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Temporary or Sustainable? Strategic and Leadership Perspectives on the Four-Day Work Week

Abstract

Purpose

This study investigates whether the four-day work week can function not merely as a human resource policy but as a strategic organizational resource capable of creating sustainable competitive advantage. Addressing a key gap in the literature, it explores the four-day week from a strategic and leadership perspective, contrasting with prior research that has focused primarily on employee well-being and productivity outcomes.

Methodology

The study applies the Resource-Based View (RBV) and the VRIO framework to assess the strategic value, rarity, inimitability, and organizational feasibility of this work arrangement. A qualitative design was adopted, based on 20 semi-structured interviews with CEOs, managers, and directors. Interview data were analyzed using text-mining tools to identify dominant patterns and themes aligned with VRIO dimensions.

Findings

Results reveal divided managerial perceptions: the policy is widely perceived as valuable and rare, but less consistently inimitable or organizationally feasible. This indicates that, in its current stage, the four-day work week represents a temporary competitive advantage with potential to evolve into a sustainable one as organizational capabilities mature.

Limitations

The research is limited by its single-country sample (Portugal), the early stage of policy adoption, and the lack of cross-sectoral comparison. Future research could integrate employee perspectives and quantitative performance indicators to strengthen empirical generalization.

Practical implications

The findings suggest that leadership commitment, communication, and strategic alignment are essential for the successful implementation of the four-day work week. Organizations that embed the policy within broader strategic and cultural frameworks

may enhance talent attraction, retention, and innovation capacity while differentiating themselves in competitive markets.

Social implications

Leadership-driven adoption of reduced working time can support employee well-being, inclusion, and gender equality, while promoting healthier work–life integration. However, attention must be given to workload management and sectoral adaptability to prevent unintended inequalities.

Originality/value

This study fills a theoretical and empirical gap by applying the VRIO framework to the four-day work week and reframing it as an intangible strategic resource shaped by leadership behavior and organizational design. It contributes to the literature by linking strategic management and leadership theory with emerging debates on work-time reduction and sustainable competitiveness.

Keywords: Four-day week; Organizational policy; VRIO Model; Competitive Advantage;

1. Introduction

Employees are a critical source of organizational performance and the foundation of sustainable competitive advantage (Hongal & Kinange, 2020). Recent debates, intensified by technological advances, have questioned the traditional five-day work week, which is increasingly associated with fatigue, and highlighted shorter work arrangements as potential solutions to improve productivity, well-being, and motivation (Kamerāde et al., 2019; Chung, 2022; Mullens & Glorieux, 2024; Delaney & Casey, 2022; Fathya et al., 2024). Policies that prioritize employee needs can also enhance retention and organizational resilience (Copeland & James, 2023).

In strategic management, the resource-based view (RBV) emphasizes that firms achieve sustainable advantage when they develop resources and capabilities that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and well-organized—the essence of the VRIO framework (Barney, 1991; Almarri & Gardiner, 2014). As work culture evolves (Dhal et al., 2021), organizations face the challenge of aligning flexible policies, such as the four-day week, with strategic objectives. Yet, research remains limited on how this policy interacts with leadership, inclusivity, productivity, and technology adoption (Rafferty et al., 2022; Chung, 2022; Fathya et al., 2024; Tessema et al., 2023; Spencer, 2022).

The central research problem addressed in this study concerns whether and how the transition to a four-day work week can be conceptualized as a strategic organizational change capable of generating a sustainable competitive advantage. Despite increasing empirical cases and public debate, there is limited theoretical understanding of this transition through the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm.

The challenge lies in identifying whether reduced working time constitutes a valuable, rare, inimitable, and organizationally embedded resource (VRIO dimensions). Existing research focuses primarily on social, psychological, or productivity outcomes, overlooking its strategic and managerial implications. This gap defines the core scientific problem: the need for an integrated framework that connects work-time reduction policies to strategic value creation within organizations.

Given its potential future relevance, it is necessary to examine whether the four-day work week can serve as a differentiating strategy and a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Campbell, 2024). This study addresses this gap by analyzing the perspectives of professionals in leadership roles, using the VRIO model as the theoretical lens.

