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NEDLAC PERCEPTIONS ON THE FOUR-DAY WORK WEEK IN SOUTH AFRICA

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A Dissertation submitted to the

Faculty of Commerce, Law, and Management of the University of Witwatersrand,

in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of

Master of Management in Development and Economics

Wits School of Governance

Supervisor: Dr Thelela Ngcetane-Vika

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DECLARATION

I, **Nolwazi Mthembu (Makaula),** declare that this Dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Master of Management (dissertation) at the Wits School of Governance, of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Management. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

_____

(Signature of candidate)

Signed at _____on the _____day of_____20_____

in_____

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Thulani and Nozipho Mthembu. Their sacrifices and investment in my academics are a blessing I can never take for granted. Their encouragement in achieving this accomplishment has fuelled me till the end. Ngiyabonga Mvelase noMaMtshali.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the perceptions among key stakeholders at the National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac) regarding the feasibility and implications of a Four-Day Work Week (4DWW) in South Africa. Drawing on qualitative methods and guided by the Work-Life Balance Theory, Institutional Theory, and Flexibility Theory, the study examines how this labour model could address productivity challenges, employee well-being, and socio-economic disparities in South Africa. Through in-depth interviews with representatives from labour, business, government, and community sectors, the study identifies both opportunities and challenges of the 4DWW.

Findings highlight mixed views on productivity outcomes, with benefits such as enhanced job satisfaction and mental well-being contrasted against concerns about implementation in labour-intensive industries. While flexible, knowledge-based roles are well-suited to the 4DWW, significant barriers exist in sectors reliant on continuous operations, such as mining and manufacturing. Stakeholders acknowledged the potential to improve work-life balance. However, they raised concerns about exacerbating existing inequalities, especially for low-skilled workers and women who may face an increased burden of unpaid care work. Economic feasibility and legislative adaptability were central themes, with participants advocating for pilot projects to assess sector-specific viability and productivity outcomes.

The study concludes that while the 4DWW offers promising opportunities to improve workforce well-being and productivity, its implementation must be sensitive to South Africa's socio-economic realities and sectoral diversity. Nedlac's facilitative role is critical in fostering dialogue and consensus among stakeholders. The research contributes to the discourse on labour reform, providing actionable insights for policymakers, businesses, and labour organisations to navigate the complexities of this innovative work model.

KEYWORDS

Four-Day Work Week, Nedlac, Work-Life Balance, Flexible Work Arrangements, Labour Policy Reform, Productivity.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Acronym	Full Form
4DWW	Four-Day Work week
BCEA	Basic Conditions of Employment Act
BUSA	Business Unity South Africa
Cosatu	Congress of South African Trade Unions
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
LMC	Labour Market Chamber
LRA	Labour Relations Act
Nedlac	National Economic Development and Labour Council

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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a comprehensive overview of the study, encompassing its background, research problem, motivation, and central focus. It provides a detailed outline of the study's aim, objectives, and expected outcomes, along with the key research questions and the investigation's significance. Furthermore, the chapter introduces the research methodology, highlighting its design and approach. It concludes with an organised breakdown of the study's structure to guide the reader through its contents.

1.2. RESEARCH CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

The ongoing debate over implementing a four-day, 32-hour standard working week has attracted significant attention from stakeholders worldwide, including employers, trade unions, political parties, governments, and the media (Bershin, 2023). The four-day work week (4DWW) can be defined as “a compressed working week, where employees work their standard contractual hours, but over four days rather than five, with the fifth day off work" (Henley, 2022, p. 538).

The concept of the 4DWW has been a subject of interest since the 1970s (Delaney and Casey, 2021). Academic, management and popular literature have extensively explored its potential benefits and practical challenges. Rather than delving into the pros and cons of this work-time revolution, this thesis adopts a unique perspective by examining the perceptions of key decision-makers in South Africa's labour law landscape regarding the viability of the 4DWW model (Larsen and Levinsen, 2024).

According to Pencavel (2022), the essence of the Four-Day Work week (herein 4DWW) model is to reduce working hours or reorganise the Work week (eight-hour days) so as to create more non-work time for workers. This time has been utilised productively for leisure, rest, relaxation, or further study in some parts of the world. In a verifiable workplace, which can be identified as a work environment where an employee’s work activities, productivity, and working hours can be monitored and measured, Henley

(2022) has found that performance improvements are almost guaranteed after introducing the 4DWW. In an environment where the concept has been implemented, performance improvements include increased worker competitiveness, improved service quality, and a better quality of life (Henley, 2022). However, scholars such as Golden and Veiga (2005) have critiqued the intervention, arguing that the 4DWW may not solve work-life balance, as compressed work hours could lead to increased stress and workload.

As a result of this important debate, which considers the differing views of those supporting and challenging the model, this study investigates the perceptions and implications of the 4DWW proposition from a labour law and labour market perspective in South Africa. South Africa has many bargaining councils and sectoral agreements that oversee basic employment conditions across various economic sectors, including working hours. To implement a 4DWW model, these agreements may need to be amended, and their terms renegotiated to accommodate this new approach (Schensema and Rasetlola, 2022). The study has used the National Economic and Labour Council's Social Partners, Organised Business, Coglobal trends, and workforce erosion to predominantly drive this push. The National Economic and Labour Council (Nedlac) emerged during South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994. As one of the first institutions to be established shortly after the dawn of democracy, Nedlac has played a crucial role in shaping South Africa's socio-economic landscape through its mandate to facilitate consensus on economic and development policies. As part of its mandate, Nedlac must consider all proposed labour legislation and significant social and economic policy changes before they are implemented or introduced in Parliament. (Nedlac, 2024).

Therefore, in engaging the Nedlac Social Partners for this study, one can anticipate a diverse range of insights and perspectives from the different constituencies, with a particular interest in the view of the implementors (Business), the beneficiaries (Labour), and the potential custodians of a policy directive (Government) (Oosthuizen, 2021). In addition, the study starts engagement and debate within Nedlac on the underlying variables related to productivity and emerging workforce trends. This topic has not received significant attention in/from the Labour Market Chamber agenda at Nedlac. South African companies began adopting the 4DWW pilot in 2023, and global trends

and workforce erosion have predominantly driven this push due to hybrid and remote work. However, productivity gains observed in successful companies suggest that, in South Africa, a country facing high levels of unemployment, mainly among youth, and low levels of formal employment, a 4DWW should not be seen as a solution to job shortages. Nonetheless, it can be an effective strategy to enhance productivity, especially in service sectors where measuring and achieving productivity improvements is challenging (Delany and Casey, 2022).

Furthermore, it is unarguable that the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic triggered a global transformation in work arrangements, with remote and flexible work becoming the new standard for many countries that were not accustomed to this work arrangement (Larsen and Levisen, 2024). This disruption prompted a re-examination of traditional work structures, leading many to question the relevance and usefulness of the five-day work week in a post-pandemic world. The 4 Day Week Global non-profit, founded by Andrew Barnes and Charlotte Lockhart, aims to promote and support the adoption of a 4DWW. This follows a successful pilot program at Perpetual Guardian in New Zealand in 2018. The Organisation launched a series of six-month pilots in various countries, yielding positive results, including reduced burnout, higher job satisfaction, and improved mental and physical health (Coote et al., 2020). The pilot initiative has since become the leader in advising businesses and governments on reduced work time. In February 2023, the 4DWW initiative expanded to South Africa, with 28 local companies and one from Botswana participating (4 Day Week Global, 2023).

The 4 Day Week Global has dedicated itself to helping businesses, individuals, and governments work towards a future where productivity is prioritised over working hours and work/life balance can be improved without sacrificing business results (4 Day Week Global, 2024). Subsequently, the research poses the key question of whether the 4DWW concept is perceived to be effective in the South African working context. At present, no related research exists in the South African context, and this study seeks to fill this gap and provide knowledge that will benefit both employers and employees in this innovative working environment. Although the 4DWW is an alternative working hours arrangement, it is vital to ensure satisfaction and deliver cost benefits locally (Campbell, 2023).

Implementing a 4DWW in South Africa offers an opportunity to explore innovative ways to address productivity challenges amid ongoing economic, social, and labour-market issues, including limited access to employment, insufficient pay, and a wide range of inequalities. However, there is limited understanding of how the country's key Social Partners perceive the potential benefits and challenges of this model/concept. Additionally, the legislative and policy reforms required to support such a shift remain underexplored. The recent results from South Africa's 4-Day Workweek Pioneer Pilot have surpassed expectations, achieved unprecedented positive results, and are a hopeful beacon for developing countries (Delaney and Casey, 2021).

1.3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

While the global momentum for implementing a Four-Day Work Week (4DWW) has gained significant traction, its feasibility and implications within South Africa's tripartite governance structures and mechanisms remain underexplored, particularly given the country's unique socio-economic challenges. High unemployment rates, entrenched inequality, and a traditionally rigid labour market underscore the urgent need for research that examines stakeholder perspectives to inform context-specific policy development (Campbell, 2023). Over the past decade, the 32-hour workweek has emerged as an innovative strategy to reshape traditional employment structures, driven by evolving workforce dynamics and shifting employee expectations (Facer, 2009). Insights from the 4-Day Work Week Global pilot projects, including those in South Africa and other developing countries, reveal notable benefits, such as addressing labour inequalities, enhancing work-life balance, boosting productivity, and reducing burnout. Further findings from Brazil and India highlight environmental advantages, including reduced commuting and energy consumption, supporting sustainability goals (4 Day Week, 2024).

In the South African context, exploring stakeholders' perceptions of the 4DWW, particularly within the National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac), is essential. As a critical platform for labour, industry, and government representatives, Nedlac offers a unique lens through which the complexities of implementing the 4DWW can be examined. Despite ongoing discussions and initial trials, comprehensive research that captures the diverse views of labour unions, business leaders, sector representatives, and government officials remains limited (Hamel and Breen, 2017).

These perspectives are often influenced by stakeholders' existing knowledge, biases, and experiences with flexible work models (Pencavel, 2014).

To fully understand the potential of the 4DWW, it is crucial to systematically examine factors such as sector-specific operational requirements, societal attitudes towards work, and broader economic impacts. This study investigates how Nedlac's social partners perceive the 4DWW within the context of South Africa's legislative and institutional frameworks, with a view to future labour-market-related dialogue and policy considerations. In addition, the study aims to contribute to the discourse on labour reform by providing actionable insights for policymakers, fostering informed decision-making, and guiding future explorations of alternative work arrangements. Ultimately, the findings seek to support the development of a more resilient, equitable, and adaptive South African workforce (Davis, 2020).

1.4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to explore the perceptions of Nedlac's Social Partners regarding the potential implementation of a Four-Day Work Week to address productivity challenges linked to South Africa's economic, social, and labour-market issues, and to identify the necessary discussions regarding legislative implications for policy reform.

Specifically, it addresses critical questions about how the 4DWW is perceived as a tool to tackle ongoing productivity challenges in South Africa's economic, social, and labour-market realities. This research examined the perspectives of Nedlac's Government, Organised Business, Organised Labour, and Community representatives on the 4DWW, including its potential benefits, challenges, and required legislative reforms. The goal is to provide evidence-informed insights to guide policy discussions and reforms to support the successful consideration and possible adoption of the 4DWW in South Africa.

1.5. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The following objectives have been identified for this study:

(a) To study the perceptions of Nedlac's Social Partners regarding the potential impact of a 4DWW on productivity in South Africa's key economic sectors.

(b) To explore the key legislative and policy reforms Nedlac's Social Partners believe are necessary to implement a 4DWW in South Africa.

(c) To examine how the views of Government, Organised Business, Organised Labour, and Community representatives within Nedlac differ on the possibility of the 4DWW in addressing South Africa's labour market challenges.

(d) To provide evidence-informed insights that support effective policymaking and labour reform efforts.

1.5.1. Main Research Question

The main research question is to establish how Nedlac's Social Partners perceive the potential implementation of a Four-Day Work Week to address productivity challenges linked to South Africa's economic, social, and labour market issues, and what discussions are necessary regarding the legislative implications for policy reform.

1.5.2. Sub-Research Question

Based on the above main research question, the following are sub-research questions of the study:

(a) What are Nedlac's social partners' perceptions of the potential impact of a 4DWW on productivity in South Africa's key economic sectors?

(b) What are the key legislative and policy reforms that Nedlac's Social Partners believe are necessary to implement a 4DWW in South Africa?

(c) How do the views of government, organised business, organised labour, and community representatives within Nedlac differ regarding the feasibility and effectiveness of the 4DWW in addressing South Africa's labour market challenges?

(d) What evidence-informed insights support effective policymaking and labour reform efforts?

1.6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant because it sheds light on the perspectives of key stakeholders shaping South Africa's future labour market policies. By understanding Nedlac's Social Partners' views on the 4DWW model, policymakers can initiate an informed social dialogue that contributes to decision-making on objectives that balance economic growth with workers' social welfare in South Africa. In addition, the study's findings also stimulate critical dialogue on the future of work, ultimately contributing to achieving a more equitable and sustainable labour market (Campbell, 2023).

Accordingly, the findings could provide a deeper understanding of the intricacies of the world of work in South Africa, while also examining perceptions of leaders of Government, Organised Business, Organised Labour, and Community regarding the practicality of the proposition and its implications for labour law reforms.

Furthermore, this research could inform evidence-based policy reforms to address trends and gaps that affect unemployment, inequality, and economic growth. Drawing on key labour law stakeholders' perspectives on the concept of 4DWW could critically provide valuable insights for legislative changes that embrace emerging workforce trends. The researcher also aims to contribute to the global discussion on innovative work arrangements and their potential positive impact.

1.7. METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

This research employed a cross-sectional design to capture the perceptions of Nedlac's Social Partners regarding the 4DWW, as detailed in Chapter Three, dedicated to Research Methodology. The study included representatives from Government, Organised Business, Organised Labour, and Community sectors to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Nedlac staff with expertise in labour relations were also included in the study. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2013), data is collected simultaneously in a cross-sectional study.

The researcher conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders at Nedlac. The questions posed to respondents are attached as Appendix 1 to this research report and will be further unpacked in Chapter 4. Permission was obtained from relevant authorities within Nedlac to engage with staff, whereas the Social Partners

responded in their respective capacities. Participants were approached directly and informed about the study's purpose, with assurances of confidentiality. The researcher employed a semi-structured interview format to ensure data validity, enable stakeholders to share detailed insights, and allow flexibility for follow-up questions.

1.8. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

To ensure clarity throughout this study, the following key terms/concepts that are of fundamental importance to this study are defined briefly below:

1.8.1. Four-Day Work Week

According to Coote et al. (2020), the Four-Day Work Week is a work arrangement in which employees work fewer than 5 days a week while maintaining the same pay and productivity standards. It is commonly defined as reducing the workweek to 32-36 hours spread across four days, without a reduction in compensation, to enhance productivity and work-life balance (Coote et al., 2020; 4 Day Week Global, 2024).

1.8.2. Reduced Working Hours

Reduced working hours denote a decrease in the standard full-time work schedule, typically from 40 hours per week to fewer hours, while still considering the worker's contribution as full-time equivalent. This concept aims to improve employee well-being and productivity and is often explored in flexible or alternative work arrangements (Messenger et al., 2022; Chung, 2022).

1.8.3. Employee Well-being

Larsen and Levinsen (2021) describe employee well-being as where higher employee engagement, job satisfaction, and individual wellness align. Well-being is a multidimensional concept encompassing physical, mental, and social health, reflecting an individual’s overall quality of life and satisfaction with various life domains, including work. Angrave and Charlwood (2015) define Well-being as the state where individuals can realise their potential, cope with everyday stressors, work productively, and contribute to their community.

1.8.4. Productivity

Productivity is the ratio of outputs (goods or services) to inputs (labour, capital, or materials), often measured as output per labour hour. In organisational contexts, it reflects the efficiency and effectiveness of resources utilised to achieve work objectives (Vallo and Mashau, 2020; Golden, 2012).

1.8.5. Work-Life Balance

According to Bello and Tank (2020), work-life balance is the equilibrium between professional and personal life demands, enabling individuals to fulfil their responsibilities and maintain well-being. It emphasises managing time and resources to achieve harmony between work commitments and personal goals, thereby reducing stress and improving the overall quality of life (Greenhaus and Allen, 2011; Bello and Tanko, 2020).

1.9. RESEARCH REPORT OUTLINE

This research report is divided into six chapters, each addressing a distinct aspect of the study. The chapters provide a coherent and systematic exploration of the Four-Day Work Week (4DWW) in the South African context.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview: This chapter introduces the concept of the 4DWW and situates it within global and local contexts. It articulates the research problem, motivation, and objectives and presents the key research questions. The chapter also highlights the study's significance and provides an overview of the research methodology and structure.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: This chapter critically examines the existing body of knowledge on the 4DWW, including its benefits, challenges, and implementation in various contexts. It also identifies gaps in the literature and explores the theoretical frameworks that underpin the study, including Work-Life Balance Theory, Institutional Theory, and Flexibility Theory.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology: This chapter details the research design and methodology, including the qualitative approach adopted, data collection methods, and sampling techniques. It explains the rationale for using semi-structured interviews and

outlines ethical considerations, as well as methods employed to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Presentation of Findings: This chapter presents the results of the thematic analysis, organised around key themes identified from the data. It includes insights from Nedlac stakeholders, focusing on productivity, well-being, sector-specific challenges, and legislative considerations.

Chapter 5: Discussion: This chapter interprets the findings in relation to the research questions and theoretical frameworks. It critically analyses the implications of the results, discusses their relevance to South Africa's socio-economic and labour market contexts, and compares them with global perspectives on the 4DWW.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations: The final chapter summarises the study's key findings and draws conclusions regarding the feasibility and potential impact of the 4DWW in South Africa. It offers actionable recommendations for policymakers, businesses, and labour organisations, and identifies opportunities for future research on alternative work arrangements.

1.10. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This introductory chapter has offered a detailed overview of the research study, outlining the motivation and rationale for exploring the implementation of a Four-Day Work Week (4DWW) in South Africa. It clearly articulated the problem statement, emphasising the need to understand the nuanced impacts of the 4DWW on productivity, employee well-being, and economic sustainability. Additionally, the chapter defined the study's focus, objectives, research questions, and methodological approach, setting a solid foundation for the investigation. The next chapter delves into a comprehensive literature review, analysing the existing body of knowledge on the 4DWW and its alignment with the study's research objectives.

CHAPTER TWO:
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a theoretical reflection on scholarly analyses, reports, and assumptions regarding the debate over the 4DWW model and its possible impacts on employees. The existing literature contextualises the push for recognition and the reduction of working hours as a historical debate on the future of work. The debate directly relates to workers' well-being, social inequalities, and defining shifting norms around the value of work and individual contribution to society. In South Africa, recognising the potential benefits of a reduced work week may be relatively new. However, it has captured the attention of new literature that aims to unpack its relevance in the country (4 Day Week Global, 2024). These topics are at the heart of social policy research (Chung, 2022). The 4DWW concept proposes reducing standard full-time working hours from 36-40 to 30-32 hours per week without decreasing employee compensation (Coote et al., 2020). This idea does not necessarily mandate a 4DWW but advocates for fewer working hours to be considered full-time equivalent.

2.2. OVERVIEW OF THE FOUR-DAY WORKWEEK

According to Delaney and Casey (2021), the 4DWW differs from part-time work, which involves reduced hours and proportionally lower pay. It also contrasts with a condensed work week, where employees work full-time hours (e.g., 40 hours) in fewer days (e.g., four days) without redefining what constitutes full-time equivalent hours (Chung, 2022). The 4DWW typically involves a full-time employment arrangement in which employees work a standard business day but fewer than 5 days a week (Arsha et al., 2024). This setup often entails working a standard nine, ten, or twelve hours per day over four days, resulting in a work week of 32 to 40 hours. For example, a compressed 40-hour work week might involve four ten-hour days with three days off (Chung, 2022).

The effectiveness and benefits of such a model depend significantly on the structure and scheduling arrangements. Variations can include banked hours, variable working hours, or differentiated working hours throughout the week, all within a comprehensive framework that considers weekly working hours and rest days (Coote et al., 2020; Smith,

2019). So far, the 4DWW has attracted attention as a potential solution to improve work-life balance, employee productivity, and overall job and employee satisfaction, and as an alternative work arrangement that has gained attention in recent years (4 Day Week Global, 2022; Collins, 1998).

Bosch (1999) points out that four possible scenarios of labour markets seem to affect work time policies, each with its own set of implications: there are economies characterised by persistently high unemployment rates and over-employment, those exposed to structural changes such as globalisation, technological change, and the new patterns of the diffusion of competitiveness. (Golden, 2012). Then, 'Europeanised' economies have inherited the tradition of Social Partnerships, with collective and decentralised instruments to adjust wages and working conditions. Finally, the neoliberal model is characterised by high labour market flexibility, flexible wage-setting, and low relative payroll costs. Indeed, among the various 'policy areas', the Organisation of work provides an appealing arena for both pluralism and social conflict (Bosch, 1999).

Hidasi et al. (2023) suggest that, since Messenger et al. (2007) produced seminal work on the economic and social implications of various forms of work-time regulation, the reduction of the working week and the enhancement of paid working hours have received substantial attention from both academic scholars and policymakers. However, scholars such as Venzcel (2024) have examined the many criticisms of the 4DWW, including the challenging nature of implementation, especially for smaller companies, and the disjuncture among colleagues as they spend less time together. These scholars also appeal for an international comparison of work duration, which they justify by an underlying interest in the broader policy issues. A large part of this discussion centres on the consensus that shorter working weeks and reduced hours may become socially and economically desirable within the next decade.

Furthermore, Chung (2022) suggests that social policy scholars should lead the debate on the need for, and the implementation of, the four-day-week policy across various workforces, industries, and sectors. His main motive for the argument is the need for a government-led intervention, with legislative requirements being organised and implemented at that level (Chung, 2022). In the current landscape of four-day-week policies, it is notable that, where these policies exist, they are primarily implemented at the company level, mainly for productivity enhancement and worker

recruitment/retention, which, for many reasons, becomes more difficult to introduce in lower-paying sectors or smaller companies (Golden, 2012).

In analysing the emerging opportunities and challenges in the 4DWW discourse, the global momentum behind the 4DWW offers valuable lessons for Africa. Digital transformation and increasing globalisation could help specific industries adopt this model, particularly in the economic hubs of countries such as South Africa (including Botswana) that have already shown interest in the concept. Nevertheless, structural challenges such as infrastructure deficits, economic inequality, and limited access to technology must be addressed. Moreover, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic still linger across the private and public sectors. Policymakers, businesses, and labour unions must collaboratively explore this model's feasibility and potential benefits within the African context.

2.3. CURRENT DEBATES ON WORKING HOURS AND THE REDUCED WORK WEEK

This study defines labour contribution as the total hours worked by individuals engaged in production-related activities (Schramm, 2023). Hours explicitly worked refer to the time spent on productive tasks (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2024). Vallo and Mashau (2020) describe working hours as the time allocated to work-related duties. A significant aspect of this discussion is the concept of overtime hours, which refers to any hours worked beyond the standard work schedule. These can either be compensated at an overtime rate or remain unpaid (Schank, 2015). For this study, overtime hours are categorised as long working hours. The term "actual hours worked" encompasses both standard and overtime hours, meaning the average hours worked can exceed the standard workweek (Schank, 2015). This study acknowledges the three classifications of working hours: standard hours (40 hours per week), short hours (fewer than 40 hours per week), and long hours (more than 40 hours per week).

