar benefits of four-day workweeks across dozens of organizations, and that these benefits were largely sustained one year later¹⁹.

Some of our findings suggest that at the beginning of the pilot, there may have been some adverse affects on outcomes such as affective organizational commitment, job satisfaction, autonomy, transformational leadership, engagement, and psychological safety during this time. Since these effects were not sustained across all three time periods, they may have been associated with an initial adjustment period where employees experienced some stress and uncertainty in adapting to the new work schedule that necessitated changes in work processes²⁰. However, without a control group, the reasons for these adverse effects are uncertain. The quantitative IONS data of five employees from pre- to post-pilot suggest that coworker helping behaviours and respect may have improved after the pilot, while work-life conflict may have decreased. All results must be interpreted with caution due to the small sample sizes, which limit our

¹⁷ Swider, B. W., & Zimmerman, R. D. (2010). Born to burnout: A meta-analytic path model of personality, job burnout, and work outcomes. *Journal of Vocational behavior*, 76(3), 487-506.

¹⁸ Bennett, A. A., Bakker, A. B., & Field, J. G. (2018). Recovery from work-related effort: A meta-analysis. *Journal of organizational behavior*, 39(3), 262-275.

¹⁹ Kelly, O., Schor, J., Fan, W., Bezdenezhnykh, T., Gu, G., & Bridson Hubbard, N. (2022). *The Four Day Week: Assessing global trials of reduced work time with no reduction in pay: Evidence from Ireland*. University College Dublin.

²⁰ Callan, V. J., Terry, D. J., & Schweitzer, R. (1994). Coping resources, coping strategies and adjustment to organizational change: direct or buffering effects?. *Work & Stress*, 8(4), 372-383.

ability to detect significant effects, and due to the lack of a control group, which precludes us from examining effects besides the reduced workweek pilot which may have influenced study variables.

In general, qualitative findings suggested that the compressed workweek had benefits such as improved work-life balance, access to work recovery opportunities (e.g., hobbies, volunteering, control over non-work time), stress reduction, greater motivation and focus at work, and improved workplace perceptions. Employees experienced challenges such as less connection time, inability to work reduced weeks all the time, a faster pace of work on working days, time and workload pressure, difficulty coordinating work with employees from other organizations that have a 5-day workweek, Monday morning email overload, and challenges related to holidays, sick leave, and vacation which further reduce work time. Overall, the qualitative findings suggest that reduced workweeks may promote positive employee outcomes in the nonprofit sector but that they may also present challenges that organizations should be aware of and take steps to mitigate. Such challenges may be mitigated through employee training on time management and prioritizing tasks, continued management of cultural change towards the new schedule, and reduced workload that fits with the new working hours. Anecdotally, executive directors of the pilot organizations have observed improved quality of job candidates, which they attribute to the reduced workweek schedule.

Strengths of this study include its multi-method and repeated measures methodology. However, the study is limited by small sample size, single-source self-report data, and the lack of a control group. We were only able to collect complete baseline data for one organization and were not able to collect any baseline data for employees in two of the organizations, so change related to the reduced workweek could not be evaluated. However, all employees' qualitative evaluations of their experiences with the new schedule were still valuable.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study findings suggest that continuing to implement the reduced workweek schedule may provide benefits to employees and organizations such as reduced burnout and improved recovery from work during nonwork time, which may promote positive employee outcomes such as engagement over time. The reduced workweek may also have important social benefits for employees' families and communities, as they report having more time to participate in family life, caregiving, and pursuits such as volunteering. Organizations may support employees in optimizing their effectiveness during work hours through coaching staff about how to prioritize tasks, exploring more productive and organized ways of working, right-sizing workload to fit with the new working hours, eliminating unnecessary meetings, working through cultural shifts needed for the success of such a change (e.g., shifting to a results orientation rather than emphasizing time worked, committing to meeting efficiency), and enabling management and staff collaboration in identifying and addressing concerns to do with the reduced workweek. Reserving Monday mornings as time for employees to catch up on emails by not scheduling meetings on Monday mornings may support them in Monday morning email overload. And finally, to maximize benefits of the reduced workweek and to enable employees to make full use of their day off, measures should be taken to ensure employees will not be required to work on that day, and the day off should not be contingent on completing work demands²¹.

²¹ Kelly, O., Schor, J., Fan, W., Bezdenezhnykh, T., Gu, G., & Bridson Hubbard, N. (2022). *The Four Day Week: Assessing global trials of reduced work time with no reduction in pay: Evidence from Ireland*. University College Dublin.