The research proceeds as follows: the literature review examines the four-day work week and strategy evaluation through the VRIO model; the methodology outlines the qualitative design and semi-structured interviews; findings and discussion present the empirical analysis; and the study concludes with implications and limitations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Four-Day Work Week: A Multidimensional Strategic Perspective

The four-day work week (4DWW) has become one of the most debated organizational innovations of the decade, attracting attention from scholars, practitioners, and policymakers. Existing research largely examines its human resource outcomes—notably productivity, well-being, and work–life balance—yet there is limited understanding of its strategic implications and of how leadership and organizational design shape its feasibility and long-term competitiveness. To address this gap, this section adopts the VRIO framework as an integrative model to structure the review. Each subsection connects existing evidence on the four-day work week to one of the four VRIO dimensions: Value, Rarity, Inimitability, and Organization. This approach provides a coherent theoretical basis for assessing whether the 4DWW can act as a strategic resource capable of generating sustainable competitive advantage.

2.1.1 Value: Productivity, Well-Being, and Flexibility

Research consistently identifies productivity and employee well-being as primary drivers of the 4DWW's perceived value. Productivity is created when organizational resources are effectively aligned with strategic outcomes (Dresch et al., 2018; Abdelwahed & Doghan, 2023). Contrary to the assumption that longer working hours enhance performance, several studies demonstrate that reduced hours can increase efficiency, focus, and motivation (Pencavel, 2014; Cui et al., 2019; Chung, 2022; Delaney & Casey, 2022). Empirical evidence from pilot programs in New Zealand, Iceland, and the Netherlands confirms higher output and employee satisfaction (Copeland & James, 2023; Fathya et al., 2024).

Flexibility is another determinant of value. Work arrangements that accommodate employees' personal and family needs strengthen long-term competitiveness and talent retention (Kossek et al., 2021; Ahmad & Munir, 2023). The 4DWW supports improved well-being, healthier lifestyles, and reduced burnout (Veal, 2023; Jahal et al., 2024), aligning organizational performance with social sustainability. Thus, the 4DWW creates value by linking employee well-being to organizational outcomes, representing a potential source of strategic differentiation.

2.1.2 Rarity: Cultural and Sectoral Uniqueness

The 4DWW remains rare in most markets, particularly outside experimental or service-oriented contexts. Its rarity stems from sectoral constraints, cultural inertia, and managerial reluctance to restructure work (Copeland & James, 2023; Campbell, 2024). However, companies that adopt this policy early may benefit from first-mover advantages, strengthening their employer brand and positioning themselves as innovators (Chung, 2022; Fathya et al., 2024).

The rarity dimension also relates to organizational culture: firms that successfully integrate shorter work weeks often promote participatory decision-making, feedback, and collaboration (Rafferty et al., 2022; Delaney & Casey, 2022). These cultural traits are not easily replicated, reinforcing the strategic value of the policy. In this sense, rarity derives not only from market scarcity but from unique leadership and cultural conditions that support flexibility and trust.

2.1.3 Inimitability: Leadership and Technological Barriers

A resource achieves sustained advantage when it cannot be easily copied. The 4DWW is difficult to imitate when it depends on leadership style, technological integration, and internal processes. Successful implementation requires strong communication, planning, and cultural alignment (Rafferty et al., 2022; Bernstein, 2023).

Flexible leadership plays a decisive role in enabling the successful implementation of the four-day work week. Adaptive leaders who encourage experimentation, delegate autonomy, and maintain open communication channels create organizational environments capable of sustaining innovation in work-time design (Bernstein, 2023; Rafferty et al., 2022). Leadership flexibility also fosters employee trust and engagement, which are essential for balancing workload redistribution and maintaining productivity under compressed schedules (Clayborne, 2023; Gomes, 2022). These behaviors transform leadership into an inimitable capability that enhances the strategic distinctiveness of firms adopting the four-day model.