According to Collewet and Sauermann (2017), building on the concept of working hours and how working arrangements are set up, it is crucial to understand how these factors influence employee productivity and the significant implications for regulating work time and managing organisational efficiency. Organisations often adjust workloads based on

customer demand, which directly impacts the output levels expected from employees. During increased demand, work intensity rises, necessitating longer working hours to meet production targets (Scott, 2018). This section explores the relationship between extended working hours and employee productivity to understand better how these factors interact.

Genda et al. (2015) discuss synchronisation between hours worked and productivity. In their analysis, they note that fluctuations in demand influence this correlation in various countries. In the manufacturing sector, distinctions exist between blue-collar and white-collar employees, especially when one considers the number of hours worked in a day or a week. As outlined by Scott (2018), these classifications differentiate blue-collar workers from office-based white-collar workers. Historically, white-collar employees worked longer hours than their blue-collar counterparts. However, this dynamic has shifted over time, with many elements, such as highly incentivised paid overtime and extended hours, emerging across the workforce, including among office-based “white-collar workers”. (Vallo and Mashau, 2020).

It is widely acknowledged that extended working hours can enhance employee performance, as longer hours are often perceived as a demonstration of dedication and productivity. White-collar workers work longer hours to showcase their commitment and value to their managers (Genda et al., 2015). In contrast, blue-collar workers operate on fixed schedules, limiting their ability to adjust working hours. This rigidity prevents blue-collar workers from extending hours beyond their set schedules, distinguishing their experience from the more variable hours often associated with white-collar roles (Vallo and Mashau, 2020).

Long hours, organisation thereof, and rest periods significantly impact work quality, life outside work, and overall well-being (Messenger et al, 2022). Workers' physical and mental health, safety, and earnings are all influenced by working time arrangements. Furthermore, decisions about working time have important implications for enterprises, affecting performance, productivity, and competitiveness.

At a broader level, working time issues can impact the economy's overall health, industry competitiveness, employment and unemployment levels, transport needs, and public services organisation (Genda et al., 2015; Messenger et al, 2022). Flexible working

arrangements, such as short-time work, work sharing, and telework, can help mitigate the economic impacts of crises and pandemics like COVID-19. As a result, issues of working time are central to many labour market reforms and developments worldwide (Vallo and Mashau, 2019).

A recent report by Messenger et al. (2022) provides a comprehensive review of working time and its impact on work-life balance globally. The report examines working hours and working-time arrangements, highlighting their effects on workers' work-life balance. Globally, the report finds that over one-third of workers regularly work more than 48 hours per week, while a fifth of the workforce works fewer than 35 hours per week (Antal et al., 2024). Additionally, the report analyses the disparity between actual and preferred working hours, revealing that working longer hours than desired negatively impacts workers' reported work-life balance. The report also explores the crisis response measures implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic to address working time issues, such as work sharing, short-time work, and home-based telework. These measures helped maintain organisational function and worker employment. The report concludes by emphasising the need to promote reduced working hours and flexible working time arrangements, such as flexitime and remote work, to improve work-life balance and benefit both workers and employers (Antal et al., 2024). This is significantly true for South Africa.

In the South African context, Bezuidenhout and Kenny (1999) critically examine the discourse of labour flexibility that emerged in the post-apartheid era, highlighting how shifts in working time arrangements were framed as mechanisms to promote competitiveness while often undermining job security and work stability. Their work illustrates how a tension between labour market deregulation and worker protection has historically shaped policy debates on working hours. Similarly, Bhorat and Oosthuzien (2006) explore the evolution of South Africa’s labour market institutions between 1994 and 2002, noting that while the country had made strides in legislating fair labour practices, inflexibilities in working time and limited adaptation to new work models continued to constrain productivity. These studies provide a vital foundation for understanding current debates around reduced working hours and their implications for labour in South Africa’s institutional landscape.

When taking a deeper look into working time arrangements, working time flexibility is a significant aspect of "workplace flexibility," which is broadly defined as "the ability of workers to make choices influencing when, where, and for how long they engage in work-related tasks" (Hill et al., 2008). Definitions of working time flexibility vary, with some focusing on employer-driven approaches (Askenazy, 2004; Chung, 2022) and others prioritising employee-centred perspectives (Golden and Vaga, 2005). The employee-focused approach emphasises workers' ability to adjust their daily or weekly working hours to suit their preferences and constraints. This flexibility can range from setting individualised start and end times (determined between employee and employer or line manager) to having full autonomy over when work tasks are completed (Golden, 2012). True working-time flexibility also entails access to and utilisation of flexible scheduling options without fear of negative consequences (Antal et al., 2024).

Much research on the consequences of flexible working time arrangements has been conducted at the company level (Golden, 2012). In contrast, economics-based literature approaches the topic differently, focusing on worker earnings and the trade-offs between wages and working conditions (Altman and Golden, 2007; Antal et al., 2024). For instance, Vallo and Mashau (2020) highlight the role of flexible working arrangements in enhancing job satisfaction and productivity. They argue that well-implemented flexible policies allow workers to balance personal and professional obligations, leading to higher motivation and reduced absenteeism. Moreover, their findings emphasise that the success of such arrangements depends significantly on organisational support and the nature of the job roles involved. This perspective aligns with broader literature, which suggests that while flexibility can benefit both employers and employees, it requires careful structuring to avoid potential drawbacks (Askenazy, 2004).

A report by Larsen and Levinsen (2024) describes how the topic has been discussed in the literature, in a for-and-against manner. The literature on the four-day work week has, since the 1970s, been characterised by two opposing perspectives. On one side is the advocacy group that preaches the immense benefits of implementing a four-day work week. This is exemplified in the Perpetual Guardian case and the UK four-day work week pilot, where the experimental findings show that the four-day week improves mental and physical health and increases productivity, among other things (Barnes,

2020; Lewis et al., 2023). This is not a surprising analysis, as the researcher has noted that the literature arguing for the benefits of the four-day work week primarily has been funded by advocacy groups such as 4 Day Week Global, a non-profit organisation founded by Andrew Barnes, also the CEO of Perpetual Guardian and Charlotte Lockhart (Campbell, 2023).

On the other hand, the academic literature suggests that the case for a four-day week is more complex and that we should be cautious about adopting it solely on the basis of findings from pilots conducted in conjunction with advocacy groups (Delaney and Casey, 2022, p. 176). These opposing perspectives have been the leading voices in the discussion since the 1970s, shaping a literature characterised by a tug-of-war over the positive and negative aspects of the four-day work week. Our contribution to the literature seeks to step out of this for-and-against paradigm and nuance the discussion by bringing in practical perspectives from potential policy advocates, policymakers, and industry leaders, offering analysis rather than evaluation.

2.4. THE GOVERNANCE ROLE OF NEDLAC IN LABOUR POLICY REFORM

The Nedlac is a statutory body established under the National Economic Development and Labour Council Act (35 of 1994). The Act positions Nedlac as a consultative forum for social partners (the Government, Labour, Business, and Community) to negotiate through social dialogue mechanisms issues of socio-economic growth and development. Therefore, under the Act, social partners are also required to promote and participate in decision-making as a collective through consensus-building. In addition, Nedlac is required and empowered to initiate and conclude engagements with agreements on socio-economic policy; however, it is mandated to consider all labour market legislation and policies before they are implemented and introduced in parliament. (Nedlac, 1994; Papadakis, 2003).

The National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac) is pivotal in South Africa's socio-economic development, fostering social dialogue and collective bargaining among Government, Organised Business, Organised Labour, and Community organisations. Established in 1995, Nedlac's four chambers facilitate decision-making on labour market policy, trade and industry, public finance, and development-related issues. The image below provides a detailed outline of the structures that are represented within Nedlac.

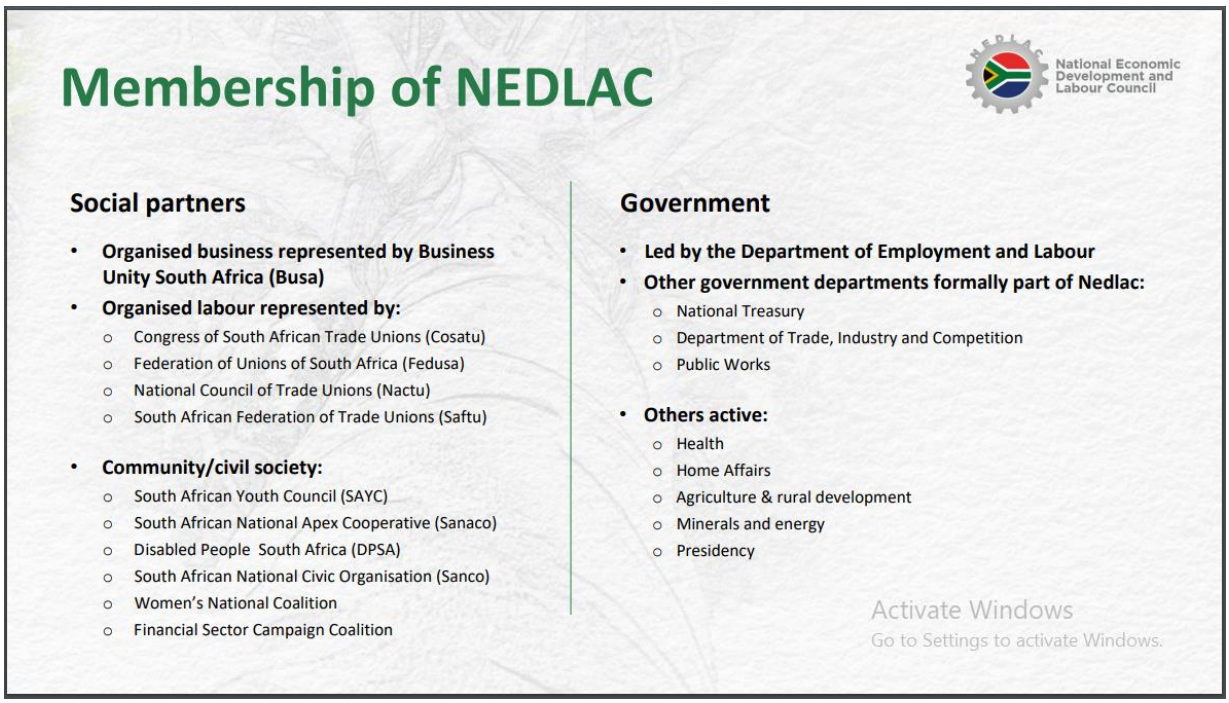

Figure 1: Membership of Nedlac Representation (Nedlac, 2024)

Nedlac is also set up to enable interest groups, legal drafters, and advisors to formulate labour market policies. Research has highlighted Nedlac's extensive contributions to labour market regulations since its early inception (Baskin, 2001) as well as holding engagement, debate, and dialogue on critical issues of economic development (Godfrey et al., 2010) as a response to the research gap in how Nedlac has critically engaged with and documented its position on addressing the urgent need for legislative reform to accommodate the changing dynamics of work, including advocating for a work-life balance for all workers.

Nedlac's institutional positioning enables it to significantly influence and shape labour market governance and policy formulation and adoption. As a statutory platform for social dialogue, Nedlac facilitates consensus among social partners and is well-positioned to research, engage in, and further dissect labour market interventions, such as the Four-Day Work Week, into relevant policy discussions. In this regard, as a governance mechanism, Nedlac enables a platform for bridging the gap between policy design and practical implementation, making it a critical governance actor in South Africa (Nedlac, 1994 and 2024).

2.5. PRODUCTIVITY AND THE FOUR-DAY WORKWEEK CONTEXT

Productivity can be defined in multiple ways, depending on the context and nature of the discussion. The most straightforward and widely used definition is the ratio of output to input, often expressed as production output per labour hour or input divided by output (Vallo and Mashau, 2020). In the manufacturing sector, labour productivity is defined as value added per hour worked, and total factor productivity is also commonly used as a performance index. Total factor productivity refers to the function of productivity, demonstrating that various input combinations can lead to different output levels. The most common 10 and frequently used type of productivity is labour productivity, which can be measured at the industry level (Golden, 2012).

Standing et al. (1996) argue that South Africa's challenges with labour-market productivity are deeply embedded in structural and institutional inflexibilities that extend beyond individual performance metrics. Their study on the challenges associated with restructuring the labour market in South Africa found that organisational inefficiencies, inadequate skills utilisation, and limited innovation capacity remain critical barriers to productivity enhancement. Importantly, they emphasise that productivity should be viewed as a social partnership issue requiring collaboration between government, organised labour and business to create an enabling environment for sustainable work models. This perspective aligns closely with Nedlac's facilitative role, underscoring the necessity for coordinated policy responses to support initiatives such as the Four-Day Work Week. Incorporating these insights contextualises the productivity debate within multi-stakeholder engagement in addressing productivity reform.

The relationship between working time arrangements and employee productivity remains poorly understood, with existing research fragmented across multiple theoretical frameworks. For example, Occupational health psychology models emphasise job demands and adjustment, while industrial-organisational psychology approaches focus on job characteristics and person-job fit. In contrast, economics-based models prioritise worker earnings, assuming compensating wage differentials. However, empirical studies cast doubt on these assumptions, revealing that workers frequently accept non-preferred hours due to employer-imposed constraints (Almantaite, 2024).

For example, according to Scramm (2023), German-based manufacturing trade union representatives perceived that a reduction in work hours would significantly reduce workers' sick days. With this kind of incentive, employers could see a potential increase in productivity and performance. However, Scramm's research also indicates that German private and public sector leaders have argued that adopting a 4DWW would significantly cut economic output. The research questions whether increased productivity is feasible with shorter working hours, particularly in industries like public transport, healthcare, and retail, where workload demands may not be easily compressed and shorter than they currently are (Schramm, 2023).

According to Golden (2012) and Schramm (2023), a common problem identified in existing research is the lack of a coherent theory explaining how different working time arrangements impact employee productivity (Golden, 2012). Previous meta-analyses relied on hypotheses derived from various theoretical models, primarily rooted in occupational and organisational health psychology. These models include "job demands," "work adjustment," "job characteristics," and "person-job fit" (Kelly et al., 2022).

The industrial-organisational psychology approach and the human resource approach form the "business case" line of research. This perspective examines whether companies can benefit from adopting employee-centred flexibility practices (Brewster et al., 1996). In contrast, the labour-industrial relations literature focuses on the institutional and workplace structural forces that influence working time and flexibility practices.

However, empirical tests have provided little support for the theoretical justification of inflexible working hours (Altonji and Paxson, 1988). Many workers settle for non-preferred hours due to constraints imposed by their employers (Golden and Vega, 2005). In contrast, flexible working arrangements, particularly those that allow workers to choose their schedules, are often associated with positive outcomes, including increased productivity and efficiency (Messenger et al., 2022). Companies that implement flexible working time arrangements, such as flexitime, tend to operate more productively and efficiently (Campbell, 2023). Employers may also share the benefits of flexible working with their employees, leading to positive outcomes for both parties (Golden, 2012).

2.6. FACTORS LINKING WORKING HOURS, PRODUCTIVITY, AND WELL-BEING

The conceptual framework presented by Vallo and Mashau (2020) illustrates the relationships between working hours, productivity, and the influence of external factors. The selected factors discussed below include health and stress levels, well-being, job satisfaction, working conditions, and wages. Performance is also examined as a determinant of productivity. While the extent to which these factors individually influence the relationship between working hours and productivity remains uncertain, the literature provides critical insights into their impact.

2.6.1. Health and Stress Levels

The relationship between working hours and employee health has been widely studied, with long working hours shown to have adverse effects on health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, and cardiovascular diseases (Bannai and Tamakoshi, 2014). Excessive working hours in countries like Japan have even led to severe consequences such as suicide and heart attacks, with an estimated 10,000 deaths annually attributed to overwork (Hamermesh et al., 2017). This highlights the necessity of recuperation time for workers to restore their mental and physical health, a principle central to the 4DWW concept (Pencavel, 2015).

Fatigue and overwork are significant barriers to productivity. Golden (2012) notes that prolonged working hours increase the risk of stress and fatigue, thereby diminishing employee performance. Absenteeism, defined as time off work due to illness, and presenteeism, where employees are present but unproductive, both contribute to reduced productivity. Overwork not only impacts individual employees but also strains organisations, as other workers may need to compensate for absences, leading to additional overtime and potential burnout (Vallo and Mashau, 2020).

Stress significantly affects productivity, with high organisational stress levels linked to reduced performance and job satisfaction (Briem and Ólafsson, 2015). Long working hours exacerbate stress, which can manifest as physical and mental health issues such as headaches, heart disease, and depression (Shagvaliyeva and Yazdanifard, 2014). For instance, Park et al. (2010) found that employees working 60 hours or more per week reported higher stress levels, exceptionally skilled and machine workers. These

findings reinforce the case for shorter workweeks to mitigate stress and enhance productivity.

Stress can also influence behaviours like smoking and alcohol consumption, which negatively impact health and productivity. For example, Berniell and Bietenbeck (2017) found that additional working hours increased smoking and reduced self-reported health. Similarly, Virtanen et al. (2015) linked long working hours to increased alcohol use, which, in turn, reduced productivity.

2.6.2. Well-Being and Job Satisfaction

Well-being and job satisfaction are pivotal factors linking working hours to productivity. Reduced working hours, as seen in 4DWW models, can enhance employee well-being by providing more time for rest and personal activities. Angrave and Charlwood (2015) argue that shorter work weeks improve psychological well-being and job satisfaction over time, though high work intensity within compressed hours may offset these benefits (Vallo and Mashau, 2020).

Job satisfaction directly influences productivity. Studies by Oswald et al. (2015) indicate a significant positive correlation between happiness and productivity, with happier workers showing higher effort levels without sacrificing accuracy. Conversely, dissatisfaction due to excessive workloads or poor working conditions can decrease performance and reduce overall productivity (Hoboubi et al., 2017).

The relationship between well-being, job satisfaction, and productivity is multifaceted. While shorter work weeks may increase happiness and work-life balance, the intensity and nature of the work, along with leadership styles and workplace conditions, also play critical roles (Pencavel, 2015). Valente and Berry (2016) highlight that flexible work schedules, such as those offered in a 4DWW, are associated with greater happiness and productivity, particularly in contexts where work-life balance is prioritised.

2.6.3. Labour Market Scenarios and Work Time Policies in South Africa

The South African labour market is characterised by persistently high unemployment rates, significant income inequality, and a dual economy comprising a formal sector

alongside a substantial informal economy (Statistics South Africa, 2023). According to the latest data from Statistics South Africa, the official unemployment rate stands at 32.6%, with youth unemployment exceeding 60%, making South Africa one of the most unequal societies globally. Exploring a 4DWW policy within this context raises important considerations about productivity, job creation, and social equity.

Historically, worktime policies in South Africa have focused on addressing unemployment and enhancing worker protections through legislative reforms, such as the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. However, limited enforcement capacity and structural constraints have hindered the effective implementation of these policies (Golden, 2012). The informal sector, which accounts for approximately 25% of total employment (Statistics South Africa, 2023), remains largely excluded from formal worktime regulations, posing a significant barrier to the equitable adoption of policies.

South Africa's fragmented and unequal labour market complicates the replication of such outcomes. Implementing a 4DWW in South Africa requires a tailored approach that addresses systemic inequalities and the specific needs of the informal sector. It is crucial to ensure that reduced working hours do not inadvertently exacerbate economic disparities or marginalise vulnerable groups further. Moreover, a focus on inclusivity in policy design and implementation is crucial to striking a balance among employers, workers, and the broader economy. Lessons from global case studies should be adapted to South Africa's unique challenges, particularly in fostering collaboration among key stakeholders, including government, labour unions, and business representatives (Statistics South Africa, 2023; Golden, 2012).

As the interest in adopting the 4DWW grows in South Africa, a thorough evaluation of its potential socio-economic impacts is essential. Policymakers must consider mechanisms to integrate informal workers, safeguard worker protections, and support small businesses to ensure the policy fosters equitable and sustainable growth.

The relationship between working hours, productivity, and well-being is shaped by factors such as health, stress levels, job satisfaction, and working conditions. Research highlights that long working hours can negatively impact physical and mental health, leading to issues like stress, fatigue, and cardiovascular diseases. These health concerns diminish productivity through absenteeism and presenteeism, straining

organisational resources. Stress induced by excessive work hours can also lead to harmful behaviours like increased smoking and alcohol consumption, further undermining worker health and efficiency. Shorter workweeks, central to the 4DWW model, are posited as a remedy that promotes recuperation and reduces stress, thereby enhancing overall productivity.

Job satisfaction and well-being play pivotal roles in productivity, as happier workers demonstrate higher effort and performance. Reduced working hours can foster better work-life balance and well-being, though compressed schedules may offset these benefits if work intensity increases. Flexible work arrangements, such as the 4DWW, have been linked to improved job satisfaction and productivity, particularly in environments that prioritise work-life balance.

Bunhlungu and Webster (2006) examine how restructuring within the South African labour market has altered the nature of work, employment security, and worker well-being. Their findings reveal that shifts toward flexible and precarious forms of work have intensified work-related stress and undermined employee satisfaction, suggesting that any move toward reduced working hours must be accompanied by robust social dialogue and institutional safeguards. Complementing this view. Standing et al. (1996) highlight a positive correlation among work engagement, organisational commitment, and employee well-being in South African organisations. They argue that workplace models that prioritise balance and engagement, such as the Four-Day Work Week, could enhance employee satisfaction and overall productivity if implemented within a supportive institutional framework. These South African local studies enrich the analysis of well-being and productivity by grounding it within South Africa's unique labour relations context.

In South Africa, implementing such policies faces unique challenges, including high unemployment, income inequality, and a significant informal economy. Tailored approaches, informed by global lessons and inclusive policy designs, are necessary to ensure the 4DWW promotes equitable growth and addresses systemic inequalities in the labour market.

Countries like New Zealand, Iceland, and Japan have piloted or implemented 4DWW policies, demonstrating varying outcomes based on their unique economic and labour

market contexts (Delaney and Casey, 2022). For instance, New Zealand's initiative to enhance work-life balance and productivity is underpinned by robust social protections and a relatively low unemployment rate, creating a conducive environment for experimentation. Similarly, Iceland’s successful trials revealed significant improvements in worker well-being and productivity without loss of output, mainly due to the country's cohesive labour market and comprehensive social safety nets. In Japan, however, efforts to reduce working hours have faced cultural resistance and mixed results due to deeply entrenched work norms (Haraldsson and Kellam, 2021).

2.7. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The importance of conceptual and theoretical frameworks in an academic project can never be overemphasised. This study is guided by the following frameworks to shape its direction as it seeks to answer the research question. To achieve this, the research first focuses on the conceptual framework, followed by the theoretical framework. First, the 4DWW is explained.

2.7.1. The 4DWW Defined and Explicated

The concept of a 4DWW has been studied and debated since the early 1970s (Campbell, 2023). As back then, current debates focus primarily on its potential impact and advantages, and on whether the reduced workweek may benefit businesses, employees, and society (Almantaite, 2024). According to Cuello (2023), the 4DWW proposal's primary goal is to reduce standard working hours to 4DWW or fewer per week, without cutting workers' pay. Advocates argue that this change can boost productivity, create or save jobs, and benefit the environment through reduced consumption and production (Cuello, 2023).

As the research analyses, various definitions, and interpretations of the 4DWW, a consistent reference is made to the 4DWW as a straightforward strategy that aims to reduce the standard work week to 4 days or less. This allows employees to enjoy more leisure time and family bonding (Wang et al., 2021). According to 4 Day Week Global (2023), a non-profit organisation promoting this arrangement, the core idea is to maintain 100% pay while reducing work hours to 80%, in exchange for 100% productivity.