Technology plays a dual role: it enables work-time reduction through automation and remote collaboration (Burchell et al., 2024; Tessema et al., 2023) while creating barriers for imitation. Firms that effectively leverage digital tools and AI to maintain performance with fewer hours gain an operational capability that competitors may struggle to reproduce (Ashford & Kallis, 2014; Gomes, 2022). Leadership vision and the ability to align human and technological resources therefore become key determinants of inimitability, transforming the 4DWW into a distinctive capability rather than a mere scheduling change.

2.1.4 Organization: Structural and Managerial Alignment

Even when valuable, rare, and hard to imitate, a resource yields competitive advantage only if it is supported by organizational systems and leadership practices. The literature highlights that organizational readiness—including workload design, communication mechanisms, and role clarity—is critical for realizing the benefits of shorter working weeks (Copeland & James, 2023; Bernstein, 2023).

Leadership flexibility thus becomes central to organizational alignment. By allowing managers to adjust processes dynamically and respond to emergent challenges, flexible leadership ensures that structural adaptations are continuous rather than reactive, promoting long-term sustainability of the reduced work model (Copeland & James, 2023; Venczel, 2024).

Managers must ensure coherent strategies for scheduling, compensation, and performance measurement (Gomes, 2022; Earley, 2024). The 4DWW also requires a supportive structure where leadership communicates purpose and objectives clearly (Bersin et al., 2023; Venczel, 2024). Organizations that fail to plan risk overburdening employees or compromising service quality (Deshpande, 2023). Thus, the organizational dimension of the VRIO model underscores that the four-day week's success depends on alignment between leadership commitment, culture, and operational processes.

Recent research introduces the notion of "Tightrope-walking Leadership", describing leaders who skillfully balance flexibility with efficiency in dynamic organizational environments (Abdullah et al., 2025; Bernstein, 2023). These leaders operate at the intersection of stability and adaptability—maintaining operational discipline while remaining open to experimentation and dialogue. In the context of the four-day work week, tightrope-walking leadership enables managers to navigate feasibility barriers by continuously realigning goals, processes, and expectations without undermining performance or cohesion. This capacity for balance reflects the "Organization" dimension of the VRIO model, where leadership acts as a coordinating capability that transforms valuable and rare practices into sustainable sources of advantage. By fostering structures that are both efficient and adaptable, tightrope-walking leaders ensure that the transition toward shorter working weeks is not only technically feasible but strategically viable.

2.1.5 Integrative Synthesis: Towards a Strategic Model

Taken together, the literature suggests that the 4DWW has evolved from a human resource practice focused on well-being into a potential strategic lever for sustainable competitiveness. The

reviewed evidence shows that its effectiveness depends on the joint fulfillment of the VRIO dimensions:

- Value through productivity and motivation;
- Rarity through cultural and sectoral differentiation;
- Inimitability through leadership capability and technological integration; and
- Organization through managerial alignment and systemic planning.

This conceptual integration provides a unified theoretical foundation for assessing whether and under what conditions the 4DWW can create sustained competitive advantage. The next section applies the VRIO framework as an analytical lens to empirically examine this question.