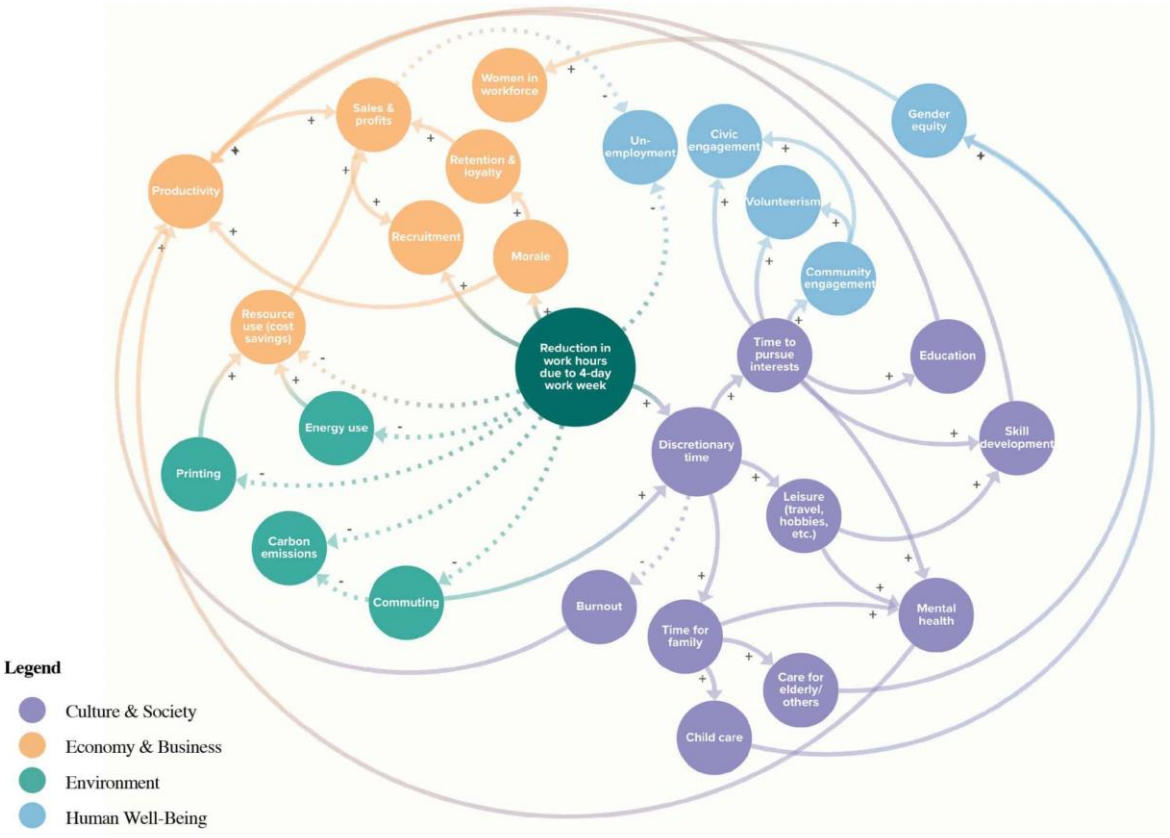

Figure 2: Benefits of a four-day work week (OPG, 2021)

It can be argued that a strong interconnection exists among the benefits of a 4DWW, with one advantage often triggering another in a chain reaction. According to Hancock (2021), the common benefits can be grouped into four key categories: culture and health, the environment, social engagement, and the economy and business, as illustrated in Figure 1 above. While many of these advantages are evident and affect various stakeholders over time, each benefit and perspective often has more complexity and nuance than initially meets the eye.

Therefore, Figure 1 illustrates the interconnected nature of the benefits associated with reduced work hours, highlighting positive impacts across multiple spheres, including the environment, the economy, business, human well-being, and societal dynamics. A particularly striking business-related finding from 4DWW pilots is the significant boost in productivity. For instance, Microsoft Japan reported a 40% increase in productivity during its 2019 pilot, measured by sales per employee, while New Zealand's Perpetual Guardian, a trust management company, observed a 20% increase in productivity (Hancook, 2021). Notably, nearly two-thirds of businesses that have implemented a 4DWW report increased productivity (OPG, 2021).

Beyond productivity gains, the 4DWW delivers substantial benefits across employee health and well-being, gender equity, and environmental sustainability. Reduced work hours provide employees with more time to focus on self-care and family responsibilities. In Perpetual Guardian's pilot, an external evaluation found that employees experienced lower job stress and burnout, along with record-high levels of perceived work-life balance (Barnes and Perpetual Guardian, 2019).

The potential for increased gender equity is another significant advantage. Women, who contribute unpaid labour, could benefit significantly from reduced work hours. However, discretion would be needed to self-manage this balance. The additional time would help alleviate the disproportionate demands placed on women and could encourage a more equitable distribution of household and caregiving responsibilities. For example, when France adopted a 35-hour work week, men increased their contributions to household work and spent more time with their children (De Spiegelaere and Piasna, 2017, as cited in OPG, 2021). Although such changes may not fully equalize labour distributions, they represent progress toward greater gender parity (Hancook, 2021; OPG, 2021).

Environmental benefits also emerge as a key advantage of the 4DWW. Microsoft Japan documented significant reductions in resource use during its pilot, including a 59% drop in pages printed and a 23% decline in energy consumption. Wider research indicates that reducing work hours by 10% could cut humanity's carbon footprint by 14.6%, implying that a one-day reduction in the work week could result in a nearly 30% decrease in the carbon footprint (OPG, 2021).

According to Hancock (2021) and OPG (2021), these findings suggest that while the 4DWW holds considerable promise for enhancing productivity, well-being, gender equity, and environmental sustainability, its implementation must be tailored to address sectoral differences and potential drawbacks. Challenges such as maintaining productivity in labour-intensive industries, managing transitions in workplace culture, and addressing legislative hurdles must be carefully considered to maximise the benefits of the 4DWW (OPG, 2021).

Numerous studies on the 4-day work week such as that of Ashford and Kallis (2013), have attempted to show that reducing working hours can and has led to significant benefits for employees and employers, especially in Europe. These benefits include

reduced stress levels, lower burnout rates, and improved work-life balance. Additional research by Bershin (2023) and the Harvard Business Review found that where the four-day week was piloted or trailed, the shorter work week resulted in decreased employee turnover, increased job satisfaction, and improved overall quality of life. These findings suggest that a 4-day work week can positively impact both employees and employers.

A Cambridge study by Lewsey (2023) noted that shorter work weeks allowed employees to disconnect from work more efficiently, reducing stress and increasing productivity during working hours. This, in turn, can lead to improved job performance and overall well-being. Additionally, businesses that have implemented shorter work weeks have reported reduced absenteeism rates. For example, Unilever Australia and New Zealand saw a 34% drop in absenteeism during an 18-month trial of a 4-day work week (Bershin, 2023).

2.7.2. Conceptual Model

The conceptual model for this study examines the complex relationships influencing the adoption and outcomes of the 4DWW. These include Demographic characteristics (age, gender, occupation), organisational characteristics (social partner constituencies, size, and influence), and institutional factors (laws and legislation, policies, and regulations), all of which serve as independent variables, shaping the perceived benefits (productivity, employment, economic growth) and challenges (implementation, management, impact on certain groups) associated with the 4DWW (Venczel, 2024). The overall perceptions of the Social Partners are the primary dependent variable of this study. Social partner constituencies, size, and influence function as moderating variables, influencing the economic benefits and challenges, social implications (work-life balance, gender equality), implementation and management, and sector-specific considerations. This model suggests that the relationship between these factors could impact the perceived and actual success of the 4DWW in South Africa, with potential sector-specific needs that need to be considered to ensure equitable outcomes (Green and McCann, 2020).

Therefore, the study's conceptual framework centres around examining complex relationships influencing 4DWW adoption and outcomes, including demographic, organisational, and institutional factors. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has

also called for future research to focus on understanding the constraints and opportunities posed by existing labour regulations, as well as the potential for policy adjustments to support flexible working arrangements (Sharpe and Fard, 2022). This is unpacked in the conceptual model below.

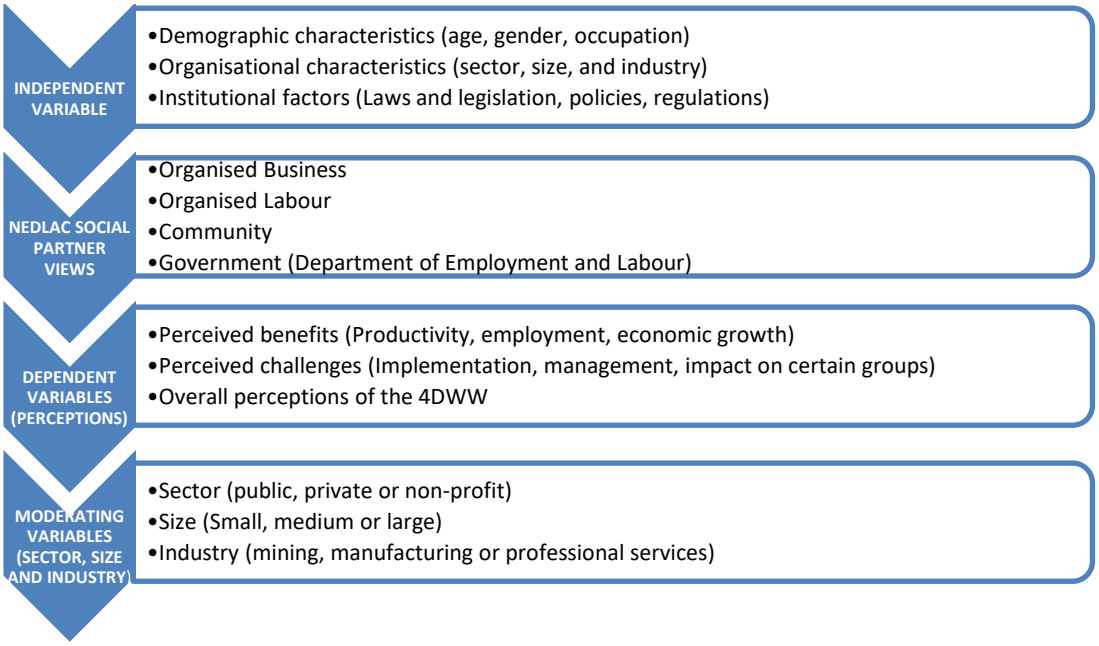

Figure 3: Conceptual Model (Researchers' own)

South Africa's labour market, regulated by statutes such as the Labour Relations Act of 1995, faces challenges in providing a supportive foundation for economic growth (Labour Relations Act, No 66 (1995). Despite high growth rates in the past, the economy has slowed, raising questions about the effectiveness of labour market institutions and wage formation mechanisms (Jones, 2018). Effective labour administration involves collaboration between Social Partners to ensure compliance with labour laws and develop balanced views on the labour market (Smith, 2019).

Labour relations and collective bargaining play a crucial role in shaping the employment landscape in South Africa (Department of Labour, 1995). The Labour Relations Act of 1995 and the National Economic Development and Labour Council aim to promote labour market institutions and collective bargaining (Labour Relations Act, No 66, 1995; Nedlac, 2024). However, the introduction of a 4DWW in South Africa would need to take into account the existing labour relations and collective bargaining framework. Research suggests that implementing a 4DWW may require negotiations with trade unions and

employer Organisations to reach consensus on issues such as working hours, compensation, and benefits (Castellani and Manzuoli, 2017). Moreover, the 2002 labour court ruling on overwork penalty payments and the legislative changes requiring employers to reduce weekly working hours may also affect the implementation of a 4DWW. Therefore, it is essential to engage with Social Partners and consider the labour relations and collective bargaining landscape in South Africa when introducing the 4DWW (Schensema and Rasetlola, 2022).

2.7.3. The National Economic Development and Labour Council Structure

The establishment of Nedlac coincided with the country's efforts to achieve peace and unity in action. In this regard, Nedlac became viewed as a critical part of the new “social contract” between the pre- and post-apartheid structures (Papadakis, 2003). This remains true 30 years into democracy, as Nedlac still plays a crucial role in ensuring that all labour market policy and legislation are developed and negotiated inclusively with all relevant stakeholders. According to Buhlungu and Webster (2006), the changing nature of the South African workforce is challenged by three competing forces. One is the intensified competition as South Africa rapidly integrates into the global economy, another is the country's continued effort to address the inequality gap resulting from the apartheid legacy, and lastly, the need to respond to demands for a more inclusive workplace and society.

To address these issues, a tripartite plus one structure such as Nedlac, becomes a suitable platform for any form of market-related interventions, including policy and legislative considerations, that may need to adjust to the current nature of work, according to global shifts and opportunities that may assist the South African labour market strengthen or become fit for the purpose bestowed upon it by the apartheid legacy and current social challenges. This study aims to explore the perceptions of the Nedlac Social Partners on a growing area of interest, presenting a potential shift in labour law and the nature of work, while also addressing a significant gap in the existing literature.

The study's interest and significance to Nedlac, the organisation, primarily stem from the Council’s aim to innovate and adapt to the changing world of work while providing a

platform for stakeholders to engage and contribute to policy development (Taylor, 2018). The Council offers an opportunity for the partners of the 4DWW initiative to gain insights and perspectives from a broad audience of interested and affected institutions (Oosthuizen, 2021).

2.7.4. Concepts and Models of the 4DWW

Contemporary models of the 4DWW differ significantly from historical models, mainly due to changes in the labour market over the years (Vallgren and Wictorin, 2024). In South Africa, as with global trends, there has been a shift from a predominantly blue-collar workforce to a higher proportion of white-collar and service-sector jobs. This shift, coupled with changes in gender ratios where female employment rates have increased significantly, complicates the analysis of a 4DWW (Statistics South Africa, 2023). The modern workforce, with its varied sectors and employee demographics, presents unique challenges and opportunities for implementing such a model. Additionally, the 4DWW itself has evolved, with several different structures now in use. Some models reduce weekly hours, while others, like the compressed work week, maintain the same number of hours but spread them over fewer days. This diversity of models is crucial to understanding how a 4DWW might function in South Africa's context.

Five basic models of the 4DWW have emerged, each designed to meet the specific needs of different companies and country dynamics of the countries that have signed up for the pilot projects (4 Day Week Global, 2024). These models range from the "Fifth-day Stoppage," where businesses close for an additional day each week, for example, employees work 40 hours a week over four days. Then there is the "Staggered days off" model, where employees rotate days off, for example, where two or three groups of employees have different days off in a week. The "Decentralised" model allows different departments to adopt their schedules, for example, a rotated day off amongst teams, while the "Annualised" model is suited to seasonal work, where average weekly hours vary throughout the year. Finally, the "Conditional" model links the 4DWW to employee performance; for example, employees are incentivised to a free day per week based on their performance (Lewis et al., 2023).

What sets these models apart from part-time work is that they are considered full-time equivalents, meaning employees are remunerated at the same rate despite working

fewer hours. In some pilot projects, such as the one in South Africa, employees participating in a 4DWW arrangement have maintained their full wages, highlighting the potential for work-life balance benefits without financial trade-offs. This is what the 4 Day Week Global termed the 100:80:100™ model, which refers to 100% pay for 80% of your time while maintaining 100% output (4Day Week Global, 2024). The diversity of these models suggests that South African companies would need to tailor the approach based on their industry, operational needs, and employee preferences.

2.7.5. Theoretical Framework

Exploring the theoretical frameworks surrounding the perceptions of Nedlac's Social Partners on the effectiveness of a 4DWW in South Africa requires a nuanced understanding of the existing literature on alternative work schedules and their implications for workers' well-being and Organisational dynamics. The body of literature begins with the foundational study by Lingard et al. (2010), which examines alternative work schedule interventions within the Australian construction industry, which was known for its long and irregular hours, resulting in higher levels of work-to-family conflict and burnout, much more so than office-based workers. (Tijani, et al, 2022). This research highlights the complexities of worker preferences regarding hours and wages, noting that while a shift from a six-day work week to a standard ten-hour, five-day schedule was perceived as beneficial in theory, its actual uptake was minimal.

Tijan et al. (2022) argue that waged workers were reluctant to embrace the change due to concerns about income loss from reduced overtime opportunities, illustrating how economic incentives can significantly shape labour supply decisions. This notion has been supported by scholars such as Groshen and Holzer (2019), who argue that the need to improve employment and earning in the twenty-first century, is far more critical than is given the necessary attention. (Groshen and Holzer, 2019). These two studies provide an important backdrop for understanding the potential resistance to a 4DWW, underscoring the tension between employer demands and employee well-being (Lingard et al., 2010; Groshen and Holzer, 2019).

Building on this foundation, the recent work by Campbell (2023) offers compelling evidence regarding the positive impacts of a 4DWW on various dimensions of workers' well-being. Their study, which encompasses a large sample of employees across

multiple organisations, demonstrates that implementing a 4DWW, without a reduction in pay, can lead to significant improvements in subjective well-being. This research is particularly relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated stress and burnout among workers. The findings indicate that a reduction in work hours can enhance job satisfaction, mental health, and overall morale. As a result, addressing some of the pressing socioeconomic challenges that South African workers may face. The contrasting views of these two studies reveal a critical dialogue about the effectiveness of work-hour reductions in promoting a healthier work-life balance while also highlighting the need for careful consideration of economic and policy implications for workers (Campbell, 2023).

In summary, the theoretical frameworks from these articles suggest that while alternative work schedules can benefit employees' well-being, the economic realities and labour market dynamics must be carefully navigated. The literature indicates a complex relationship between worker preferences and employer expectations, which is essential for understanding the potential adoption of a 4DWW in South Africa's unique socio-economic landscape.

2.7.5.1. Work-Life Balance Theory

In the context of this study, a suitable framework to unpack this conceptual theory is the Work-Life Balance Theory. In work-life balance, the word "work" includes both psychological and physical efforts needed to fulfil the individual demands of one's work expectations. The word "balance" is associated with maintaining stability in all spheres of life (Bello and Tanko, 2020). This theory is based on the understanding that male and female employees face a broad set of daily challenges that create an imbalance between their working and personal lives. This theory explores the balance between working and personal demands (Bello and Tanko, 2020). According to this theory, the study can examine how Nedlac's Social Partners (Government, Organised Business, Organised Labour, and Community) perceive their interests and roles in implementing a 4-day work week.

The theory introduces the concept that a 4DWW can potentially enhance work-life balance, reducing stress and improving productivity (Naithani, 2009). In the South African context, the 4-day work week can easily complement the prescripts of the basic

conditions of employment. However, there are many bargaining councils and sectoral agreements that regulate basic conditions of employment, and for the 4DWW to be fully and successfully implemented by the national government, consensus will need to be reached with the relevant institutions (Hedda Schensema, 2022). This theory helps us understand how 4DWW could help improve work-life integration while adhering to the regulations as set out by the bargaining councils and employers.

2.7.5.2. Institutional Theory

In addition, the Institutional Theory is conceptualised by Scott (2005) as beneficial to structuring the arguments, as it looks at how existing institutional arrangements (laws, policies, and regulations) shape Nedlac Social Partners' perceptions of the 4-day work week. This theory hinges on public administration and public policy, and it emphasises the importance of agile institutions that are well-positioned to proactively respond to internal and most external shocks or just general needs for change (Silva, Macedo, and Thompson, 2023). Nedlac, as the representative body of Social Partners, operates within the institutional framework to shape labour policies and regulations, and any feasible discussion on the 4DWW will be hosted and led by Nedlac in line with Labour Relations Act (LRA). The provisions of the Labour Relations Act provide a regulatory environment for discussions about the 4DWW, and this framework provides guidelines on how the institutional makeup of Nedlac would support or discourage the 4DWW (Phalane, 2019).

2.7.5.3. Flexibility Theory

Lastly, the Flexibility Theory, conceptualised by (Moniz, 2010), investigates how the 4-day work week could enhance or hinder flexibility in the South African labour market. This theory stresses the importance of multiple contexts in which knowledge to be acquired is embedded. This can be linked to the 4DWW can be embedded into the Employment Equity Act (EEA) which is an employment regulatory framework meant to ensure equal opportunities and fairness in the workplace (EEA, 1998) as well as the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, (1997), which aims to give effect to the right to fair labour practices. The contingency theory can link to these two Acts because the theory and the Acts all encourage flexibility in response to external factors such as market

conditions and societal needs and these frameworks can play a significant role in assessing whether the 4DWW would be appropriate for South Africa.

The table below unpacks the strengths and weaknesses of the three above-mentioned theories:

Table 1: Comparative analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen theories for the study. (Researchers own)

THEORY	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Work-Life Balance Theory	Highlights the importance of balance between work and personal life	Overly individualistic, neglecting organisational and societal factors
	Recognises demands of working life on employees	May not account for diverse employee needs and preferences
	Supports 4DWW to improve work-life balance	Limited generalisability across cultures and contexts
	Aligns with South African employment regulations	
Institutional Theory	Considers the role of laws, policies, and regulations	May overlook the individual and organisational agency
	Emphasises the importance of agile institutions	Can be overly focused on structural factors
	Provides a framework for understanding Nedlac's role in facilitating the interactions between different structures in a formal setting	Limited attention to power dynamics and conflict
	Aligns with Labour Relations Act provisions	
Flexibility Theory	Highlights the importance of adaptability in the labour market	May prioritise employer interests over employee needs
	Recognises multiple contexts for knowledge acquisition	It can be overly broad, lacking specificity
	Aligns with the Employment Equity Act and Basic Conditions of Employment Act	Limited consideration of structural barriers to flexibility
	Supports contingency planning	

2.7.6. Integration of the Theories

Integrating these three theories offers a comprehensive framework to evaluate the feasibility, potential impact, and implementation of the 4DWW in South Africa. These theories provide a multidimensional perspective incorporating employee well-being, institutional adaptability, and responsiveness in the labour market. Synthesizing these theories, an overarching conceptual framework that addresses the complex dynamics of the 4DWW within the South African socio-economic and regulatory context emerges. The Work-Life Balance Theory underscores the importance of achieving equilibrium between work and personal life. The theory highlights how a 4DWW could enhance employees' psychological and physical well-being by reducing stress, improving

productivity, and fostering a sense of stability (Bello and Tanko, 2020; Naithani, 2009). This theory is particularly relevant in South Africa, where long working hours often exacerbate stress and imbalance.

Looking deeper into the South African context, the Work-Life Balance Theory resonates strongly, given the socio-economic realities where long working hours often strain employees, particularly those in dual roles as workers and primary caregivers. This theory also bridges discussions with other frameworks by emphasizing well-being as a critical outcome of labour reforms, which institutional and flexibility considerations must support.

From this perspective, the 4DWW serves as a tool to align work demands with personal life needs, potentially leading to healthier and more engaged employees. The theory also identifies challenges, such as the need for consensus among South Africa's bargaining councils and sectoral agreements to ensure compliance with existing labour laws (Hedda Schensema, 2022). Doing so places work-life integration at the heart of labour policy discussions.

2.7.6.1. Institutional Theory: Structuring Policy and Regulatory Support

The Institutional Theory provides a lens through which to examine how South Africa's existing institutional frameworks shape the discourse on the 4DWW. The role of Nedlac as a platform for Social Partners (Organised Business, Community, Organised Labour, and Government) is central to this discussion. This theory emphasises that institutions like Nedlac and laws such as the Labour Relations Act (LRA) provide the foundation for negotiating, debating, and potentially implementing the 4DWW (Phalane, 2019).

Institutional agility is critical for responding to external shocks, such as economic changes or societal demands for improved work conditions (Silva, Macedo, and Thompson, 2023). The theory highlights how existing regulations could either facilitate or hinder the adoption of the 4DWW, emphasizing the need for adaptive policymaking and a cohesive framework for stakeholder engagement.

2.7.6.2. Flexibility Theory: Adapting to Labour Market Dynamics

The Flexibility Theory complements the other two theories by focusing on the adaptability of the labour market and regulatory environment. It emphasises the importance of embedding the 4DWW into existing legislative frameworks, such as the Employment Equity Act of 1998 and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act of 1997, to ensure fairness and equity in implementation. This theory posits that a flexible approach to employment practices can enable organisations and employees to respond effectively to changing market and societal needs (Moniz, 2010).

The contingency-based perspective of this theory ensures that the 4DWW is not applied as a one-size-fits-all model but is tailored to the unique needs of South Africa's diverse industries and economic contexts. For instance, industries with high labour intensity may require different flexibilities than knowledge-driven sectors.

2.7.6.3. Work-Life Balance Theory as the Overarching: A Holistic Framework for the 4DWW

The Work-Life Balance Theory provides the foundation for understanding the core motivation behind the 4DWW, recognised by activists such as the 4 Day Week Global (2024), as achieving a sense of stability between professional and personal responsibilities. This theory emphasises that employees face multifaceted challenges in juggling work demands and personal commitments, often resulting in stress and diminished productivity (Bello and Tanko, 2020). The concept of the 4DWW aligns with this theory by proposing that reducing working days can alleviate these pressures, foster better work-life integration, and ultimately improve individual and organisational outcomes (Naithani, 2009).

Integrating the three identified frameworks positions the Work-Life Balance Theory as the overarching framework for this study, as it encapsulates the primary rationale behind the 4DWW. Institutional Theory and Flexibility Theory serve as supporting frameworks, addressing structural and operational considerations that facilitate or hinder the achievement of work-life balance. For instance, the Institutional Theory ensures that policies and institutional arrangements are aligned with work-life balance principles by advocating for regulatory updates and fostering stakeholder consensus. On the other hand, the Flexibility Theory operationalises the concept of work-life balance by

identifying mechanisms to implement flexible work arrangements within institutional boundaries.

Therefore, by placing the Work-Life Balance Theory at the centre, this study underscores that the ultimate success of the 4DWW hinges on its ability to improve employees' quality of life while maintaining regulatory compliance and operational feasibility. Integrating Institutional and Flexibility theories provides the context and tools to address these broader dynamics, ensuring that the 4DWW is practical and sustainable.

2.8. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Before delving into the empirical analysis of the South African context surrounding the four-day work week, it is essential to understand the broader context in which this analysis is situated. This enables a more informed interpretation of the findings. This section outlines the empirical context and is structured as follows. First, it introduces the concept of the 4DWW and its various models, followed by a historical overview, including early studies conducted in the late 20th century. A summary of key findings from recent pilot projects, with examples from South Africa and the United Kingdom, further highlighting the challenges and successes expressed by employees and employers is also explored. Lastly, an examination of the challenges associated with implementing a four-day work week, including legal constraints within the South African legal context, is presented.

2.8.1. Historical Overview

There is no clear consensus on what the 4DWW entails, as its implementation and effects have varied. In the 1970s, some companies introduced "compressed work weeks," where employees worked the same number of hours (typically 40) in four days instead of five. Early studies on these models, conducted before the turn of the millennium, examined impacts on productivity, job satisfaction, and performance, but results were inconsistent. Many of these studies were focused on manufacturing settings, which may not directly apply to today's work environments. A meta-study of 39 studies found positive effects of compressed work weeks on supervisor performance, job satisfaction, and schedule satisfaction but no apparent improvements in productivity or absenteeism.

Scholars such as Calvasina, Boxx, and Ivancevich (as cited in Campbell, 2023) have presented mixed results, with some finding no increase in productivity or performance, while other more recent scholars such as Wictorin and Vallgren (2024) reflect that earlier analysis of the 4DWW, found higher job satisfaction and reduced anxiety-stress among employees in more diverse sectors. Overall, these early studies indicate that the effects of a 4DWW are not universal, underscoring the need for companies to tailor the approach based on their specific circumstances and the needs of their employees.

As an adaptation to the historical analysis done by scholars such as Campbell (2023) and further additions done by Larsen and Levinsen (2024), this study also looks closer into the evolution of interest in the 4-Day Work week over time. To present this empirical analysis, the evolution can be categorised into the following five distinct stages:

2.8.1.1. The Initial Surge of Interest

The 1970s marked the first wave of intense interest in the 4DWW, primarily in the United States. This period focused on compressed work weeks (4x10-hour days) and reduced work weeks (4x8-hour days), driven by arguments of improved efficiency, reduced absenteeism, and enhanced job satisfaction. Despite the enthusiasm, critiques emerged regarding the anecdotal and subjective nature of findings, similar to those directed at contemporary experiments. In contrast, Western Europe concentrated on alternative work arrangements like flexitime.

1980s–2000s: Decline and Focus on Health Impacts Interest in the 4DWW faded during this period while flexitime gained traction. Studies predominantly examined compressed work weeks, with a specific focus on health consequences. Findings were mixed, with some studies reporting increased health complaints, such as psychological strain and sleep issues, and others indicating limited improvements in well-being.

2.8.1.2. Contemporary Revival Driven by Economic Crises

The period from 2008 to 2012 was characterised by the global financial crisis and rising fuel costs, which sparked a renewed interest in the 4DWW as a cost-saving measure. Research from this period highlighted mixed outcomes, including perceived productivity gains, reduced absenteeism, and improved morale, but also challenges like increased employer costs and childcare issues. Environmental benefits were explored, but their

realisation depended on supportive policies. The focus shifted toward practical implementation, with some organisations adopting the model despite lingering scepticism.

2.8.1.3. Media and Business-Driven Revival

In 2019, the world saw the most recent rebirth of the 4DWW, primarily driven by media, unions, political commentators, and businesses. Notable experiments, such as Iceland's public sector trials (2015–2019) and New Zealand's Perpetual Guardian (2018), drew significant attention. While these trials highlighted potential benefits like improved work-life balance and productivity gains, critiques of intensified managerial practices and mixed findings in subsequent studies, such as Delaney and Casey (2022), underscore the need for cautious adoption and deeper scrutiny of the 4DWW's business case. The COVID-19 pandemic further perpetuated interest in the model, with large sectors struggling to recover from the effects of the forced shutdowns across the globe.

2.8.1.4. Current Scholarly Debate

Contemporary research provides mixed insights. For instance, compressed work weeks in the Philippines' Metro Manila, showed reduced job stress and increased productivity. At the same time, Canadian pilots reported enhanced job satisfaction and work-life balance but faced logistical challenges. Key critiques point to the potential for managerial intensification and the need to reassess the broader implications of the 4DWW model. This historical trajectory illustrates the fluctuating interest and evolving understanding of the 4DWW, with contemporary debates focusing on balancing its potential benefits against implementation challenges and unintended consequences. This brings an increasing interest in the recent pilots emerging globally, with a particular interest in how public and private sector organisations have interpreted their pilot results.

2.8.2. Recent Pilots

In 2015, Iceland sparked global interest by launching the first major trials of the 4DWW, with subsequent trials in 2017. These initiatives, led by Reykjavik City Council and the Icelandic national government, were driven by trade unions and civil society organisations advocating for reduced working hours (Haraldsson and Kellam, 2021). The success of these public sector trials in Iceland encouraged private and third-sector

Organisations worldwide to experiment with similar work structures. In Iceland, two significant trials from 2015 to 2019 involved nearly 3,000 workers who shifted from a 40-hour to a 35- or 36-hour week without a pay cut, leading to lasting changes. By 2021, 86% of Iceland's workforce had access to or participated in 4DWW arrangements (Haraldsson and Kellam, 2021). Among the key organisations supporting these experiments are Autonomy, 4 Day Week Global, and the 4 Day Week Campaign. These groups have facilitated large-scale pilot projects in countries like the United States of America (USA), Brazil, Ireland, Portugal, and the UK, where numerous businesses have tested the 4DWW (Lewis et al., 2023; Schor et al., 2022).

Building on this momentum, 4 Day Week Global coordinated trials 2022 across several countries, involving 33 companies and over 900 employees, particularly in the USA, Ireland, and Australia (Schor et al., 2022). These trials included a mix of industries such as IT, healthcare, and retail and required companies to maintain full wages while offering significant reductions in working hours. Notably, many participating companies were small, with half employing fewer than ten people, and the employee demographic was relatively young, with nearly half under 35 years old. The trials employed a pre-and post-assessment methodology, comparing baseline data from six months prior to the trial with data gathered during the six-month experiment. This comprehensive approach allowed for a detailed analysis of the impacts of reduced working hours on productivity, employee well-being, and organisational performance, which came out significantly successful (Schor et al., 2022).

In 2022, the UK also conducted its most extensive 4DWW pilot, involving over 60 companies and 3,000 employees from various industries, primarily marketing and professional services. Most participating companies were small, with 66% employing fewer than 25 people, and adopted flexible models, often shutting down on Fridays. The trial, initiated by Autonomy, 4 Day Week Campaign, and 4 Day Week Global, collected survey data and employee interviews to assess its impact. Separately, Belgium pioneered the world's first national 4DWW legislation, effective February 15, 2022, allowing eligible employees to work four days without reducing their 38-hour work week, with the option to trial for six months and then choose to continue or revert to a five-day schedule.

From March to August 2023, South Africa conducted its very first and significantly smaller-scaled 4DWW pilot study. This pilot study investigated the impact of a 4DWW on productivity and employee well-being in South African organisations. The pilot involved over 28 companies (27 based in South Africa and 1 in Botswana) and 470 employees from various industries, primarily professional services, information technology, marketing finance, and recruitment. Most participating companies were small to medium enterprises, with 54% employing 11-25 employees and 7% employing 51-100 employees. The South African organisations demonstrated flexibility and innovation in reducing work time, allowing employees to choose their preferred schedules while meeting business needs. By adopting employee-centric approaches, these organisations successfully balanced individual needs with operational requirements, showcasing adaptable and creative work arrangements (4 Day Week Global, 2023).

2.8.3. Challenges and Limitations of the 4DWW in South Africa

A complete analysis of the 4DWW in South Africa requires understanding the local labour context and how the reduced work week, particularly work hours, could impact productivity, employee well-being, and organisational performance. Although South Africa has not yet undergone large-scale, government-sponsored trials like those in Iceland or the UK, there are emerging discussions and ongoing pilot projects in the country that provide insight into how this model might be adapted and its potential effects on the South African labour market.

As of 2023, South Africa's unemployment rate is around 32.9%, with high youth unemployment. The labour force is composed mainly of manual and service industry workers, though there is a growing segment of knowledge-based employees in urban areas. This diversity means the 4DWW could have different implications across sectors, mainly since a large portion of the workforce is employed in the informal sector, which may not be suited to formal trials of reduced working hours (Statistics South Africa, 2023).

Gender inequality also remains a significant issue, with women disproportionately affected by lower-paying jobs, underemployment, and precarious working conditions (Statistics South Africa, 2023). Reducing working hours could positively affect gender

equality, particularly in industries where women are overrepresented, such as retail, education, and healthcare. However, the 4DWW may be more easily implemented in sectors like technology, finance, and professional services, where there is a higher proportion of skilled workers (4 Day Week Global, 2023).

Some South African companies, particularly in the tech, consulting, and financial sectors, have started experimenting with shorter work weeks. While large-scale national trials are still rare, smaller pilot projects are underway within private businesses. For instance, several tech firms and startups in South Africa have adopted flexible working hours or condensed work week models, such as a 40-hour week spread over four days, driven by global trends and the desire to improve work-life balance and attract talent in a competitive market. Early adopters in the IT and fintech sectors have reported positive outcomes, including higher employee retention, increased productivity, and reduced absenteeism, echoing the results of similar trials in other countries (Lewis et al., 2023).

However, adapting the 4DWW model to South Africa's diverse labour market presents challenges. In industries like manufacturing and mining, key sectors in the South African economy, implementing a 4DWW could be more difficult due to their operations, the need for continuous shifts, and safety regulations. Alternative models like compressed work weeks or staggered shifts might be more practical in these sectors. However, they may face resistance from unions or workers concerned about job security and potential wage reductions (4 Day Week Global, 2023).

2.8.4. Perspectives on the Four-Day Work Week

The 4DWW, which involves reducing the work week to four days without a corresponding pay cut, is gaining momentum globally as a potential solution to modern workplace challenges. Across the world, trials, and implementations of the 4DWW have demonstrated positive outcomes, including improved work-life balance, enhanced productivity, and better employee well-being. Countries such as Iceland, New Zealand, and Japan have been pioneers in testing and adopting this model, with results showing that shorter work weeks can maintain or even boost productivity while reducing burnout (Haraldsson and Kellam, 2021; Microsoft Japan, 2019). This shift is further enabled by automation and advancements in digital tools, making the concept more viable, especially in knowledge-based industries (Deloitte Insights, 2023).

The conversation around the 4DWW in Africa is still nascent, influenced by the continent's unique socio-economic conditions and labour market realities. While some formal sectors in countries like South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria show potential for adopting this model, the predominance of informal and labour-intensive industries poses significant challenges (World Bank, 2023). High levels of youth unemployment in Africa also offer a different perspective, with the 4DWW being explored as a strategy to redistribute work and create more opportunities (AfDB, 2022). However, cultural perceptions of work, limited technological infrastructure, and restrictive labour laws remain barriers to widespread adoption (UNDP, 2023; African Labour Research Network, 2023).

Despite the disparities, the growing global acceptance of the 4DWW provides a framework for African nations to explore its feasibility, adapt it to local contexts, and potentially use it to address broader social and economic challenges.

2.8.4.1. Global Perspective

The concept of a reduced working week, from the typical five days to the 4DWW without reducing pay, has gained global traction. It is increasingly seen as addressing modern work challenges such as burnout, declining productivity, and work-life imbalance. Various countries have piloted this model with notable success. The table below summarises countries that have piloted it.

Table 2: A summary of Countries that have piloted or implemented the Four Day Work Week as of August 2024 (Researchers own)

COUNTRY	YEAR OF PILOT	DETAILS OF PILOT	OUTCOME OF PILOT
Iceland	2015-2019	National trials conducted by Reykjavík City Council and the national government involved public sector workers.	Improved employee satisfaction and maintained or increased productivity are widely regarded as successful.
Sweden	2017	Selected companies in the tech and healthcare sectors tested reduced hours to improve employee satisfaction.	Improved employee well-being, but challenges in specific industries where continuous coverage is needed.
Japan	2019	Microsoft Japan implemented the 4DWW for a month to boost employee well-being and productivity.	Productivity increased by 40%employees reported improved well-being.
Spain	2021	Government-backed initiative to test reduced hours without cutting pay in select industries.	Mixed results were successful in some sectors, but there are

COUNTRY	YEAR OF PILOT	DETAILS OF PILOT	OUTCOME OF PILOT
			concerns about feasibility in labour-intensive industries.
United Kingdom	2022	The world's most extensive 4DWW pilot, involving over 60 companies and 3,300 workers across various industries.	Preliminary results show higher job satisfaction, reduced absenteeism and maintained productivity."
United Arab Emirates	2022	The government moved to a four-and-a-half-day work week for public sector employees to enhance work-life balance.	Improved employee happiness and work-life balance, though the adoption of the private sector remains limited.
Mauritius	2023	No record was found of a pilot process undertaken by the country.	Mauritius has enacted a law (Effective 1 July 2023) giving employees the option of a four-day work week and expanding employer-paid leave entitlements to care for an ailing family member, among other key employment-related changes.
South Africa	2023	Pilots for corporate sectors focused on reducing burnout and exploring productivity gains.	High interest from corporate participants.
Australia	2023	Several private companies tested the 4DWW to understand its impact on employee retention and productivity.	With positive employee feedback, companies reported better retention and reduced stress levels.

The pilot projects summarised in Table 2 reveal key global trends and insights into the adoption and outcomes of the 4DWW. The concept has been explored across diverse geographical regions, including high-income countries (e.g., Iceland, Japan, New Zealand), developing economies (e.g., South Africa), and even government-led initiatives in the United Arab Emirates. This underscores the universal interest in rethinking work structures through the visible diverse geographical implementation.

We also see promising outcomes, which are consistently seen across the pilots. Results indicate improved employee well-being, increased job satisfaction, and, in many cases, maintained or improved productivity. For example, Microsoft Japan observed a 40% productivity increase, while Iceland's trials demonstrated widespread success, influencing broader discussions on reduced working hours. However, these trials have also seen significant sectoral focus and challenges. Many successful pilots have occurred in knowledge-based or service-oriented sectors, where flexibility and efficiency gains are more achievable. However, industries with continuous operational demands,

such as healthcare or manufacturing, face more significant implementation challenges (Vallgren and Wictorin, 2024).

The table highlights a mix of public and private sector leadership in the comparative analysis between the Government and Private Sector. Leadership in these sectors becomes an area of interest regarding buy-in. The Governments in countries like Spain and the UAE have initiated national-level pilots, whereas companies like Perpetual Guardian in New Zealand have led the most pilots in corporate innovation. Regarding cultural and economic considerations, the outcomes also reflect varying feasibility based on cultural attitudes toward work and financial conditions. For instance, while high-income nations often focus on enhancing quality of life, pilots in developing regions like South Africa aim to balance productivity and reduce burnout (Larsen and Levinsen (2024).

The global perspective on the 4DWW reflects a growing consensus that reduced working hours can lead to positive outcomes for employees and organisations. However, the model is not a one-size-fits-all solution and must be tailored to local economic contexts, sectoral needs, and cultural dynamics. The promising results from these pilots suggest that the 4DWW could play a transformative role in shaping the future of work. However, challenges such as industry-specific requirements and legal frameworks must be addressed for broader adoption (Haraldsson and Kellam, 2021).

2.8.4.2. African Perspective

In Africa, discussions around the 4DWW are in the early stages, influenced by the continent’s diverse economies, socioeconomic challenges, and cultural dynamics. While there is limited formal adoption, the idea holds the potential for fostering innovation and addressing employment-related challenges. With Africa’s very diverse economies and undeniable socioeconomic challenges, it becomes important to investigate the various considerations in a manner different from that of the global approach. Therefore, these critical considerations become of interest when looking at the African perspective of the 4DWW.

Implementing the Four-Day Work Week (4DWW) in Africa is complex due to the continent's economic diversity. While formal sectors, such as IT and financial services in South Africa and Kenya, may benefit from enhanced productivity and reduced

burnout, informal and subsistence-based economies may find the concept less relevant (Dabalen et al., 2023). Additionally, sectoral variations in adaptability to the 4DWW exist, with industries like IT, education, and professional services being more suitable than labour-intensive sectors like agriculture and mining (Golden, 2012).

Successful adoption of the 4DWW in Africa will require considering cultural and social contexts and policy and legal frameworks. Shifting societal attitudes toward productivity and time management will be necessary, as work culture is often driven by economic necessity (Dabalen et al., 2023). Furthermore, labour laws must be reformed to accommodate reduced working hours while ensuring economic viability (Espi-Sanchis, 2024). However, effective implementation of the 4DWW could provide innovative solutions to youth unemployment and job creation challenges on the continent (Zeufack et al., 2022).

2.9. RESEARCH GAPS

Several research gaps and opportunities have been identified regarding the 4DWW in South Africa. There is a lack of investigation into the perceived impact of working hours and work-life policies on business performance. According to Larsen and Levinsen (2024, p15), “While scholars like Campbell, Delaney, and Casey are calling for more research that critically reflects on the existing findings on the four-day week, literature looking into the underpinning assumptions of the four-day week without evaluating whether it is a good or bad idea, is needed” (Vallgren and Wictorin, 2024).

Section 9 of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997 (BCEA) governs working hours in South Africa, stating that a work week cannot exceed 45 hours (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 1997). The maximum daily work limit is nine hours for employees working five days or fewer in a week. In cases where an employee works more than five days a week, the daily limit is set at eight hours (Staden, 2024).

According to the BCEA, employees are only permitted to work overtime under specific conditions outlined in Section 11 of the Act (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 1997). If a written agreement is established, employees may work up to 12 hours per day without receiving overtime pay. However, these agreements cannot mandate or allow an employee to work more than 45 hours a week, exceed 10 hours of overtime weekly, or require work on more than five days per week (Staden, 2024). These

legislative measures reflect the impact of international labour standards and South Africa's social and economic policies. Notably, the BCEA establishes only a minimum level of protection for South African employees, meaning that these provisions do not prevent Organisations from adopting a 4DWW. (Staden, 2024)

2.10. CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter provides a detailed review of the theoretical, empirical, and conceptual underpinnings of the 4DWW contextualising its relevance to South Africa's socio-economic environment. The chapter begins by exploring the historical development of work-time reduction, contrasting the 4DWW with part-time and compressed work weeks. It identifies the potential benefits of the 4DWW, including enhanced productivity, improved employee well-being, gender equity, and environmental sustainability, while acknowledging challenges like sectoral differences and cultural resistance.

The literature highlights the global momentum behind the 4DWW, showcasing successful pilots in Iceland, the UK, and Japan, demonstrating positive outcomes such as increased productivity and reduced burnout. However, challenges related to sector-specific adaptability, especially in labour-intensive industries like mining and manufacturing, and potential socio-economic inequalities are noted as key concerns.

The South African context is critically analysed, emphasising high unemployment, gender disparities, and a dual economy with a significant informal sector. The review acknowledges the need for tailored approaches to adapt the 4DWW to South Africa's diverse labour market, focusing on sectors like technology and professional services better suited for such reforms. The chapter also highlights the importance of flexible work arrangements, aligning with global best practices while addressing local realities.

Theoretical frameworks such as Work-Life Balance Theory, Institutional Theory, and Flexibility Theory are integrated to analyse stakeholders' perceptions, including Nedlac's Social Partners. These frameworks emphasise achieving equilibrium between work and personal life, the role of institutions in shaping labour policy, and the adaptability of employment practices to meet diverse needs. Empirical insights from global and local pilots are examined, showcasing the 4DWW's impact on productivity, job satisfaction, and employee well-being. The chapter concludes by identifying research gaps, particularly the lack of data on the 4DWW's impact on business

performance and its implications for South Africa's labour policies. This sets the stage for further exploration of the feasibility and implications of adopting the 4DWW within the South African context.

CHAPTER THREE:
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in exploring Nedlac's perceptions of implementing a four-day work week (4DWW) in South Africa. The methodology provides a systematic framework for investigating the research questions and objectives, ensuring the collection of high-quality data that accurately represents the perspectives of Nedlac's Social Partners and staff. This chapter discusses the research design, sampling strategy, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques used in this qualitative study.

Research methodology is the process where an investigator gathers either quantitative or qualitative data or integrates or combines the two and draws insights beyond what can be learned from the raw data (Creswell, 2021). Therefore, its significance to this study is drawn from its ability to interpret data and make assumptions based on the research question (Creswell, 2021). This part of the study covers and outlines how data was collected and analysed to gain an understanding of the experiences and, most importantly, the perceptions of Nedlac Social Partners. This study investigates insights from Labour union representatives, Business leaders, Community/Civil society representatives, and Government representatives working in the Employment and Labour space, who have a government view opinion of the potential effect of such a shift in the country as Nedlac Social Partners. Given the nature of the study, a qualitative research method that involves an in-depth examination and analysis of a particular phenomenon or case is most appropriate for this research. This could be an individual, organisation, community, event, or situation (Babbie, 2020).