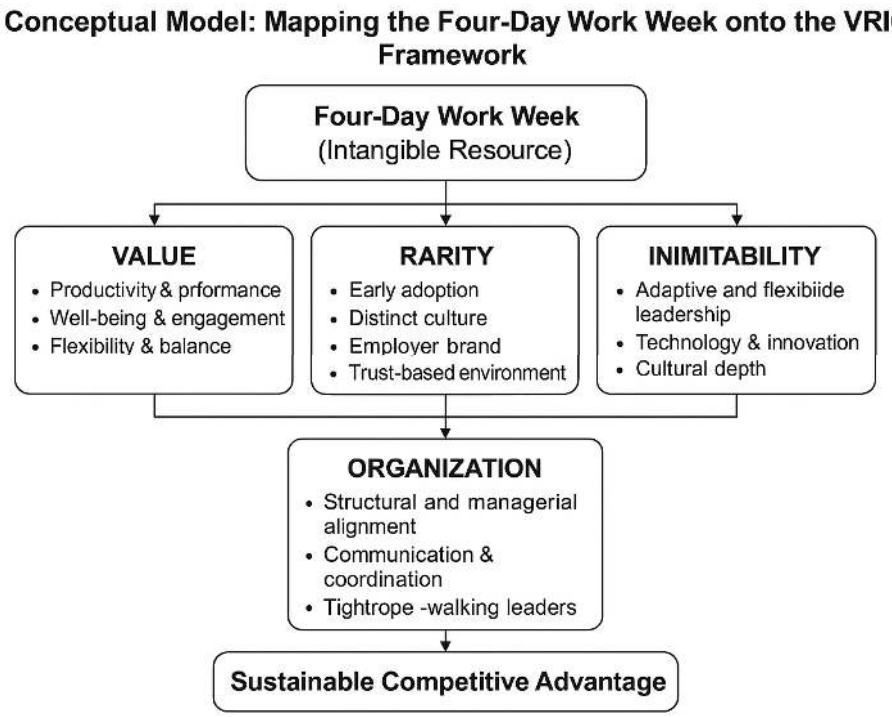
2.2 Strategy Evaluation based in VRIO Model

A company's competitive strategy shapes its ability to innovate and achieve superior market performance (Ali & Anwar, 2021; Farida & Setiawan, 2022). The resource-based view (RBV) conceptualizes firms as bundles of resources and capabilities (Barney et al., 2021). When assessed through the VRIO model (Barney & Mackey, 2016), these resources can form the basis of sustainable competitive advantage if they are valuable, rare, inimitable, and well-organized (Cardeal & António, 2012; Knott, 2015).

2.2.1 The VRIO Model

The VRIO framework evaluates the strategic importance of resources by analyzing Value, Rarity, Inimitability, and Organization (Barney, 1991; Cardeal & António, 2012). Valuable resources reduce costs or exploit opportunities, improving both performance and competitive advantage (Newbert, 2008; Ferreira et al., 2022; Knott, 2015). However, value alone is insufficient: capabilities must be combined to generate advantage (Newbert, 2008; O'Shannassy, 2008). Rarity depends on how many competitors possess the same resource, with scarce resources strengthening competitive positions (Barney & Hesterly, 2015; Ferreira et al., 2022). Yet, if resources are easy to imitate, the advantage will be temporary (Barney et al., 2021; Cardeal & António, 2012), making differentiation essential (Ferreira et al., 2022; Gerhart & Feng, 2021; O'Shannassy, 2008). Finally, valuable, rare, and inimitable resources require organizational alignment to create economic value and sustain advantage (Barney & Mackey, 2016). Figure 2.1 shows the conceptual model of how the research was conducted to evaluate sustainable competitive advantage.

Figure 2.1 Conceptual Model: Mapping the Four-Day Work Week onto the VRIO Framework.



Source: author's elaboration based on VRIO Framwork, Barney, 1991

2.2.2. Sustainable Competitive Advantage

A Sustainable Competitive Advantage (SCA) arises when a strategy creates value, is not simultaneously implemented by competitors, and cannot be replicated over time (Barney, 1991; O'Shannassy, 2008). SCAs improve performance (Lieberman, 2021; Newbert, 2008), deliver customer value, and reduce costs (Farida & Setiawan, 2022; Zahara et al., 2024). While the four-day work week is not a tangible resource, it can be conceptualized as an intangible organizational policy that enhances productivity (Campbell, 2024; Fathya et al., 2024) and competitiveness (Dresch et al., 2018). However, its feasibility depends on overcoming managerial and structural challenges (Bernstein, 2023; Copeland & James, 2023) and must therefore be assessed through the VRIO lens (Barney, 1991).

While the majority of previous studies have focused on employee experiences—highlighting improvements in well-being, motivation, and productivity—the managerial and leadership dimensions remain underexplored. Understanding how leaders perceive

and implement the four-day work week is crucial for translating employee-centered benefits into sustainable strategic outcomes. This gap provides the basis for the present study, which examines the phenomenon through a strategic and leadership lens using the VRIO model (table 2.1).

Table 2.1. Main topics and lines of research

Authors (year)	Main Topics	Research gaps
Copeland & James (2023)	Effect on talent retention; Benefit to employees in meeting goals.	How to meet customer needs and demands in the short term in a 4-day work week.
Delaney & Casey (2022)	Productivity is the most compelling metric for implementing a 4-day week; more time for workers to develop their skills.	Lack of evidence of results from the implementation of the 4-day week at the organizational environment level.
Fathya et al. (2024)	Need for an inclusive work culture and constant feedback; Improvements in worker productivity and happiness.	How to ensure that workers' task deadlines are not compromised.
Gomes (2022)	Increased worker productivity and happiness; Beneficial technological changes to implement the 4-day work week.	Questions regarding salary issues in the implementation of the 4-day workweek.
Jahal et al. (2024)	Positive effect on workers' lifestyle; Benefits in terms of equal working hours between genders.	What are the long-term effects of the 4-day week; What is the possibility of reconciling the 4-day week and hybrid work.
Kamerāde et al. (2019)	Definition of the ideal number of hours in a 4-day work week that maximizes worker productivity.	Long-term impact of work changes on workers' mental health and well-being.
Rafferty (2022)	Advance planning in the implementation of the 4-day week depending on the business being conducted; Importance of communication during the implementation of the schedule reformulation.	Influence of this organizational policy on the hiring of new workers by companies that implement it.
Tessema et al. (2023)	Importance of work-life balance and employee well-being when implementing a 4-day work week; Greater flexibility in the workplace.	Need to understand the repercussions on customer service provision by a company that implements the 4-day work week.

Source: Own elaboration

3. Methodology

This research aims to meet the growing needs of workers, who are experiencing increasingly flexible work, and to understand how companies can benefit from these needs and differentiate themselves from the competition. Currently, most workers are looking for a job that allows them not only to earn a good income but also to achieve flexibility between their professional and personal lives. Although it is a topic that has been discussed for several decades, the issue of flexibility at work has gained greater emphasis after the COVID-19 pandemic, where remote and hybrid working arrangements have become commonplace in most companies that are able to implement them. As a result, new strategies and policies that meet these employee needs, such as the 4-day work week, are frequently being questioned in terms of their viability for companies that want to implement them.

Although the literature review revealed several aspects that support the implementation of a four-day work week, gaps in this research were also found. Among these, it is possible to highlight the lack of necessary leadership over workers, incompatibility with the type of business the company practices, the need to not overload workers and to not put too much pressure on them, among others. In this sense, although several authors highlight various aspects that contribute to the creation of a Sustainable Competitive Advantage, such as improved productivity and worker well-being, it is essential that, due to the existence of some divergence among the authors mentioned in the Literature Review, research questions be defined that contribute to understanding, through the research methodology, whether a 4-day work week can be seen as a Sustainable Competitive Advantage for the companies that apply it. Thus, through Table 3.1, it will be possible to analyze the key questions for this research.

To address the research problem, this study employs a qualitative exploratory design grounded in the VRIO analytical framework (Barney, 1991). This approach enables an in-depth examination of managerial and leadership perceptions regarding the value, rarity, imitability, and organizational feasibility of the four-day work week as a potential strategic resource. Data were collected through twenty semi-structured interviews with CEOs, directors, and managers, selected through a purposive sampling strategy to ensure participants possessed direct responsibility for strategic decision-making and resource management within their organizations. To broaden the diversity of perspectives, a

snowball sampling procedure was subsequently applied, allowing initial participants to recommend other qualified professionals meeting the same criteria.

The interview protocol was structured around the four VRIO dimensions, translating the theoretical constructs into empirical questions and enabling a systematic assessment of how leadership interprets the strategic potential of the four-day work week. This method is particularly suited to a phenomenon that is context-dependent, multidimensional, and underexplored in quantitative research. By aligning the data collection with the VRIO framework, the study ensures both theoretical coherence and empirical depth, consistent with the exploratory and theory-building nature of qualitative inquiry.