3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design serves as a detailed blueprint, outlining the various research processes necessary to achieve the study's objectives (Zikmund et al., 2014). As Creswell (2007) notes, research designs encompass the plan and procedures for a study, covering a range of decisions from initial assumptions to specific data collection and analysis methods. This study is qualitative, employing a case study method to

investigate the Social Partners of Nedlac, and makes use of semi-structured interviews with selected persons from the Nedlac Social Partners (Creswell et al., 2007).

The research design for this study employs a qualitative dataset that covers both primary data information from semi-structured interviews using pre-arranged open-ended questions to stimulate engagement insights and perspectives into the specific context of Nedlac and its Social Partners on the 4DWW. This approach allows for a focused exploration of their attitudes, concerns, and expectations, offering a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon in South Africa (Babbie, 2020). The secondary data entails publications from previous pilot studies and other reports on the 4DWW in the South African context and from other developing economies.

3.3. RESEARCH PARADIGM AND PHILOSOPHY

A research philosophy, as defined by Saunders et al. (2023), refers to the system of beliefs and assumptions regarding the development and nature of knowledge. The interpretive paradigm, also referred to as constructivism, is one of several philosophical orientations alongside positivism, critical realism, and pragmatism (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). Unlike positivism, which uses quantitative methods to test theories and seeks replicability and objectivity, interpretivism adopts a qualitative approach to understanding the world through participants' eyes (Creswell et al, 2018). This paradigm generates rich, context-specific information with multiple meanings and focuses on theory generation rather than hypothesis testing.

This study adopts an interpretivist research paradigm, focusing on subjective realities to explore perceptions of the 4DWW and its broader implications. According to Pham (2018), Interpretivism emphasises understanding the meanings individuals and groups assign to their experiences, using methods such as interviews and focus groups to uncover rich, context-specific insights. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives, fostering a nuanced understanding of how the 4DWW impacts workplace dynamics, employee satisfaction, and perceptions of Nedlac’s role. The interpretivist paradigm is particularly suited for this study as it prioritises exploring contextual and cultural factors that shape perceptions, enabling a deeper understanding of the complexities involved. Unlike the positivist approach, which seeks generalisability and causality, interpretivism captures the lived experiences and diverse narratives often

overlooked in quantitative frameworks (Creswell, 2007). This makes it an ideal choice for a study aiming to unpack the multifaceted nature of the 4DWW and its social and organisational implications (Pham, 2018).

The interpretivist orientation aligns with this study's aim to explore subjective experiences and perceptions of the 4DWW within the Nedlac context. It prioritises exploring cultural and contextual factors that shape how Social Partners and staff perceive their roles and interests in labour policy reform. This paradigm is particularly relevant given the study's focus on understanding the lived experiences and unique challenges faced by stakeholders in implementing new industry or global employment trends that affect the world of work, such as remote work, and a 4DWW (Pham, 2018).

The use of semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method reflects the interpretive paradigm's emphasis on capturing subjective realities (Saunders et al., 2023). These interviews allow participants to articulate their perspectives on the 4DWW and its implications for workplace dynamics, employee satisfaction, and Nedlac's role. The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews fosters an environment where participants can provide contextually rich responses, enabling a deeper understanding of their lived experiences.

The interpretivist approach also informs the data analysis process, which involves thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and insights from the qualitative data. This method aligns with the interpretivist goal of uncovering meanings and understanding complex social phenomena, rather than seeking universal truths or generalisable results.

According to Pham (2018), adopting an interpretivist paradigm and aligning research methods with this orientation, the study ensures that its approach is consistent with its objectives. The focus on subjective realities and contextual insights supports exploring how Nedlac's Social Partners perceive the feasibility and implications of the 4DWW. At the same time, the measures taken to ensure validity and reliability (such as theoretical alignment, detailed documentation, and systematic procedures) enhance the rigour and credibility of the research. This integration of paradigm, methods, and quality assurance establishes a robust foundation for drawing meaningful conclusions about the 4DWW in South Africa.

3.4. RESEARCH TOOLS AND THEIR APPLICATION

A qualitative research method was used with semi-structured interviews, which were conducted to gather qualitative insights, allowing for a richer understanding of individual and collective attitudes, motivations, and reservations about the implementation of a 4DWW (Leavy, 2017). The use of these tools provides a comprehensive analysis of how Social Partners perceive the 4DWW's potential to alleviate specific economic and social challenges within South Africa's unique labour market dynamics (Wolf and Blome, 2021). This triangulation of data enhances the reliability and validity of the findings, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted implications of a 4-day work week (Smith and McDonald, 2021).

3.4.1. Construction of Research Tool

The semi-structured interview guide used for conducting the interviews for the study was designed to gather valuable, qualitative data that directly aligns with the main research question and its sub-questions. Below is an analysis of how the interview questions were designed to address each research sub-question, followed by a diagram/figure to assist in illustrating the interview questions used as a guide's alignment with the research questions used. Therefore, the interview guide captures the essence of the main research question through open-ended, exploratory questions that encourage participants to share their perceptions and insights about the 4DWW to meet the overall study's objectives.

This study employed a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth insights from strategic members of the Nedlac social partners and staff. The interview guide consisted of introductory questions, followed by four main sections addressing the research questions, and concluding questions. The introductory questions aimed to establish the participants' roles within Nedlac and their familiarity with the concept of a 4DWW.

The four main sections explored were developed as outlined in Figure 4 below, as an adaptation of the research question and supporting sub-questions. The sections were separated in line with the following thematic questions, to respond and provide responses as follows.

3.4.1.1. Productivity

Participants' thoughts on the potential impact of a 4DWW on productivity, sectors that might benefit or struggle, and challenges in maintaining productivity.

3.4.1.2. Social Issues

The potential of a 4DWW is to address social challenges, unintended social consequences, and specific groups that might benefit or face disadvantages.

3.4.1.3. Legislative and Policy Reforms

Necessary legislative changes, adjustments to existing labour laws, and Nedlac's role in shaping these reforms.

3.4.1.4. Differing Views of Stakeholders

Perspectives of Government, Organised Business, Organised Labour, and Community representatives on the feasibility of a 4DWW, their concerns and priorities, and the impact of these differing views on Nedlac discussions.

The concluding questions were included to allow participants to share additional considerations, relevant examples or case studies, and any further thoughts on the 4DWW and how the research could best aid the researchers' analysis of the 4DWW in South Africa.

These semi-structured interviews enabled the collection of rich, qualitative data, providing a nuanced understanding of the Nedlac stakeholders' perceptions and or experiences related to the 4DWW. The sample interview schedule, with the detailed questions asked, can be found in Appendix 1 of this research.

The questions were divided into four main themes, based on the four sub-questions arising from the research objectives and the main research question. The first section was focused on Productivity, in response to the following research question.

Sub-Question a. What are the perceptions of Nedlac's Social Partners regarding the potential impact of a 4DWW on productivity in South Africa's key economic sectors?

The second section focused on the theme of social issues, in response to the following research sub-question:

Sub-Question b. *How do Nedlac's Social Partners view the Four-Day Work week as a strategy to address social issues such as gender inequality, unemployment, and work-life balance in South Africa?*

The third section focused on the theme of legislative and policy reforms, in response to the following research sub-question:

Sub-Question c. *What are the key legislative and policy reforms that Nedlac's Social Partners believe are necessary to implement a 4DWW in South Africa?*

The fourth section focused on the theme of differing views of the Nedlac Social Partners, in response to the following research sub-question:

Sub-Question d. How do the views of Government, Organised Business, Organised Labour, and Community representatives within Nedlac differ on the feasibility and effectiveness of the Four-Day Work week in addressing South Africa's labour market challenges?

In summary, the overall design of the Interview schedule (appears in Appendix 1) and its link to the Research Question and Sub-Questions is depicted in Figure 4 below.

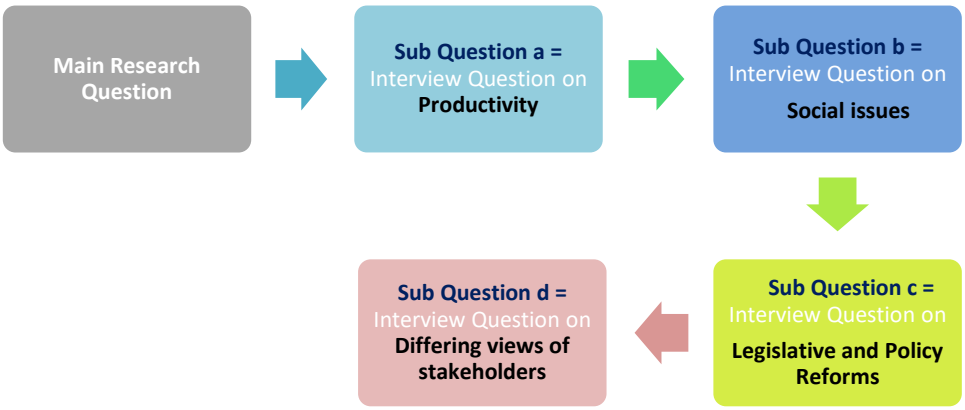

Figure 4: Interview Schedule design and link to research questions (Researchers own)

3.5. POPULATION OF THE STUDY

Leavy (2017) defines population as the collective group of individuals or objects sharing common characteristics, representing the total set of cases relevant to a study. In essence, the study population comprises individuals whose specific traits align with the research objectives, enabling the collection of pertinent and reliable data or information. Therefore, this study's population is comprised of individuals within the stakeholders of the National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac) who are strategically involved in labour market relations, including policy and legislation development, or employee relations. Nedlac encompasses individuals with a diverse range of skills and backgrounds, which in the researcher's opinion, have strengthened the reliability and validity of the study.

3.5.1. Sampling Techniques

According to Rai and Thapa (2015), sampling is defined as a process used in data analysis in which a predetermined number of observations will be taken from a larger population. In addition, sampling involves analysing a subset of the population to make informed inferences about the entire population. This process entails selecting a representative fraction of the population to draw generalizations about the whole. The primary objective of sampling is to obtain an accurate approximation of the population's true characteristics.

Purposive sampling, also known as judgment sampling, is described by scholars Etikan, and Alkassim (2016), as a process that involves intentionally selecting participants based on specific qualities they possess. This non-random technique does not rely on underlying theories or require a predetermined number of participants. In essence, the researcher identifies the information needed and seeks out individuals who are both capable and willing to provide it, drawing on their knowledge or experience.

In addition, purposive sampling is used in cases in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher based upon a variety of criteria such as specialist knowledge of the research issue or case or capacity and willingness to participate. The study employs a purposive sampling method to select key representatives from the Nedlac Social Partners, including Government, Organised Business, Organised Labour, and Community constituencies.

3.5.2. Sample Size

According to Collis and Hussey (as cited in Vallgren and Wictorin, 2024, p34) In research, a sampling frame refers to a subset of the population from which a sample can be drawn. However, when employing an interpretivist research paradigm, the requirement for random sampling is relaxed. This is because the goal of interpretivist research is not to generalise findings to the broader population, but rather to gain in-depth insights into the experiences and perspectives of the sampled participants. Nedlac Social Partners were, therefore, primarily pre-identified respondents whose roles or responsibilities within Nedlac form part of the leadership or governance representatives of the Nedlac constituencies.

This study identified 12 (twelve) participants as part of the study sample. The respondents comprised of namely, 4 (four) Overall Convenors- these are the highest constituency roles within Nedlac, and 4 (four) social partner leaders who sit on the Nedlac Labour Law Reform Task Team, responsible for reviewing all labour laws for South Africa. These members are made up of senior Government officials in the Department of Employment and Labour, Senior Business leaders, who lead Nedlac's Business representation of the Business Unity South Africa (BUSA), Senior leaders of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) representing Nedlac's Organised Labour representation at Nedlac, as well as a senior member of the Community and leader of the Nedlac Community Constituency.

Finally, 4 (four) relevant Nedlac staff members with Labour law-related involvement and expertise, such as the Executive Director of Nedlac who also chairs the Labour Law Reforms Task Team, the Manager responsible for the Labour Market Chamber at Nedlac, and strategically two Human Resources specialists within the Corporate Services and Human Resource Management Units at Nedlac, were also identified. This sample of 12 (twelve) respondents represents a diverse range of perspectives on the potential adoption of 4DWW in South Africa. (Leavy, 2017). In the planning phase of the data collection process, interviews were scheduled with eight respondents, and as per the minimum of five respondents being a recommended sample size for a qualitative study with semi-structured interviews (Vallgren and Wictorin, 2024).

Table 3: Summary of Study Respondents

Respondent Identification	Constituency	Gender
Respondent 1	Organised Business	Male
Respondent 2	Organised Business	Female
Respondent 3	Organised Business	Male
Respondent 4	Organised Labour	Male
Respondent 5	Organised Labour	Female
Respondent 6	Government	Male
Respondent 7	Government	Female
Respondent 8	Community	Male
Respondent 9	Secretariat	Female
Respondent 10	Secretariat	Female
Respondent 11	Secretariat	Female
Respondent 12	Secretariat	Female

As displayed in the Table 3 above, the respondents represented a mix of males and females across all the social partner representative.

3.6. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The primary data was collected using semi-structured interviews with the representatives of the Nedlac Social Partners using pre-arranged questions. The interviews were done with the 12 identified interviewees using an open-ended question format allowing participants to express their views freely while ensuring that the discussion remains relevant to the study's objectives (Creswell 2007).

The researcher started by sending email invitations, as presented in the standard email sample in Appendix 2 of this report. The emails sent to the respondents requested each candidate to be part of the study, with a very brief background given on the nuance of the topic and intention for the study. Once a candidate had confirmed availability, the researcher was able to set up a suitable time and date for the meeting. A calendar invitation was then sent to each of the candidates accompanied by a detailed consent form from the Wits School of Governance, alongside a detailed information sheet detailing the issue of conduct, how the data would be managed, the confidentiality of the respondents, and the overall process of recording and transcription of the interviews. These two documents can be found respectively in Appendix 3 and 4 of this report

Interviews were conducted on an online platform, using Microsoft Team to coordinate the interviews and record and transcribe the discussions. To ensure that respondents

gave consent to the recording, in line with the consent form issues before the interview, the researcher went through the consent form and information sheet to attain the necessary permission on record. The process of recording the interviews assisted the researcher in returning to the discussions that needed to be revisited during the researcher's analysis process.

During the interviews, the researcher introduced each thematic section of the questions, as outlined in section 3.5 above, and allowed the respondent to answer the question, which led to new ideas that stemmed from the questions. The use of the semi-structured approach allowed the discussions to flow naturally allowing the respondent to tap into every element of their perceptions and views of each of the themes, the questions were asked under.

Following the conclusion of all twelve (12) interviews, the data was then sorted and prepared. For the process of analysis. Secondary data was also collected using the desktop research method, engaging with online datasets, journal articles, reports, and policies related to the 4DWW (Creswell, 2021).

3.7. DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

According to (Collis and Hussey (cited in Wictorin and Vallgren, 2024), when data is analysed, the method chosen by the researcher will depend on what type of data has been collected for analysis. This study employs a qualitative analysis, where semi-structured interviews are conducted with Nedlac stakeholders. To analyse the data collected from these interviews, the study uses thematical analysis methods. Analyse the data collected from interviews (McMullin, 2023). The data collected was used to draw insights from the twelve (12) discussions to assist the researcher in identifying the appropriate findings and conclusions (Babbie, 2020). Similarly, Babbie (2020) indicates that thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes data in an informative and enormous detail. However, thematic analysis goes further than this and interprets various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). This is done as this analysis process allows the researcher to identify patterns (themes) within data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a flexible and widely used approach,

particularly valuable when seeking in-depth understanding and nuanced insights from qualitative data.

Therefore, this choice of analysis approach is informed by the intention to explore the realities, experiences, meanings, and the reality of participants, in addition, to how these realities, experiences, and meanings affect the views and perceptions of the participants. The use of themes and sub-themes is considered important because a theme captures something important about the data concerning the research questions and represents an approximate level of patterned response or meaning within the data (Creswell et al., 2007).

The data collected from semi-structured interviews conducted with Nedlac social partners and the secretariat was also further analysed by using a mix of thematic analysis and webQDA, which is a qualitative data analysis tool designed to support researchers in organising, coding, and interpreting textual data (Costa et. al, 2016). This approach ensured a systematic analysis aligned with the study's interpretivist paradigm, which emphasises understanding subjective perspectives and contextual realities.

3.8. METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This study operates under several key assumptions that inform its methodology and the interpretation of its findings. First, it is presumed that all available literature, research studies, articles, and other sources of information reviewed in this study are accurate, credible, and not misleading. The integrity of the analysis is contingent upon the reliability of these sources, as they form the foundation for understanding the perceptions and effectiveness of a 4DWW in South Africa.

Furthermore, ethical clearance was obtained to conduct this research, allowing for engagement with the National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac) Social Partners. It was expected that these Social Partners would be cooperative and amenable to participating in the study and responding to constituency-related questions, and this was achieved. The willingness of these stakeholders to share their insights (whether anonymously or in a non-anonymous manner) was crucial for gathering honest and comprehensive data.

3.9. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study adheres to ethical principles guided by four key concepts: preventing harm to participants, obtaining informed consent, respecting privacy, and avoiding deception (Alan and Emma, 2015). Participants' autonomy, confidentiality, and anonymity were prioritised to ensure ethical data collection. Personal information was coded, and participants may withdraw without inconvenience or pressure. Organisational data was treated as confidential. Before proceeding with the research, ethical clearance and permission from The University of Witwatersrand School of Governance were obtained, as required.

3.10. RESEARCH RIGOUR

Maintaining credibility involves ensuring the soundness and rigour of the research methodology. The researcher prioritised methodological transparency. That is, clearly describing the procedures followed in data collection and analysis. The rigorous application of qualitative research methods, such as semi-structured interviews and scholarly data analysis, contributed to the overall credibility of the study by providing a robust foundation for the presentation analysis of the findings.

To ensure scientific rigour, this study adhered to established methodologies for validating and verifying data integrity. Reliability and validity are essential components of research, ensuring the quality and trustworthiness of the measures used.

3.10.1. Validity of Data

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2013), a measure should be valid and reliable to achieve meaningful and consistent results. Validity in research refers to the extent to which meaningful and valuable inferences can be drawn from the survey or interview instrument. At the same time, reliability addresses the consistency of responses across constructs and the uniformity of the process during test administration and scoring (Creswell et al., 2018).

Validity is divided into two key components: internal and external validity. Internal validity examines whether the survey or interview instrument accurately measures the intended constructs. This research ensured internal validity by designing interview questions that

aligned with the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study, such as the Work-Life Balance Theory, Institutional Theory, and Flexibility Theory. This alignment ensured that the questions captured key aspects of how Nedlac's Social Partners, comprised of Government, Organised Business, Organised Labour, and Community, as well as the Secretariat, perceive the potential implementation of a 4DWW. External validity, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which the findings can be generalised to the broader population. To address external validity, a diverse group of participants was selected from Nedlac's Social Partners and Secretariat, ensuring that the findings reflect various perspectives within the institution (Creswell et al., 2018).

3.10.2. Reliability of Data

Reliability, as highlighted by Sekaran and Bougie (2013), indicates that a measure is consistent when responses across the various items or constructs in the instrument remain stable. To ensure reliability in this study, detailed research process documentation was maintained. This included clear records of how interviews were conducted, the development of the interview questions, and the analytical procedures used to interpret the data. Additionally, a comprehensive database of participants was established, capturing critical information such as their roles, affiliations, and contributions during the interviews. This database ensured data transparency and traceability.

Furthermore, consistent procedures were employed throughout the study to enhance reliability. All interviews were conducted using a standardised protocol, and a uniform approach to coding was applied during the analysis stages of the research. These measures ensured the data collection and interpretation processes were systematic and replicable.

By ensuring validity and reliability, this research establishes a robust foundation for drawing meaningful conclusions about how Nedlac's Social Partners and Secretariat perceive the feasibility and implementation of the 4DWW. The detailed documentation, theoretical alignment, and diverse participant engagement contribute to the credibility and generalisability of the findings, making them applicable to the broader labour policy discourse in South Africa.

3.11. RESEARCHER'S POSITIONALITY

My positionality is further shaped by my academic background, professional experience, and personal perspective, which influence my approach to the topic of the 4DWW. I am positioned as a scholar in the school of governance and interested in development and the labour market. As a researcher employed by Nedlac and currently serving as a manager in the Labour and Development Unit, my positionality provides advantages and potential challenges for the study. Therefore, my engagement with this research topic stems from a commitment to understanding how innovative work models can address socio-economic challenges in South Africa. My positionality also reflects my awareness of the socio-political and cultural context of labour relations in South Africa, where inequality, unemployment, and regulatory complexity are critical factors.

While I strive for neutrality, my interpretation of data and analysis may be informed by my belief in the potential of progressive labour policies to drive economic and social transformation. On the one hand, my role within the Nedlac facilitates direct access to key stakeholders, including representatives from the Government, Organised Business, Organised Labour, and Community sectors, which is crucial for gathering diverse perspectives on the four-day work week. However, this positionality also requires careful consideration to ensure that my personal biases or institutional affiliations do not influence the research process or findings. Efforts were made to maintain objectivity and impartiality throughout the study while leveraging my position to foster meaningful dialogue and access to relevant participants.

3.11.1. Mitigation of Bias

To mitigate potential biases, the following was considered:

(a) Employed diverse data sources, including literature reviews, stakeholder interviews, and policy analyses, ensuring multiple perspectives are represented.

(b) Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process, acknowledging how my position might influence the framing of questions, interpretation of findings, and recommendations.

(c) Peer reviews and feedback were incorporated at various stages to challenge assumptions and validate interpretations.

3.12. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

In conducting this research, the following elements were anticipated and expected in the overall research and engagement processes.

3.12.1. Contribution to Knowledge

This research on the perceived effectiveness and feasibility of a 4DWW in South Africa seeks to substantially contribute to the existing literature in several key aspects, including legislative changes and creating new perspectives in the future of work-social dialogue. In addition, it aims to contribute to the discourse and debate on labour relations and social policy in South Africa.

3.12.2. Empirical Evidence on Work Week Innovation

This study could provide empirical evidence on the viability of a 4DWW within the South African context. While there is growing global interest and research on alternative work schedules, there is a notable gap in literature explicitly focusing on South Africa. This research is positioned to start filling this gap by offering data-driven insights into how such a work week can be adapted and implemented in a developing country with unique socio-economic challenges.

3.12.3. Insights from Key Stakeholders

The study incorporates perspectives from a diverse group of stakeholders, including industry experts, human resources, professionals, union representatives, and policymakers, and it provides a comprehensive understanding of the potential benefits and challenges associated with a 4DWW. This multi-stakeholder approach ensures that the findings are robust and reflective of various interests and concerns, offering practical recommendations for policy and practice.

3.12.4. Framework for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study could inform policymakers and business leaders on the potential pathways to successfully implementing a 4DWW. Developing a strategic

framework based on empirical data may serve as a guide for Organisations considering this transition. This framework may include best practices, potential pitfalls, and actionable steps to maximise the benefits while mitigating adverse effects.

3.12.5. Contribution to Labour Relations and Social Policy

The research could also contribute to the discourse on labour relations and social policy in South Africa. The study highlights how Social Partners can collaborate to achieve more flexible and humane work arrangements by examining the role of labour unions, employee perceptions, and collective bargaining processes. This can lead to more informed and equitable labour policies that enhance the quality of life for workers.