Table 3.1. Research questions and objectives

Key research question	Could the 4-day work week represent a sustainable competitive advantage for companies that implement it?	
Lines of research (Authors, year)	**Research question**	**Research objective**
How to ensure that workers' task deadlines are not compromised (Fathya et al., 2024)	QI1: Do you think a 4-day workweek has the potential to create value for your company? Why or why not?	OI1: Understand the value offered to companies by the 4-day workweek
What is the long-term impact of work changes on the mental health and well-being of workers (Kamerāde et al., 2019)		
How to meet customers' short-term needs and demands in a 4-day workweek (Copeland & James, 2023)	QI2: Do you consider the 4-day work week to be rare among your company's competitors? Why?	OI2: Assess whether the 4-day workweek is a strategy applied by few companies
What are the long-term effects of the 4-day week (Jahal et al., 2024)?		
Lack of evidence of results from implementing a 4-day week at the organizational level (Delaney & Casey, 2022)	QI3: Do you consider the 4-day workweek difficult or costly for competitors to imitate? Why?	OI3: Understand whether the 4-day workweek is difficult or costly for competitors to imitate
Questions regarding salary issues in the application of the 4-day work week (Gomes, 2022)		

How the 4-day workweek influences the hiring of new employees (Rafferty et al., 2022)	QI4: Do you think the organization where you work can organize itself to effectively exploit the 4-day workweek? Why?	OI4: Assess whether the company has the capacity to organize itself to implement the 4-day workweek
Need to understand the repercussions on customer service provision by a company that implements the 4-day work week (Tessema et al., 2023)		

Source: Own elaboration

Given that the research objectives are aligned with the definitions of the VRIO Model, and that the interviewee needs a basis for this model, it is pertinent to analyze and explain this model, also drawing on authors mentioned in the Literature Review. Thus, the VRIO Model is divided into four components (Value, Rarity, Inimitability, and Organization) (Barney, 1991; Cardeal & António, 2012), which allow a resource or capability to be evaluated according to the type of competitive advantage it provides to the organization by possessing it (Newbert, 2008). As Table 3.2 shows, depending on the assessment of each metric in the model, there is a competitive implication for the resource or capability being assessed. However, it is important to note that this is a sequential model, i.e., if a component is evaluated negatively by the interviewer, the following components, although they may be evaluated positively, are no longer relevant to the assessment of competitive implications, and the analysis is interrupted, as can also be seen in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2. Implications of the VRIO Model

Valuable?	**Rare?**	**Difficult to imitate?**	**Organization-oriented?**	**Competitive implication**
No	-	-	-	Competitive disadvantage
Yes	No	-	-	Competitive Parity
Yes	Yes	No	-	Temporary Competitive Advantage
Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Unexploited Competitive Advantage

Source: Own elaboration adapted from Barney and Hesterly (2015)

Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sustainable Competitive Advantage

The target audience for these interviews were employees from different companies whose role involves managing the working methods of other employees or comprehensively managing a specific area of the company or even the company in a general context, in order to assess whether this new flexible working hours policy, the 4-day working week, meets the needs of the employees and employers of these companies, and whether they consider this policy to be a resource that adds value to their business and that they have the necessary resources and capabilities to implement it.

Data were analyzed through a thematic coding procedure structured around the four dimensions of the VRIO model. The coding process combined deductive and inductive strategies: the initial codebook reflected the theoretical dimensions of Value, Rarity, Inimitability, and Organization, while additional subthemes emerged from the data through iterative reading. A two-stage coding process was implemented. First, two researchers independently coded all interview transcripts using NVivo software, generating preliminary categories. Second, the researchers compared results and discussed discrepancies until consensual interpretations were reached, ensuring intercoder reliability.

To reinforce validity and credibility, findings were triangulated with theoretical constructs identified in the literature and validated through comparison across participants and sectors. This methodological triangulation, combined with transparent documentation of coding decisions, strengthens the rigor, consistency, and trustworthiness of the analysis.