3.12.6. Enhancing Understanding of Work-Life Balance

Finally, this study adds to understanding work-life balance and its implications for employee well-being and organisational performance. By documenting the experiences and outcomes of a four-day work week, the research provides valuable insights into how organisations can support their employees in achieving a healthier balance between their professional and personal lives.

3.13. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has provided a comprehensive outline of the research methodology employed in this qualitative study, which aimed to explore Nedlac's perceptions of implementing a 4DWW in South Africa. The research strategy, sampling methods, data collection techniques, and data analysis procedures have been systematically described to ensure transparency and accountability. By utilising in-depth interviews with strategic members of Nedlac Social Partners and staff, this study has attempted to provide a nuanced understanding of their perceptions and experiences related to the 4DWW. The interview questions were rigorously tested for reliability and validity, and bias was minimised using an interview protocol and transcription verification. The following chapter presents the data analysis findings, followed by an interpretation and discussion of the results concerning existing literature.

CHAPTER FOUR:
DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings of a qualitative study examining the perceptions of key stakeholders and experts engaged in labour policy and economic development discussions within South Africa. The research focused on the National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac) Social Partners and their views on the potential implementation of a Four Day Work Week (4DWW) in South Africa. Specifically, the study explored the perceptions of Nedlac Social Partners regarding the possible impact of the 4DWW on productivity, employee well-being, and economic viability in South Africa.

The study employed a qualitative research design, utilising semi-structured interviews with twelve (12) participants selected through purposive sampling. The sample comprised representatives from the community, organised business, government, and organised labour constituencies involved in labour market policy formulation and implementation and members of the Nedlac Secretariat. Data analysis was conducted using a mix of manual thematic analysis supported by WebQDA, a qualitative data analysis tool designed to help researchers organise, code, and interpret textual data (Costa et al., 2016). In addition, data sources, including policies, academic literature, and pilot reports on the 4DWW, assisted the researcher in coding and conceptualising the themes for the data analysis. Below is an in-depth exploration of the themes derived from the interviews, incorporating nuances and intersections between stakeholder views, sectoral implications, and potential policy outcomes.

4.2. DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher manually analysed the data to qualitatively examine all the in-depth information provided by the participants, with additional assistance from webQDA for the coding part of the process. The main themes relate to the research objectives and address the primary and sub-research questions.

The first step in the analysis involved a manual process of preparing and organising the data. Transcripts of the interviews were retrieved and reviewed with the researcher,

editing and correcting data that may have been incorrectly captured or missing from the transcripts generated by the Microsoft Team. This allowed the researcher to start highlighting themes as they were captured during the interview stages. Following this process, the transcripts were formatted to ensure compatibility with webQDA, and files were uploaded to the system under the internal sources in a structured format. To facilitate analysis, the transcripts were categorised by stakeholder group (e.g., staff, Organised Business, Community, Organised Labour, and Government), allowing for focused comparisons across Nedlac's social partners.

Coding Framework Development, respondents were further identified as respondents and not by name or their constituencies.

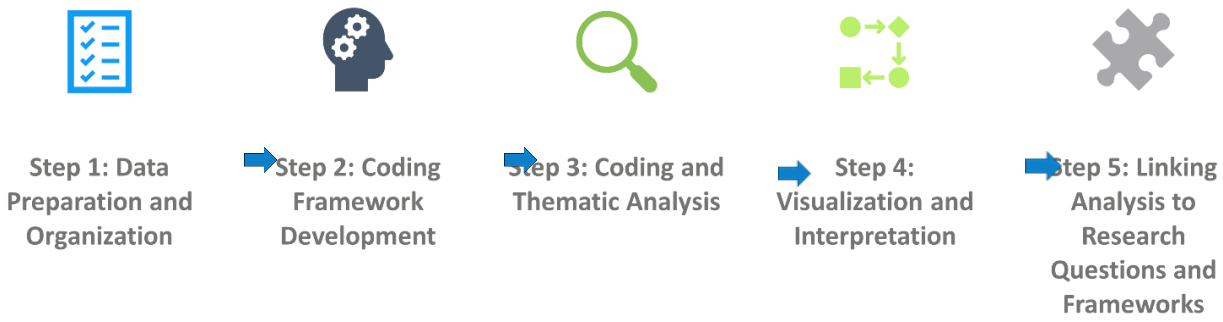

Figure 5: Image of the Thematic Analysis Process (An adaptation of Saunders, 2016)

Braun and Clarke (2006) and Saunders et al. (2016) outline that thematic analysis involves a systematic approach to identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. This approach was selected for its flexibility and suitability for exploring diverse perspectives on the four-day work week (4DWW) within the South African context. Braun and Clarke (2006) have identified six phases, as presented in the image below:

Phase		Description of the process
1	Familiarising yourself with your data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and rereading the data, noting down initial ideas
2	Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code
3	Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme
4	Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis
5	Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme
6	Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis

Figure 6: Phases or steps phases of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

This study's data analysis process adapts both the five steps presented by Saunders (2016) and the 6 phases of Braun and Clarke (2006) to support the abductive nature of the analysis, according to Boyatzis (1998). The first phase in thematic analysis involves becoming deeply familiar with the collected data. This process begins with transcription and continues throughout the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This study's interviews with Nedlac stakeholders were recorded, transcribed, and reviewed multiple times. Notes were taken during interviews and further expanded upon while audio recordings and transcripts were reviewed. Special attention was given to what was said and how it was expressed, helping uncover nuances in stakeholder perceptions of the 4DWW. This process provided a strong foundation for subsequent phases, as it allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the data and ensured that key insights were identified early in the analysis.

The second phase involves generating initial codes by systematically identifying meaningful segments of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Saunders et al., 2016). Transcripts were systematically coded by highlighting relevant text segments and assigning them to the appropriate codes identified in the internal coding framework. This process was iterative, with adjustments made to the coding framework as new themes or patterns emerged. Thematic analysis was then conducted to identify recurring themes within and across categories. This approach enabled a deeper understanding of how Nedlac's social partners perceive the Four-Day Work Week (4DWW) regarding productivity, social issues, and legislative feasibility. In this phase, codes were applied to text based on patterns or phrases relevant to the research questions. Given the slightly abductive approach (middle ground between inductive and deductive approaches) of this study, both data-driven (inductive) and theory-driven (deductive)

coding were employed in this phase. Codes related to productivity, socio-economic impacts, sectoral feasibility, and legislative implications were either derived from existing literature or developed from new patterns emerging in the data.

After coding, the third phase identifies themes by grouping related codes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Themes represent broader concepts that connect multiple codes and provide insight into stakeholder views on the 4DWW. For instance, codes related to "shift restructuring," "flexible roles," and "work-life balance" were grouped under themes like "Sector-Specific Feasibility" and "Social Impacts." Tools such as tables and webQDA were used to organise codes and facilitate theme development. The internal coding framework used in webQDA was developed based on the study's research questions and sub-questions. In addition, the system allowed a secondary framework to be inputted based on the theoretical frameworks, including the Work-Life Balance Theory, Institutional Theory, and Flexibility Theory. Categories were then created to address key themes, such as productivity, social issues, legislative reforms, and stakeholder differences. Within these categories, four specific codes were defined in line with the four main themes and categories to capture nuanced themes. Throughout this phase, the research questions were revisited to ensure alignment.

In the fourth phase, themes were refined and reviewed to ensure coherence and relevance (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This involved revisiting the data to confirm that themes accurately represented the collected information. Sub-themes were created via webQDA to capture more specific insights, such as distinguishing between "continuous operations" and "knowledge-based roles" under sector-specific feasibility. Researchers worked independently to refine themes, then compared findings from the initial stages and themes emanating from the webQDA analysis to ensure reliability and address alternative interpretations.

The fifth phase involves defining and naming each theme to encapsulate its core meaning and relevance to the study's focus (Braun and Clarke, 2006). For example, "Policy and Legislative Implications" was defined as the need for labour law adjustments to accommodate the 4DWW while ensuring equity. These definitions were revisited to ensure they were neither too broad nor too narrow and provided a coherent data narrative.

The final step involves integrating the thematic analysis into the research report. Themes were presented in a structured, concise manner, ensuring logical flow and sufficient evidence to support conclusions. Illustrative quotes from stakeholders enriched the analysis and demonstrated how findings were grounded in the data. Reviewing similar academic research reports, peer feedback from fellow researchers, supervisors, and colleagues was sought to refine the final presentation of results and enhance clarity. Using webQDA, transcripts were systematically coded by highlighting relevant text segments and assigning them to the appropriate codes as identified in the internal coding framework of the webQDA software. This process was iterative, with adjustments made to the coding framework as new themes or patterns emerged.



Figure 7: Sample of a generated Visual tool (Word Cloud) from identified codes (webQDA, 2024)

4.3. DATA PRESENTATION

The below section presents the emerging themes from the key findings gathered from the interviews (primary research) and from secondary sources. This section analyses the study results and the six themes that emerged during the coding phase. In this study, themes are designed to respond to the research questions.

4.3.1. Theme 1: Productivity

4.3.1.1. Potential Productivity Gains

Participants agree that reducing working hours might improve focus, efficiency, and job satisfaction, particularly in roles with clear, measurable outputs. A typical example was

that office-based employees or knowledge workers could work more effectively in compressed schedules. Shorter hours might reduce distractions, idle time, and burnout, translating into higher per-hour productivity.

However, the majority assumption is that office-based and knowledge-driven sectors, such as finance and Information technology, could adapt better to a 4DWW due to existing flexibility in work arrangements, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participant 2: "With remote work already normalised, professional services can restructure workloads without significant productivity loss". Supported by participants 8, 10 and 11

Participants 7, 8, and 10: A four-day work week could lead to better-rested employees, reducing burnout and increasing productivity

There are some differing views regarding managing workloads. Concerns about maintaining the same level of productivity within a compressed schedule were evident, considering that increased workload intensity could lead to stress and burnout, causing more harm than good for workers.

Participant 3: "Challenges in aligning interdependent sectors could hinder overall efficiency"

Participant 7: "The five-day week already feels too short for the workload. Compressing it into four days might not be feasible in many sectors"

4.3.1.2. Barriers to Productivity Gains

(a) Idle Time vs. Management

Participants raised a great deal of concern about the productivity levels of South African Workers. South Africa's productivity challenges are often attributed to poor management rather than working hours. Issues like supply chain delays, misallocated resources, and bottlenecks undermine efficiency. In many instances, the main issues lie in that employees are not "actually" performing their duties within the full working shift or day. Issues such as management finding it difficult to ensure that all employees are doing their jobs as and when they should; may be a difficult task to accomplish fully. Many

employees in the workplace waste time on social media and comfort breaks (smoke breaks, etc.). This then raises a difficult assumption that reducing a day in the work week may not further affect managers' and employers' ability to manage the required levels of productivity, especially in a short week. However, some views saw the potential of reducing distractions and idle time during a shortened week. This may be because of workers want to spend less time idling to ensure that their weekly targets are met to avoid sacrificing their incentivised additional day off, and as a result, translating into higher per-hour productivity.

Participant 4: "The key problem is not an issue of time but a lack of management. Without addressing inefficiencies, reducing workdays won't solve productivity issues." -Labour

Participant 5: "Shorter hours might reduce distractions and idle time, translating into higher per-hour productivity."

(b) Cultural Challenges

Respondents raised an additional point that was not covered in the theoretical analysis, which however seems to be more of a South African Labour market challenge that was brought up. Considering the Labour market landscape with a heavy union representation, it may be likely that workplace cultures may resist the notion that shorter hours can produce the same results. Without strict adherence to focused work during working hours, productivity gains may not materialise. Therefore, organisations may struggle to adopt flexible practices due to entrenched expectations of constant availability, particularly for managers and knowledge workers. This may ignite Unions challenging the 4DWW implementation, especially in labour-intensive sectors.

Additionally, in South Africa, we still see many workers taking work home to meet their deadlines, etc. This tends to extend working hours far longer than the prescribed workday, more so for white-collar workers. This, ultimately affects the effectiveness of the 4DWW.

Participant 1: "I think the way to increase productivity effectively is to ask people to work that time, specifically to be dedicated to work that time. Then,

I think you can reduce the working week from five days to four weeks quite easily."

"Even when people are on leave, they're still contactable. South Africa isn't mature enough to completely disconnect"

(c) Sector-Specific Considerations

Participants raised various concerns regarding using a blanket approach in determining the feasibility of a 4DWW, especially in South Africa. Views regarding inconsistent evidence to support a positive outcome of implementing a 4DWW in sectors like mining, manufacturing, and healthcare, more so as maintaining productivity while reducing hours is seen as difficult to achieve under a traditional five-day work week. The general views were that these industries rely on physical presence and continuous operations, where time off disrupts workflows and outputs.

Participant 5: "Public services, like healthcare workers, already face excessive workloads; a four-day model may worsen strain unless the workforce size increases".

Participants 3 and 11: Sectors with more flexible tasks or output-driven targets (e.g., office work, some manufacturing) are seen as more adaptable

(d) Manual and Continuous Operations

Participants also raised concerns that in sectors like mining, manufacturing, and healthcare, maintaining productivity while reducing hours may be a difficult undertaking. These industries rely on physical presence and continuous operations, where time off disrupts workflows and outputs. For example, healthcare workers already face excessive workloads; a four-day model may worsen strain unless the workforce size increases.

Participant 3: "In a manufacturing environment, time spent at work is important in determining productivity levels."

Participant 5: "Public sector workers... already face excessive workloads, and a four-day model may worsen strain unless the workforce size increases."

Participants 6 and 4: Sectors requiring continuous operations (e.g., mining, agriculture, healthcare) may struggle to maintain productivity

(e) Workload Intensity

There is an emerging concern that came from the discussion regarding the ability of workers to meet current output targets (over the normal five-to-six-day work week), over less and even more compressed working hours. Some participants noted that even five-day work weeks feel insufficient for current workloads, suggesting that compressing tasks into four days could lead to excessive stress and burnout.

Additionally, for labour-intensive industries, this may also result in a Health and Safety concern, where machines are being asked to do more than they should, causing a technical risk, and on the other side, people taking fewer breaks, to meet their targets before their respective log-off times. Therefore, not only are machines being overworked and causing potential resource maintenance problems but also, workers are overstretched and under even greater pressure to deliver the expected targets in a shorter timeframe.

Participant 9: “The intensity of work would increase significantly, and this could result in more occupational health issues”

Participant 6: "Public sector workers... already face excessive workloads, and a four-day model may worsen strain unless the workforce size increases."

Participant 12: "The five-day week already feels too short for the workload. Compressing it into four days might not be feasible in many sectors."

(f) Flexible and Knowledge-Based Roles

Participants’ perceptions of knowledge-intensive jobs (e.g., consultancy, tech roles) and sectors with outcomes tied to intellectual rather than physical labour differed slightly

from those of labour-intensive sectors. Some respondents believed that these sectors or types of jobs would benefit from a 4DWW and would therefore be better positioned to benefit from reduced hours. Some of the rationale was that these workers are already working in less strained and more flexible environments, such as remote work and utilising flexible work resources, including laptops that can be taken out of the workplace and used in other locations.

> *Participant 6: "For office workers, a Four-Day Work week is not going to affect productivity negatively at all."*

Table 4 summarises the coding frequencies and dominant stakeholder perspectives emerging under Theme 1: Productivity.

Table 4: Coding Frequency Summary- Theme 1: Productivity

Sub-Theme	Number of Participants Mentioning	Number of References	Dominant Stakeholder(s)
Potential productivity gains (focus, efficiency)	8	23	Business, Labour
Barriers to productivity gains (management inefficiency)	7	19	Government, Labour
Cultural challenges (workplace resistance, unionisation)	6	13	Labour
Sector-specific feasibility (knowledge vs. manual work)	9	27	All groups
Workload intensity / burnout risk	7	16	Labour, Government

Flexible/knowledge-based roles	6	14	Business, Labour
Total for Theme 1	**12 (all participants)**	**112**	**N/A**

The productivity theme dominated the dataset, reflecting strong interest in sectoral feasibility and management-related constraints. Divergence emerged most clearly between labour (efficiency scepticism) and business (optimism in knowledge sectors).

4.3.2. Theme 2: Social And Employee Well-Being

4.3.2.1. Enhanced Work-Life Balance

(a) Benefits

Participants see the potential for improved family dynamics, mental health, and overall well-being through better work-life integration. This is more so for those who would be able to manage their time effectively, to ensure that the day off is indeed used to better themselves, be more present within family structures, do more fulfilling work or activities, etc. In addition, this may in turn benefit job satisfaction and lessen absenteeism.

> *Participant 10: "A shorter work week would allow more time with family and improve well-being."*

> *Participants 10 and 8: A shorter work week may improve overall well-being, reduce absenteeism, and increase job satisfaction*

(b) Risks

Women are likely to face an unequal burden of unpaid care work, undermining potential benefits for gender equality. Women, especially mothers, may also end up taking on more responsibility within their households including their children, once they are seen to be “at home more often”. Although the 4DWW model may have been set up for good

cause, a compressed work week (e.g., longer hours over four days) might exacerbate fatigue, particularly in physically or emotionally demanding jobs.

Participant 2: "For mothers, a flexible schedule rather than a rigid day off might work better to manage home responsibilities and reduce childcare costs."

Participant 4: "A Four-Day Work week lessens paid work but increases unpaid work in the domestic sphere, primarily on women."

Participant 8: So, imagine the life of a socialite who works Monday to Friday, now having to add a day (Friday) into the weekend, turning weekends into a long weekend, meaning there's more time for parting. There's more time for drinking.

4.3.2.2. Emotional Toll on Specific Roles

Participants further raised the potential relief on the emotional toll carried by workers in various industries, if the reduced day were to be implemented. For instance, call centre workers, healthcare professionals, and social media content moderators often face high emotional demands in their day-to-day operations dealing with people. Reduced hours could help mitigate long-term psychological stress. For instance, workers who tend to be caregivers for extended family or partners, end up taking on more work at home as an “unpaid worker”.

Participant 4: "Call centre workers have to sound upbeat and happy all the time, which is emotionally draining. Reducing hours could help mitigate this."

Participant 1: “While beneficial for well-being, the model might not adequately address existing social inequalities, particularly gender roles. “

Table 5 summarises the coding frequencies and dominant stakeholder perspectives emerging under Theme 2: Social and Employee Well-being

Table 5: Coding Frequency Summary - Theme 2: Social and Employee Well-being

Sub-Theme	Number of Participants Mentioning	Number of References	Dominant Stakeholder(s)
Work-life balance and family time	8	18	Labour, Community
Mental health and burnout reduction	6	15	Labour, Government
Gender implications (unpaid care work)	5	11	Labour
Social risks (substance use, misuse of leisure)	3	6	Community
Emotional toll in caring or front-line roles	5	9	Government, Labour
Total for Theme 2	**10**	**59**	**N/A**

This theme emphasised quality-of-life benefits and gender disparities. Labour and community representatives foregrounded well-being, while business participants rarely raised this spontaneously.

4.3.3. Theme 3: Sector-Specific Feasibility

4.3.3.1. Continuous Service Sectors

Industries like healthcare, transport, and mining may need tailored solutions. Shift restructuring has also been highly referred to amongst the participants if the 4DWW model was to succeed: Alternating teams could cover essential operations, but this could increase administrative complexity and costs. Unintended Consequences may also result in reduced staff on specific days, leading to bottlenecks in production chains

or becoming an overall safety risk for high-intensity sectors (e.g., in mining or public transport).

Participant 7: "Can the manufacturing sector work four days and still meet the same productivity levels? I don't foresee that happening without risks."

Participant 4: "Public services, like healthcare, are already overstretched. Reducing days would strain them further."

4.3.3.2. Public Sector Challenges

The government representatives had a strong caution relating to the Country's already thin public servants, which has in turn resulted in service delivery in government roles being highly stretched. A 4DWW might worsen inefficiencies unless paired with significant resource expansion.

Participant 6: "Can the manufacturing sector work four days and still meet the same productivity levels? I don't foresee that happening without risks."

Participant 5: "Public services, like healthcare, are already overstretched. Reducing days would strain them further."

4.3.3.3. Hybrid Models for Flexible Sectors

Participants felt that businesses with measurable output goals (e.g., retail, client-based consulting firms, etc) could pilot four-day workweeks without sacrificing client service, particularly if shifts are staggered. This can be easily done once there is a revised schedule and potential addition of workforce, therefore also creating additional jobs.

Participant 3: "Knowledge workers with output-driven targets can adapt to a four-day model."

Table 6 summarises the coding frequencies and dominant stakeholder perspectives emerging under Theme 3: Sector-Specific Feasibility.

Table 6: Coding Frequency Summary - Theme 3: Sector-Specific Feasibility

Sub-Theme	Number of Participants Mentioning	Number of References	Dominant Stakeholder(s)
Continuous service sectors (health, mining, transport)	8	22	Government, Business
Public sector service delivery capacity	6	15	Government
Hybrid or staggered models	5	10	Business
Industry adaptability (output-driven vs. manual)	7	16	Labour, Business
Total for Theme 3	**11**	**63**	**N/A**

Divergent sectoral realities underpinned this theme. Participants stressed differentiated implementation, highlighting how corporatist dialogue at Nedlac must mediate across heterogeneous economic sectors.

4.3.4. Theme 4: Implementation Challenges

4.3.4.1. Economic and Structural Hurdles

Participants raised a crucial consideration in implementing a 4DWW regarding the potential impact on workers' wages. Many individuals rely heavily on their regular income and live pay-check-to-pay-check, leaving them vulnerable to financial instability. A reduced working hours, even to improve work-life balance, may evoke concerns among workers that their income will be reduced. Implementing a full-pay model, where

workers receive their regular salary for reduced hours, may alleviate these concerns but could also strain businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Additionally, respondents felt that some organisations may struggle to adopt flexible practices due to entrenched expectations of constant availability, particularly for managers and knowledge workers.

Participant 1 "The hourly wage structure complicates implementation. How do you ensure workers are paid the same if hours are reduced?"

"Staggered shifts increase administrative burdens, particularly in sectors that rely on synchronised operations."

Participants 6 and 11: The hourly wage structure in South Africa complicates implementation, as reduced hours may lower income unless hourly rates are adjusted.

4.3.4.2. Cultural Resistance

Primary research conducted by this study revealed an emerging sub-theme that was not covered in the researcher's theoretical analysis. Notably, the literature review conducted in Chapter 2 had a scarcity of this phenomenon. There is a strong perception that introducing a 4DWW also raises concerns regarding administrative complexity. Implementing staggered shifts or overlapping schedules designed to ensure continuity of operations can significantly increase administrative burdens. This is particularly pronounced in interdependent sectors, where coordinating schedules and workflows is critical. The added complexity may necessitate investments in new administrative systems, training, and new personnel, which could offset the potential benefits of the 4DWW. As such, policymakers and organisational leaders must carefully consider these challenges and develop strategies to mitigate them.

In addition, leveraging automation and process optimisation could support productivity while allowing fewer working hours. However, this requires substantial investment and cultural change within the workforce, which would need a great deal of buy-in, canvasing, and engagement with employees.

Participant 1: "Even when people are on leave, they're still contactable. South Africa isn't mature enough to completely disconnect." -Business.

Participants 3 and 10: Transitioning to a four-day model might temporarily lower morale or productivity due to the cultural and operational shift.

Table 7 summarises the coding frequencies and dominant stakeholder perspectives emerging under Theme 4: Implementation Challenges

Table 7: Coding Frequency Summary - Theme 4: Implementation Challenges

Sub-Theme	Number of Participants Mentioning	Number of References	Dominant Stakeholder(s)
Economic feasibility (wage, SME strain)	7	19	Business
Structural and administrative hurdles	6	13	Government
Cultural resistance/readiness	8	21	Labour, Business
Management and supervision issues	5	10	Labour
Technological adaptation/automation	4	7	Business
Total for Theme 4	**12**	**70**	**N/A**

Implementation issues revealed structural weaknesses and attitudinal barriers to reform. Governance insight: institutional change depends on coordination across state, business, and labour systems

4.3.5. Theme 5: Legislative And Policy Perspectives

4.3.5.1. Legislative Framework

Notwithstanding the potential benefits of a 4DWW, the legislative framework governing employment in South Africa is a critical consideration that has been repeatedly raised.

However, based on expert opinions, it appears that the existing labour laws, such as the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA), possess sufficient flexibility to accommodate reduced work weeks without necessitating formal legislative amendments. This flexibility is crucial, enabling organisations to explore alternative work arrangements without being unduly constrained by regulatory requirements.

However, there were views made regarding amendments to the BCEA that may be helpful, especially regarding maximum working hours and overtime provisions, currently sitting at 40 hours. Additionally, amendments to the current Occupational Health and Safety regulations might need updates to reflect ergonomic considerations that may become important once workforces are overstretched.

To facilitate the successful implementation of 4DWWs, developing a code of good practice could provide invaluable guidance for companies navigating this model. Such a code would offer a framework for ensuring fairness and productivity benchmarks are met, mitigating potential risks and challenges associated with reduced work weeks. By establishing clear guidelines and standards, a code of good practice could help to promote the adoption of 4DWWs in a manner that balances the needs of both employers and employees.

Participants 8,10,11 and 12: The BCEA would need adjustments to accommodate flexible work arrangements without increasing regulatory burdens.

Participants: 7, 9, and 12: A possible code or good practice could be developed with sector-specific determinations to support the 4DWW implementation.

Table 8 summarises the coding frequencies and dominant stakeholder perspectives emerging under Theme 5: Legislative and Policy Perspectives.

Table 8: Coding Frequency Summary -Theme 5: Legislative and Policy Perspectives

Sub-Theme	Number of Participants Mentioning	Number of References	Dominant Stakeholder(s)
Legislative flexibility (BCEA adequacy)	7	15	Government, Business
Code of good practice / sectoral determinations	5	12	Government
Occupational health and safety considerations	4	8	Labour
Need for policy guidance (not new law)	6	10	All
Total for Theme 5	**10**	**45**	**N/A**

Stakeholders acknowledged South Africa's flexible legal framework but called for formalised guidance. Nedlac's policy-incubation role was implicit in several interviews.

4.3.6. Theme 6: Role of Nedlac and Stakeholder Perspectives

The underlying and emerging view regarding Nedlac's primary role was that the institution should facilitate dialogue and not advocate for policies. If Social Partners prioritises the need for engagement and consideration of a four-day work week, Nedlac could oversee research and coordinate discussions. However, Nedlac's primary role is facilitating social dialogue, which is not necessarily an advocacy platform.

A nuanced examination of the perspectives on the 4DWW concept reveals diverging views among key stakeholders. Organised Labour groups essentially endorse the 4DWW, citing its potential to foster improved work-life balance and promote more significant employee equity. Conversely, organised business representatives express both support and concerns regarding the financial feasibility of implementing a 4DWW,

worrying that reduced working hours may compromise productivity and output. They also note that the successes made by the pilot projects in the country are progressive.

The government's stance on the 4DWW is also multilayered. While acknowledging the model's potential benefits, policymakers may be hesitant to introduce new regulations, instead prioritising the protection of existing employment standards, which may be seen as a far more excellent opportunity in comparison. This cautious approach reflects the government's commitment to preserving the stability of the labour market.

Social Partners from the Community were, to a large degree, also in support of the engagement to unpack the 4DWW model at Nedlac, more so as the constituency had brought up the topic during the Job Summit engagements in 2018. However, it noted that broad information data needs to be considered to explore the concept in the country entirely.

The disparate priorities of stakeholders may create challenges for collaborative discussions, particularly within the Nedlac. Should the topic or study make its way to Nedlac for consideration, an effective dialogue and negotiation among specifically the social partners in the Labour Market Chamber consisting of Organised Labour, Organised Business, and Government representatives, is crucial in navigating these differences and developing a cohesive strategy for implementing the 4DWW. This is especially essential where all facts, statistics, research, and supporting information are adequately presented. Therefore, before any form of in-depth engagement, this kind of data would need to be given to the social partners before the dialogue to assist in developing their respective positions and mandates.

It was also interesting to note the views of the Secretariat, who manage, curate, and coordinate these engagements with the various social partners. In unpacking their perspectives in the views of each social partner, especially the three in the Labour Market Chamber, there was a precise and uniform anticipated position, which the respondents indeed confirmed.

> *Participant 9: "Organised labour would likely support the concept as long as wages are preserved, but businesses are unlikely to agree without demonstrated financial benefits.*

Participant 7: "Nedlac's role is to facilitate social dialogue. It's not an advocacy platform unless partners explicitly bring an issue to the table."

Table 9 summarises the coding frequencies and dominant stakeholder perspectives emerging under Theme 6: Role of Nedlac and Stakeholder Perspectives. Table 9: Coding Frequency Summary -Theme 6: Role of Nedlac and Stakeholder Perspectives.

Table 9: Coding Frequency Summary - Theme 6: Role of Nedlac and Stakeholder Perspectives

Sub-Theme	**Number of Participants Mentioning**	**Natinal of References**	**Dominant Stakeholder(s)**
NEDLAC's facilitative vs. advocacy role	9	23	All
Divergent stakeholder interests	8	20	Labour and Business
Dialogue and consensus-building potential	7	16	Government, Labour
Data and evidence are needed before policy engagement	6	13	Secretariat, Business
Institutional legitimacy/trust in process	5	10	Government
Total for Theme 6	**12**	**82**	**N/A**

4.4. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has comprehensively investigated stakeholder perceptions regarding the feasibility and implications of implementing a Four-Day Work Week (4DWW) in South Africa. The findings reveal a complex interaction of prospects and challenges across different sectors, with significant variation in flexibility based on the nature of work, industry requirements, and existing workplace cultures. While sectors such as knowledge-based industries and professional services appear poised to benefit from reduced work hours through improved productivity and employee well-being, labour-intensive and continuous operation industries face notable barriers, including increased workload intensity, potential safety concerns, and administrative complexities.

Participants highlighted the potential for enhanced work-life balance, emotional relief for employees, and broader societal benefits like gender equity and environmental sustainability. However, these positive outcomes are tempered by concerns over structural inefficiencies, cultural resistance, and the risk of exacerbating inequality. Legislative frameworks, while adaptable, would require strategic updates to support this transition effectively, with additional suggestions of a code of good practice being referenced as a suggested alternative.

The study underscores the need for tailored, sector-specific approaches rather than a one-size-fits-all solution. Supported by comprehensive data collection and analysis, pilot programs were recommended as a critical step toward assessing the practicality and scalability of the 4DWW in the South African context. Furthermore, fostering collaboration among Nedlac's social partners, supported by clear policy guidelines and management training, is essential for addressing the diverse and sometimes conflicting priorities of stakeholders. As South Africa considers global learnings and local challenges, a cautious, inclusive, and flexible approach will be key to realising the potential benefits of a 4DWW while mitigating its risks.

As the next chapter discusses, these findings underscore the centrality of Nedlac as both a governance mechanism and a political space, however, one that bridges government and society through structured participation. The observed tensions and alignments among stakeholders provide valuable insight into how tripartite institutions navigate reform in an environment marked by economic uncertainty and social demand.

Thus, Chapter 5 builds on these empirical patterns to critically interpret their significance for governance theory, institutional practice, and policy development. It situates the 4DWW discourse within broader debates about participatory governance, deliberative democracy, and policy legitimacy, examining what these dynamics reveal about the evolving nature of social dialogue and collective decision-making in South Africa.

CHAPTER FIVE:
DISCUSSION

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an in-depth discussion of the findings regarding the Nedlac Social Partners' perceptions of the 4-day work week (4DWW) in South Africa, which have revealed emerging themes. The discussion integrates key insights from the qualitative data, drawing connections to the study's objectives, theoretical frameworks, and relevant literature. The chapter addresses the potential productivity impacts, socio-economic implications, legislative requirements, and implementation challenges of the 4DWW. It also reflects on the broader impact on labour relations and policy development within South Africa's unique socio-economic landscape.

5.2. DISCUSSION OF THEMES

The themes that emerged from the research findings are discussed in the section below. Additionally, each theme has been linked to the study's objectives. To restate, the study objectives are as follows:

(a) To study the perceptions of Nedlac's Social Partners regarding the potential impact of a 4DWW on productivity in South Africa's key economic sectors.

(b) To explore the key legislative and policy reforms Nedlac's Social Partners believe are necessary to implement a 4DWW in South Africa.

(c) To examine the views of Government, Organised Business, Organised Labour, and Community representatives within Nedlac differ on the feasibility and effectiveness of the 4DWW in addressing South Africa's labour market challenges

(d) To provide evidence-informed insights that support effective policymaking and labour reform efforts.

The table below shows the link between each study finding and the research objectives.

Table 10: Link between Study theme/findings and the research objectives

Emerging Theme (Findings)	Study Objective Link
Productivity and Sectoral Variations	Objective 1: To study the perceptions of Nedlac's Social Partners regarding the potential impact of a 4DWW on productivity.
Social and Employee Well-being	Objective 1 and 4: To study perceptions of productivity and provide evidence-informed insights for policymaking.
Sector-Specific Considerations	Objective 1 and 3: To explore sectoral challenges and differing views on the 4DWW's feasibility across sectors.
Legislative and Policy Implications	Objective 2: To explore legislative and policy reforms necessary for 4DWW implementation.
Stakeholder Dynamics and Implementation Challenges	Objective 3: To examine differing views among Nedlac representatives on the feasibility of the 4DWW.
Broader Implications for Policy and Practice	Objective 4: To provide evidence-informed insights for effective policymaking and labour reform efforts.

The section below further discusses each finding under the themes that emerged during the data analysis process.

5.2.1. Theme 1: Productivity and Sectoral Variations

The findings highlight a spectrum of productivity outcomes associated with the 4DWW, reflecting both opportunities and challenges across sectors. Participants from office-based and knowledge-driven industries, such as finance and professional services, generally perceived the 4DWW as feasible due to the flexible work arrangements that have become normalised post-COVID-19. These sectors are likely to benefit from better-rested employees, reduced burnout, and heightened focus, resulting in improved hourly productivity.

Conversely, participants from sectors reliant on continuous operations, such as mining, healthcare, and manufacturing, expressed scepticism about maintaining output levels within a compressed schedule. The need for physical presence and uninterrupted workflows poses significant challenges. For instance, healthcare workers already face excessive workloads, and compressing these into four days could exacerbate strain and compromise service delivery.

A recurring concern across all sectors was the potential for increased workload intensity. Many participants emphasised that compressing five days' worth of tasks into four could lead to elevated stress levels and burnout, especially in roles with demanding workloads. These findings align with international research, which highlights that the success of a 4DWW depends on strategic workload redistribution and precise productivity monitoring mechanisms.

The discussion on productivity highlights the complex governance dynamics that shape labour reform debates within tripartite plus institutions, such as Nedlac. Divergent stakeholder views were highlighted in instances where labour's emphasis on well-being versus business's concerns about output loss, revealing the inherent policy contestation in balancing efficiency with worker rights. These tensions reflect Nedlac's broader challenge of forging consensus where economic imperatives intersect with social protection goals. Moreover, the emphasis on management inefficiencies, cultural resistance, and sectoral disparities points to the institutional fragmentation that complicates coordinated productivity policy. In governance terms, the debate reflects how corporatist negotiation processes must mediate between systemic constraints (low productivity, managerial limitations) and transformative aspirations (well-being and innovation), making productivity reform a test of Nedlac's deliberative and integrative capacity.

5.2.2. Theme 2: Social and Employee Well-being

The 4DWW was broadly recognised for its potential to enhance work-life balance, reduce stress, and improve overall well-being, particularly among office workers and employees in emotionally taxing roles. Female participants emphasised the model's potential to alleviate the pressures of juggling professional responsibilities with domestic obligations, such as childcare. However, concerns were raised about the risk of reinforcing gender inequalities, as unpaid domestic work might disproportionately fall on women.

Participants also noted that while the 4DWW could promote psychological well-being, the benefits might not be evenly distributed. Workers in lower-skilled or physically demanding jobs could experience fatigue due to compressed schedules, reducing the model's intended benefits. This underscores the importance of tailoring the 4DWW to different roles and contexts to ensure equitable outcomes.

The findings reveal that while participants recognise the 4DWW's potential to enhance well-being, they also anticipate gendered and socio-economic inequalities that could deepen without careful policy design. This duality underscores the necessity for governance mechanisms that extend beyond surface-level consensus to address structural inequities within social dialogue outcomes. Within Nedlac, such discussions often expose underlying tensions between the moral appeal of worker welfare and the practical constraints of implementation. The theme thus

reflects a critical governance debate: whether social dialogue structures can effectively translate normative commitments (such as well-being and equity) into operational reforms. It also highlights the intersection between social policy and labour governance, illustrating how deliberative forums like Nedlac, must balance diverse social realities within negotiated frameworks.

5.2.3. Theme 3: Sector-specific considerations

Industries that require continuous operations, such as healthcare, transportation, and mining, face significant challenges in adopting a four-day work week due to their reliance on uninterrupted service. Participants highlighted shift restructuring as a potential solution, allowing alternating teams to sustain essential operations. However, this approach introduces complexities, such as increased administrative costs and potential safety risks in high-intensity sectors like mining and public transportation. Public sector representatives also expressed concerns about the already overstretched workforce in essential government services. Without significant resource expansion and recruitment, a 4DWW could exacerbate inefficiencies and hinder service delivery, making its implementation in these sectors particularly challenging.

In contrast, flexible and knowledge-driven industries, such as retail and consulting, were deemed more adaptable to a four-day work week. Participants suggested that these sectors could implement staggered schedules to maintain productivity while potentially creating additional job opportunities through workforce expansion. By focusing on measurable output goals, these industries could pilot hybrid models of the 4DWW with minimal disruption to client services. This adaptability highlights the sector-specific feasibility of the 4DWW and underscores the need for tailored approaches across different industries to ensure its successful implementation.

The theme of sectoral feasibility exposes the limits of uniform policy solutions within South Africa's heterogeneous economy. The evidence shows that while flexible, output-based industries may adapt to reduced hours, labour-intensive and continuous-operation sectors remain constrained. This divergence encapsulates a central governance dilemma for Nedlac, focusing on how to negotiate differentiated implementation pathways while maintaining coherence in national labour policy. From a business governance perspective, these findings suggest that the success of the 4DWW depends on Nedlac's capacity to broker adaptive frameworks, more so, ones that

recognise industrial diversity, promote sectoral bargaining, and prevent exclusionary outcomes. The sectoral divide also signals the need for a multi-level policy dialogue that links national consensus to industry-specific realities, as a hallmark for mature social dialogue systems.

5.2.4. Theme 4: Legislative and Policy Implications

The findings suggest that South Africa's existing labour laws, particularly the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA), offer sufficient flexibility to accommodate the 4DWW without requiring significant legislative overhauls. However, participants noted the need for practical updates, such as amending overtime provisions and occupational health and safety regulations to address the ergonomic and psychological demands of compressed schedules.

Rather than relying solely on legislative reforms, participants advocated for developing best practice guidelines or a code of good practice to support businesses and employees in transitioning to the 4DWW. Such policies could address sector-specific challenges, ensuring the model is implemented fairly and effectively.

Implementation debates reveal deeper governance concerns regarding policy capacity, institutional coherence, and cultural readiness. The apprehension around wage structures, administrative complexity, and organisational culture underscores how structural and behavioural factors interact in shaping policy feasibility. Within Nedlac, such issues are representative of procedural governance tensions, where well-intentioned proposals encounter institutional unwillingness and competing mandates. The resistance to change reflects entrenched managerial norms and limited flexibility within both state and private sectors, echoing broader challenges of state-society coordination in the South African labour market. Therefore, these findings highlight that successful reform requires not just legislative or technical adjustments, but a cultural shift in workplace governance, supported through inclusive dialogue, research, and ongoing institutional learning.

5.2.5. Theme 5: Stakeholder Dynamics and Implementation Challenges

The diverse perspectives among Nedlac's Social Partners (specifically Organised labour, business, and government) reveal opportunities and challenges in advancing the 4DWW. Labour representatives were strong proponents, citing improved work-life balance and equity as key benefits. However, they emphasised the need to preserve wages under a reduced schedule. Business representatives were more cautious, raising concerns about financial feasibility and the potential disruption to productivity.

Government stakeholders expressed interest in the model's potential to address social and economic challenges but emphasised the importance of balancing innovation with the need to protect employment standards. The divergent priorities of these stakeholders underscore the critical role of Nedlac in fostering dialogue and building consensus.

The study also identified significant implementation challenges. Economic constraints, such as South Africa's hourly wage structure, complicate efforts to maintain income levels under reduced hours. Additionally, cultural resistance to change, entrenched workplace norms, and administrative complexities were highlighted as barriers. These challenges point to the need for a phased, pilot-driven approach to test the feasibility of the 4DWW in various sectors.

5.2.6. Theme 6: Broader Implications for Policy and Practice

The 4DWW can potentially drive systemic change in South Africa's labour market, offering benefits beyond productivity and well-being. However, its success depends on addressing several critical factors:

The implementation of a 4DWW necessitates careful consideration of equity considerations to prevent exacerbating existing inequalities between high-skilled and low-skilled workers. High-skilled roles, which are more adaptable to flexible schedules, are likely to benefit disproportionately from the 4DWW. Therefore, policymakers must ensure that the model promotes inclusive growth and addresses the needs of vulnerable workers, thereby mitigating potential disparities.

Effective sectoral adaptation is crucial for the successful implementation of the 4DWW. Sector-specific pilots are essential for identifying the contexts in which the 4DWW can be effectively implemented. These pilots should provide data-driven insights into the model's impact on productivity, employee well-being, and operational efficiency. By conducting thorough analyses, policymakers can develop targeted strategies for implementing the 4DWW across various sectors.

While international pilots have demonstrated promising results, South Africa's unique economic and cultural context necessitates a tailored approach. Lessons from countries like New Zealand and Iceland can provide valuable guidance; however, local adaptations are crucial to ensuring feasibility and acceptance. Policymakers, whether at a company or national government level, must carefully consider the country's specific needs and circumstances when engaging, debating, and considering developing and implementing the 4DWW for South Africa.

The National Economic Development and Labour Council plays a critical role in guiding the development of the 4DWW. As a facilitator of dialogue and consensus, Nedlac is well-positioned to foster collaborative discussions, conduct sector-specific research, and disseminate pilot findings. By doing so, Nedlac can build stakeholder confidence and support, ultimately contributing to the successful implementation of the 4DWW.

This theme crystallises the broader governance and institutional dynamics underpinning the entire study. The findings highlight that Nedlac’s legitimacy lies in its facilitative rather than advocative role, providing a structured platform for contestation, negotiation, and consensus-building among unequal partners. The divergent positions of labour, business, government, and community reflect both the strength and fragility of South Africa’s tripartite system. Labour’s pro-equity stance, business’s pragmatic caution, and the government’s regulatory restraint exemplify the pluralistic tensions that Nedlac must mediate to achieve agreements, particularly social compacts. In governance terms, this underscores Nedlac’s dual function as a site of democratic deliberation and policy legitimation, where the contestation of ideas forms part of the institutional process of building policy coherence and social trust. The effectiveness of Nedlac in managing such debates will determine whether the 4DWW discourse becomes a vehicle for inclusive reform or remains an aspirational debate.

5.3. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has comprehensively discussed the findings, highlighting the 4DWW's potential to address productivity, well-being, and policy challenges in South Africa. While the model offers promising opportunities, its successful implementation requires careful consideration of sectoral differences, stakeholder dynamics, and socio-economic realities, especially in South Africa. The discussion underscores a common thread of the Nedlac social partner perceptions of the concept, its strengths and limitations in the South African Labour Market, and the importance of a phased, inclusive approach that leverages Nedlac's facilitative role to navigate the complexities of this transformative labour reform.

The analysis of the six themes reveals that the Four-Day Work Week (4DWW) debate extends far beyond questions of workplace efficiency; it directly addresses the functioning and adaptability of South Africa's governance architecture. The findings reveal that within Nedlac's tripartite framework, social partners engage not merely in technical deliberations but in negotiations over values, priorities, and institutional power. The varied perspectives on productivity, well-being, feasibility, implementation, and policy reform expose how competing interests are mediated through processes of dialogue, compromise, and contestation that define corporatist governance in South Africa.

CHAPTER SIX:
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter synthesises the study's key findings, providing a comprehensive summary of insights drawn from the research. It reflects on the Four-Day Work Week (4DWW) implications for productivity, employee well-being, and socio-economic dynamics in South Africa, as perceived by stakeholders at the National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac). The chapter concludes by presenting actionable recommendations tailored to policymakers, business leaders, and labour organisations to facilitate informed decision-making. Furthermore, it highlights the broader contributions of the study to the discourse on labour reform and outlines potential areas for future research to deepen the understanding of alternative work arrangements.

6.2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The key findings are summarised in the section below, under the themes that emerged from the research.

6.2.1. Productivity and Sectoral Impacts

Stakeholders expressed mixed views on the productivity implications of a four-day work week. While proponents argued that reduced working hours could enhance focus, efficiency, and overall output in knowledge-based and administrative roles, concerns were raised regarding sectors reliant on continuous operations. Industries such as mining, healthcare, and manufacturing were highlighted as less adaptable due to their dependence on physical presence and uninterrupted workflows. This divergence underscores the importance of sector-specific considerations when exploring such reforms.

Management inefficiencies, rather than working hours, were identified as a primary cause of low productivity in South Africa. Addressing systemic inefficiencies through better resource allocation and organisational practices could unlock productivity gains irrespective of the work week structure.

6.2.2. Social and Well-being Implications

The potential for a 4DWW to improve work-life balance and reduce burnout was widely acknowledged. Stakeholders emphasised the benefits of additional personal time for employees to engage with family and community activities, promoting social cohesion. However, concerns were raised about the disproportionate burden on women, who may face increased unpaid domestic labour under such arrangements. This highlights the need for gender-sensitive policies to mitigate unintended consequences.

Workers in emotionally demanding roles, such as call centre agents and healthcare professionals, were identified as prime beneficiaries of reduced hours. A shorter work week could alleviate the psychological toll of their work, provided adequate support systems are in place.

6.2.3. Economic and Legislative Challenges

Economic feasibility emerged as a central challenge. The country's wage structure, heavily reliant on hourly compensation, complicates the adoption of a four-day model. Businesses expressed concerns about maintaining productivity while preserving wages, especially in labour-intensive industries. Administrative complexities, including the need for staggered shifts to sustain operations, further compound these challenges.

From a legislative perspective, current labour laws are flexible enough to accommodate the voluntary adoption of a four-day work week. However, stakeholders advocated for a code of good practice to guide implementation, ensuring fairness and safeguarding productivity benchmarks. Nedlac's role as a platform for dialogue and collaboration is pivotal in facilitating these discussions.

6.3. BROADER IMPLICATIONS FROM THE FINDINGS

The following additional information, provided by the participants, covers broader implications of implementing the 4DWW in South Africa and what could be considered to better prepare for, or respond to, a possibly growing interest in the country. These are summaries under sub-themes identified by webDQA-generated data analysis.

6.3.1. Inequality Concerns

While the intended outcome of the proposed 4DWW is generally for the benefit of all workers, without careful implementation, which includes engagement of all staff levels, a four-day model may unintentionally widen gaps between high-skilled and low-skilled workers. This is mainly due to high-skilled roles, often with flexible schedules, having a greater chance of benefit disproportionately, as many may now need to put more time into managing the implementation of the 4DWW (shift allocations and management, etc.), even after-hours, causing additional strain and workload, while low-skilled workers, may gain more as their work is on the job and stops when they leave the office.

6.3.2. Global Learnings

South Africa could and must learn from international pilots, but must consider local economic and cultural contexts. For instance, France's reduced work week faced challenges balancing competitiveness with social goals (4 Day Week Global, 2023). Therefore, it would be essential for South Africa to look closely at piloting as many sectors as possible before deciding on policy or legislative adjustments. Also, in considering these global lessons, researchers and policymakers should aim to encourage private-sector implementation on a case-by-case basis, as a blanket approach is not ideal, especially in a country like South Africa, where jobs are scarce and unemployment is on the rise.

6.3.3. Additional Considerations

The notion of environmental benefit, as OPG (2021) indicates, is supported by growing evidence that a reduced workweek would yield environmental benefits, including a reduction in humanity’s carbon footprint. If we look at the high traffic and carbon emissions from commuters and office paper printing, both harm the environment. Therefore, implementing, for instance, reduced energy consumption at the workplace and staggered working times in the implementation of a 4DWW could reduce congestion and environmental damage if implemented strategically.

The findings underscore the potential for a 4DWW to exacerbate existing inequalities if not carefully managed. High-skilled workers with flexible schedules are likely to benefit disproportionately, while low-skilled workers may face challenges in accessing similar

advantages. Additionally, the global competitiveness of South African businesses must be considered, particularly in the context of international markets and economic pressures.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations emerged. However, the following were raised for further consideration. Participants suggested initiating sector-specific pilot programmes to effectively implement a 4DWW model in South Africa to assess feasibility and productivity impacts before a national rollout. Additionally, they recommended addressing systemic inefficiencies through management training, focusing on improved management practices and resource allocation. Furthermore, participants emphasised the importance of promoting flexible policies rather than rigid adherence to a four-day work week, enabling adaptability to varying sectoral and individual needs.

6.3.4. Sector-Specific Pilots

The research emphasised the importance of initiating pilot programs tailored to specific sectors as a critical step in assessing the feasibility and impact of a four-day work week. These pilots are particularly essential for industries with limited data or evidence of successful implementation. A recurring concern highlighted during engagements was the risk that labour-intensive sectors adopting a four-day work week could lead to unintended consequences, such as burnout, fatigue, health and safety issues, and various social challenges. To address these concerns, the pilot programs should focus on knowledge-based industries and roles with inherent flexibility, where implementation is more feasible. They should also include robust metrics to evaluate productivity, employee satisfaction, and operational efficiency over an extended period. The data collected from these pilots would provide valuable insights to guide broader policy discussions and inform future decision-making.

6.3.5. Management and Operational Reforms

To address systemic inefficiencies, organisations should prioritise investing in management training programs to enhance resource allocation and optimise workflows. They should also leverage technology and automation to streamline processes, particularly in industries characterised by repetitive tasks. Additionally, establishing clear

productivity metrics and an accountability framework helps ensure that organisational goals are met efficiently and effectively.

6.3.6. Policy Development and Guidance

A code of good practice could serve as a framework for the voluntary adoption of the four-day work week. This code should outline best practices for implementation, such as staggered scheduling and effective productivity monitoring, to ensure smooth transitions and maintain operational efficiency. It should also address potential inequalities by guiding equitable wage adjustments and protections for low-skilled workers, ensuring that the benefits of the reduced work week are distributed fairly. Additionally, the code should promote gender-sensitive approaches to prevent the unintended consequence of increased unpaid labour for women, fostering a balanced and inclusive work environment.

6.3.7. Social Dialogue and Awareness

Nedlac should facilitate ongoing stakeholder dialogue to foster consensus and address concerns about the four-day work week. This process should involve sector-specific consultations to gather various perspectives and insights, ensuring that all voices are heard. Additionally, sharing case studies and international examples can help build confidence in the model's potential, demonstrating its feasibility and benefits. Education initiatives targeting employers and employees should also be implemented to raise awareness about the advantages and challenges of transitioning to a four-day work week, promoting informed decision-making.

6.3.8. Global Competitiveness Considerations

South Africa must scale its labour reforms, including the four-day workweek, to meet global standards to ensure economic viability and competitiveness. This requires an in-depth analysis of international pilot projects to identify best practices that can be adapted to the local context. At the same time, efforts should focus on balancing labour reforms with strategies that enhance productivity and maintain South Africa's competitiveness in global markets, ensuring that economic growth and workforce well-being go hand in hand. This also includes the possibility of South Africa's productivity reputation, which is currently unranked as efficient (Vallo and Mashau, 2018).

6.3.9. Enhancing Workplace Well-Being

Organisations are encouraged to strongly emphasise mental health and well-being initiatives as part of any shift in work schedules. Key actions in achieving this should include providing psychological support and resilience training for employees in high-stress roles, helping them manage the demands of their work effectively. Additionally, incorporating regular breaks and offering flexible hours within the existing workweek structure can contribute to a healthier work environment, which must be considered to ensure the effective implementation of a 4DWW. Finally, fostering workplace cultures that value rest and recovery should be given the necessary attention to ensure that well-being remains a priority, supporting both employee satisfaction and organisational performance and productivity.

6.3.10. Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings underscore that Nedlac's capacity to facilitate inclusive social dialogue will significantly shape the viability of the Four-Day Work Week in South Africa. As the principal forum for social dialogue and negotiating labour and economic policy and legislation, Nedlac's ability to align diverse stakeholder interests with the necessary considerations for the future of work will determine whether such policy reforms gain legitimacy and practical traction. The institution's governance structure and the responsiveness of its social partner representatives create the perception that the 4DWW debate could play a role in modernising future labour market-related co to emerging labour trends, reflecting the broader governance dynamics of consensus-building and adaptive policymaking in the country.

Strengthening Nedlac's strategic coordination across its chambers could therefore enhance policy coherence, ensuring that innovative work models are integrated within South Africa's evolving labour and productivity frameworks. However, considering the diverse views presented in this study, future opportunities for social compacting towards a possible 4DWW will not be a smooth process through Nedlac, mainly due to the divergent views on the concept and its practicality across all sectors. However, this inclusion in the Nedlac agenda modernisation would ultimately force the Nedlac agenda to consider more effective ways to build and support the discourse around possible

future policy formations that would emerge through the Labour Market Chamber of Nedlac.

6.4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Participants made multiple calls for Sector-Specific Research to be done. What this means for governance is the need to conduct detailed feasibility investigations of a 4DWW across sectors, particularly those with high operational demands, such as mining, healthcare, and transportation. These studies should focus on developing tailored models that address sector-specific challenges, such as restructuring shifts and ensuring operational continuity. In addition, there is a call for further research exploring the potential benefits and constraints of flexible, knowledge-based sectors, such as consulting and financial services, where productivity may not be time-dependent.

Regarding Socio-Economic and cultural dynamics, participants felt that research on how a 4DWW might exacerbate or mitigate socio-economic inequalities in South Africa should focus on income disparities, the gendered impacts of flexible work schedules, and accessibility for low-income workers. Therefore, an examination of the cultural implications of reducing workdays and whether societal perceptions of work ethics and productivity align with the model's principles was of interest.

Respondents firmly raised the need for more detailed records, pilot programs, and longitudinal studies. More specially designed and implemented pilot programs are needed in varied industries to collect empirical data on productivity, employee well-being, and economic viability under a 4DWW model. This can also help identify best practices for scaling. In addition, longitudinal studies are needed to measure the long-term impacts of a 4DWW on productivity, work-life balance, and organisational performance.

Regarding engagements on Policy and Legislative Frameworks, participants suggested the need for further investigation into the legislative adjustments required to accommodate the 4DWW, particularly regarding wage structures, labour protections, and compliance with international standards. Furthermore, participants suggested that developing guidelines or a code of good practice for equitable implementation could ensure fair treatment across sectors, particularly in industries with less flexibility, as a plausible solution.

In global comparisons, participants felt that future research could draw on global experiences with the 4DWW to identify successful models and adaptation strategies for South Africa. Comparative studies can provide insights into economic and cultural factors that influence outcomes. These recommendations highlight the need for more research across interdisciplinary and context-sensitive approaches to enhance further and clarify the understanding of the 4DWW's potential in South Africa.

6.5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

It is essential to acknowledge certain limitations inherent in this research. The reliance on existing literature indicates that the findings may be affected by biases or gaps within the available studies. Should the sources of information contain inaccuracies or biased perspectives, the validity of the conclusions drawn from this research may be compromised. Additionally, while the assumption of cooperation from Nedlac representatives is critical, some stakeholders may be reluctant to participate or provide candid responses due to political, organisational, or personal constraints. This reluctance could introduce bias or limit the scope of the data collected, potentially impacting the study's comprehensiveness and depth. Fortunately for the researcher, all the sampled respondents agreed to participate in the study.

The use of thematic analysis was highly flexible and suitable for exploring a complex phenomenon like the 4DWW; however, it has limitations. The interpretation of data is influenced by the researchers' perspectives, potentially introducing bias. Furthermore, the method is time-intensive and requires meticulous attention to detail, especially with large datasets. These limitations were mitigated through collaboration, iterative refinement, and seeking external feedback from peers to ensure validity.

Lastly, the subjective nature of participant responses may lead to varying interpretations of the concept of a 4DWW and its perceived effectiveness. Different Social Partners may have divergent views based on their unique perspectives, experiences and vested interests, which could complicate the analysis and synthesis of results. This is also true for the context in which each respondent was interviewed. For instance, each social partner has multiple roles; Respondent 1 is a labour law expert, a lawyer by profession, and a businessperson. However, his role at Nedlac should be neutral as they represent a broader group of private sector representatives from different sectors.

These limitations were carefully considered throughout the research to ensure a rigorous and balanced exploration of the Nedlac Social Partners' perceptions and understanding of the 4-day work week's implications in South Africa.

6.6. CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

The concept of a 4DWW offers a transformative opportunity to redefine work-life balance, enhance productivity, and address systemic inefficiencies in South Africa's labour market. However, the findings of this study highlight the complexity of implementing such a model in a socio-economic context characterised by diverse sectoral needs, entrenched inequalities, and significant economic pressures. While the potential benefits of a 4DWW, such as improved employee well-being and enhanced productivity, are evident in the local pilots done by companies in South Africa and other similar countries, its ultimate success depends on a nuanced, evidence-based approach.

Sector-specific pilot programs are essential to assess the feasibility and impacts of 4DWW across industries, particularly in labour-intensive sectors where unintended consequences such as burnout and safety risks are prevalent. Concurrently, addressing management inefficiencies and leveraging technology will be critical to unlocking productivity gains, irrespective of the work week structure. Policy frameworks, such as a code of good practice, could be an option to guide any future implementation of a 4DWW structure to ensure equity, protect vulnerable workers, and foster inclusive practices, particularly for women who may face disproportionate and unpaid domestic burdens.

The role of Nedlac as a facilitator of social dialogue and collaboration cannot be overstated. By fostering stakeholder engagement, promoting awareness, and sharing global and local best practices, Nedlac can pave the way for a more inclusive and informed discourse on the 4DWW. Furthermore, South Africa's labour reforms must seek to align with global competitiveness standards, ensuring that productivity improvements support both economic growth and worker well-being.

Ultimately, the 4DWW represents more than just a shift in working hours; it is a catalyst for reimagining the future of work in South Africa. To realize its potential, stakeholders must collaborate on context-sensitive solutions that balance social, economic, and

operational considerations. The path forward requires further research, expanded pilot programs, and comprehensive data to shape a labour reform agenda that delivers equitable benefits for workers, businesses, and society. South Africa stands at a pivotal moment to lead in innovative labour practices, but this will require strategic planning, inclusive policies (privately and or nationally), and a commitment to long-term sustainability.

This study has successfully answered the research question, which sought to establish how Nedlac's Social Partners perceive the potential implementation of a 4DWW in addressing productivity challenges linked to South Africa's economic, social, and labour market issues and what discussions are necessary regarding legislative implications for policy reform. It is evident in the presented flow of the study that the secondary data collected on the 4DWW was indeed thin regarding the South African context; however, a great deal of research has been conducted across the globe. This has assisted in shaping the discussions with respondents has also provided a foundation for future exploration and practical implementation strategies.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

NEDLAC Perceptions on the Four-Day Work Week in South Africa

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

By Nolwazi Mthembu

Student no. 1582440

Introductory Questions

a) Can you describe your role or involvement within Nedlac?

b) How familiar are you with the concept of a four-day work week (4DWW)?

A. Research Question (a): Productivity

1. What are your thoughts on the potential impact of a 4DWW on productivity in key economic sectors in South Africa?

2. Are there specific sectors you believe would benefit from implementing a 4DWW? Why?

3. What challenges might arise in maintaining productivity under a 4DWW model?

B. Research Question (b): Social Issues

1. In your view, could a 4DWW contribute to addressing social challenges such as gender inequality, unemployment, or work-life balance in South Africa? If so, how?

2. What unintended social consequences, if any, might arise from a 4DWW?

3. Are there specific groups within the workforce that might benefit disproportionately—or face disadvantages—if a 4DWW were implemented?

C. Research Question (c): Legislative and Policy Reforms

1. What legislative changes or policy reforms do you think are necessary to implement a 4DWW in South Africa effectively?

2. How might existing labour laws, such as the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, need to be adjusted for a 4DWW?

3. What role should Nedlac play in shaping these legislative and policy reforms?

D. Research Question (d): Differing Views

1. From your perspective, how do the views of government, business, labour, and community representatives differ on the feasibility of a 4DWW?

2. What are the primary concerns or priorities of each stakeholder group regarding the 4DWW?

3. How might these differing perspectives impact the discussions and negotiations around a 4DWW at Nedlac?

E. Concluding Questions

1. What additional considerations should be considered when evaluating the potential implementation of a 4DWW in South Africa?

2. Are there any specific examples, case studies, or international experiences you believe are relevant to this discussion?

3. Is there anything else you would like to share about your views on the 4DWW or its potential implications?

APPENDIX 2: EMAIL INVITATION SAMPLE SENT TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear (Participant name)

I hope this email finds you well.

My name is Nolwazi (Mthembu) Makaula and I am currently in the process of concluding, a Master's degree at the Wits School of Governance, University of Witwatersrand. As part of my research project, I am examining the perceptions of the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) regarding the potential implementation of a four-day work week in South Africa.

The aim of my research is to better understand NEDLAC's position on this topic, as well as the broader implications for labour relations, economic policy, and social welfare in South Africa. In this regard, I am seeking to interview key stakeholders who may have insights into NEDLAC's stance on the matter or its role in shaping discussions around work week policies in the country.

I would be happy if you could participate in a brief interview to share your perspectives and experiences related to this topic. The interview would take approximately [30-45 minutes] and can be conducted at a time that suits you, either virtually or in person, depending on your preference. All responses will be kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes unless otherwise agreed with the stakeholders at NEDLAC.

If you are willing to participate, please let me know your availability, and I will coordinate the logistics accordingly, between the week of **18 -22 November 2024.** I am flexible to accommodate a time and date that best suits your availability.

Thank you for considering this request. I greatly appreciate your time and expertise, and I am looking forward to the possibility of engaging with you on this important issue.

Kind regards

Nolwazi (Mthembu) Makaula
Master of Management (Governance and Economics)
Student no. 1582440
1582440@students.wits.ac.za
Supervisor: Dr Thelela Ngcetane-Vika

APPENDIX 3: CONSENT FORM SENT TO PARTICIPANTS

Consent Form

Title of Research: NEDLAC Perceptions on the Four-Day Work Week in South Africa

Name of researcher: Nolwazi (Mthembu) Makaula

I, …….., agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about. YES NO

I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study YES NO

I agree that the interview may be audio-recorded YES NO

I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report. YES NO

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name) and will not be used by the researcher in their research report unless I have agreed to it. YES NO

…… (signature) …… (name of participant)

…… (date) …… (signature)

Nolwazi (Mthembu) Makaula (name of researcher) …… (date)

APPENDIX 4: RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Research Participant Information Sheet

Dear Participant,

My name is Nolwazi (Mthembu) Makaula, and I am a Master of Management student at the Wits School of Governance, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. I am conducting research in partial fulfilment of my degree under the supervision of Dr. Thelela Ngcetane-Vika.

My research study is titled: “NEDLAC Perceptions of the Four-Day Work week in South Africa.”

I would like to invite you to participate in a semi-structured interview as part of this research. Your insights and perspectives will contribute to the findings of my study. If you agree to participate, the interview will be conducted either in person at a mutually agreed premises or virtually via an agreed-upon platform and time.

Confidentiality and Data Protection:

With your permission, I would like to audio-record the interview. All recordings and data will be securely stored on a password-protected computer and will be deleted after a maximum of five years. Only I, as the researcher, will have access to this data.

Your participation will remain confidential and anonymous. In the research findings, your name or any identifying information will not be included.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to decline participation or withdraw at any point during the interview without any consequences. Additionally, you are not obligated to answer any question you are uncomfortable with. Participation in this study will not incur any costs or provide direct financial or other benefits.

Risks and Benefits:

The risks associated with this study are minimal. The questions are focused solely on your professional experiences and personal viewpoints related to the research topic. While there are no direct benefits to participants, your input will contribute to valuable research that could inform policy discussions.

Study Dissemination:

This research will be written up as a report and published on the University of the Witwatersrand's academic platforms, including its library website. If you would like a summary of the final report, I will gladly share it with you.

If you have any questions about the research, please feel free to contact me using the details below. Should you have concerns regarding the ethical aspects of this study, you may contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) at:

Phone: +27 (0)11 717 1408

Email: hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Sincerely,



Nolwazi (Mthembu) Makaula
Master of Management Candidate
University of the Witwatersrand, Wits School of Governance
Student no. 1582440
1582440@students.wits.ac.za

APPENDIX 5: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF GOVERNANCE ETHICS COMMITTEE

CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE: **WSG-2024-63**

PROJECT TITLE: **NEDLAC perceptions of the 4-day workweek (4DWW) in South Africa**

INVESTIGATOR	Nolwazi Mthembu
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	School of Governance
DATE CONSIDERED	22 November 2024
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	Minimal Risk
EXPIRY DATE	Date of submission of the Research Report

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 9th of December 2024 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
Rekgotsofetse Chikane

cc: Supervisor: Dr Thelela Ngcetane-Vika

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

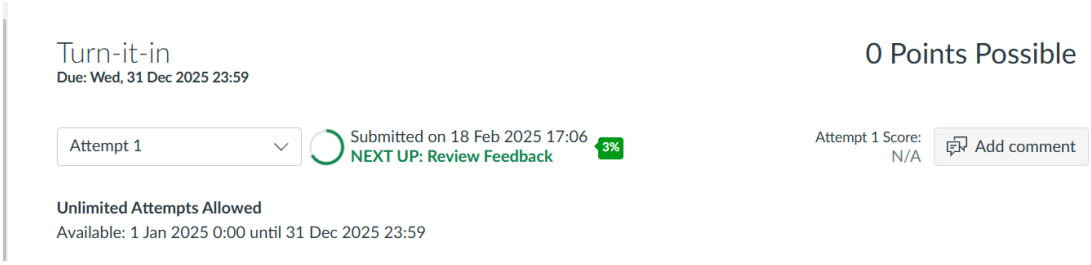
To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

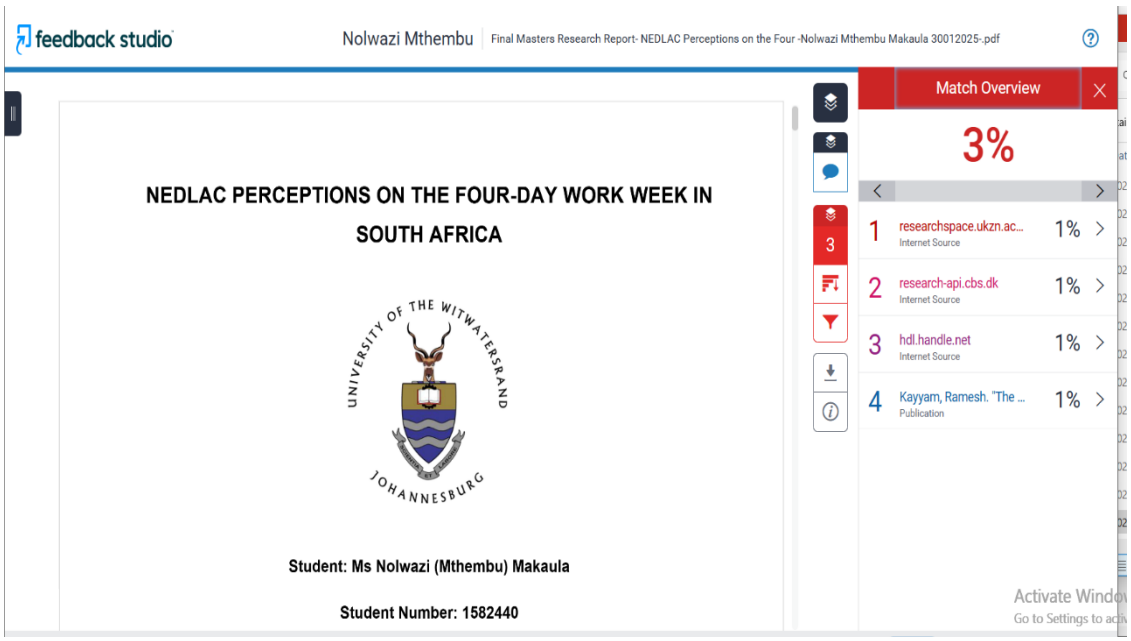
I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

_____ _____/_____/_____09 12 2024

Signature **Date**

APPENDIX 6: TURN IT IN REPORT





Signed off by Supervisor:

Supervisor Name: Dr Thelela Ngcetane-Vika

Supervisor Signature: _____

APPENDIX 7: CERTIFICATE OF LANGUAGE EDITING

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25 January 2025 • **001/2025**

CERTIFICATE OF EDITING

This certificate confirms that professional language editing rendered on the following submission:

TITLE: **NEDLAC PERCEPTIONS ON THE FOUR-DAY WORK WEEK IN SOUTH AFRICA**

STUDENT: **Ms Nolwazi (Mthembu) Makaula • 1582440**

PROGRAMME: **Master of Management in Development and Economics**

INSTITUTION: **University of the Witwatersrand**

PAGES: **123 (Last page number 110)**

We hope you find our work acceptable to your expectations.

Best regards

A. BEST CGFO, MHRP, PSEP, F.ODP, PM
Membership No: ***BES003***
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MSc in Public Policy and Management (London), BAdmin Hons in Public Administration (Fort Hare), Diploma in Business Computing in Information Technology (Damelin), Programme in Project Management (Stellenbosch), Programme in Total Quality Management (Unisa), Executive development Programme (Nelson Mandela)

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Directors: Best A (Mr) · Ntutela M M (Mr)