Regarding the structure of the interview, it is important to note that these were recorded with the consent of the interviewees, and it consists of six questions, two of which are descriptive in nature, in order to understand the interviewee's role and professional experience, and four other questions that aim to understand, according to the components of the VRIO Model, how the interviewee evaluates a possible application of the 4-day work week in their company. Before the questions, the interviewees were presented with concepts related to the topic of the research and the VRIO Model. Table

3.3. shows the questions presented to the interviewee, which are in line with the research questions and objectives.

Table 3.3. Research objectives and questions

Research objective	Questions	Type of Question
-	How many years of professional experience do you have?	Descriptive question
-	What is your role in the organization?	Descriptive question
Understanding the value offered to companies by the 4-day workweek	Do you think the 4-day work week has the potential to create value for your company? Why or why not?	Interpretive question
Assess whether the 4-day workweek is a strategy applied by few companies in the market	Do you consider the 4-day work week to be rare among your company's competitors? Why?	Interpretive question
Understanding whether the 4-day work week is difficult for competitors to imitate	Do you consider the 4-day work week difficult or costly for competitors to imitate? Why?	Interpretive question
Assess whether the company has the capacity to organize itself to implement the 4-day work week	Do you think the organization where you work can organize itself to effectively implement the 4-day work week? Why or why not?	Interpretive question

Source: Own elaboration

4. Data Analysis

For the analysis of the data, this chapter is organized according to the questions in the interview, so first an analysis of the descriptive questions will be presented in order to characterize the sample analyzed, and then an analysis of the interpretive questions will be made, following the VRIO Model, using Microsoft Office Excel, KH Coder 3 Folder software, the Online Utility – Text Analyzer platform, and TagCrowd for data processing.

4.1. Description of the sample

The sample collected is based on 20 professionals who agreed to be interviewed, whose position involves managing other workers or who have a leadership role in some area within the organization in which they operate. It is therefore pertinent to characterize the sample in order to ensure the accuracy of the information collected and to provide a more detailed view of the type of professionals who were interviewed. Thus, in order to describe the sample collected, two descriptive questions were considered, aimed at understanding how many years of professional experience the interviewee has and what their position is within the organization.

4.1.1. Years of professional experience

Regarding the professional experience of the interviewees, looking at Figure 4.1, which shows the absolute values for years of professional experience of the interviewees, it is possible to highlight that two interviewees have more than 50 years of professional experience, and only one has less than 10 years.



Figure 4.1. Years of Professional Experience
Source: Own elaboration

Additionally, observing Figure 4.2, it is possible to analyze the percentage values for each interval of years of professional experience of the interviewees, whereby it can be seen that 35% of interviewees have between 20 and 29 years of professional experience. Furthermore, it is also possible to retain the information that 95% of interviewees have more than 10 years of professional experience.

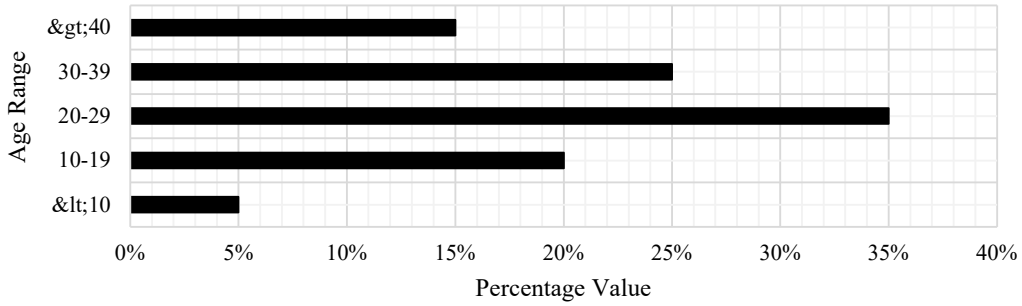


Figure 4.2. Percentage of Years of Professional Experience
Source: Own elaboration

4.1.2. Profession

Regarding the professions of the interviewees, Figure 4.3 shows that among the 20 interviewees, seven different responses were obtained, with the most common response being CEO (Chief Executive Officer) at 45%, followed by Team Leader at 20%. In addition, responses were also recorded for Manager, Human Resources Director, Marketing Director, Production Director, and People Business Partner.

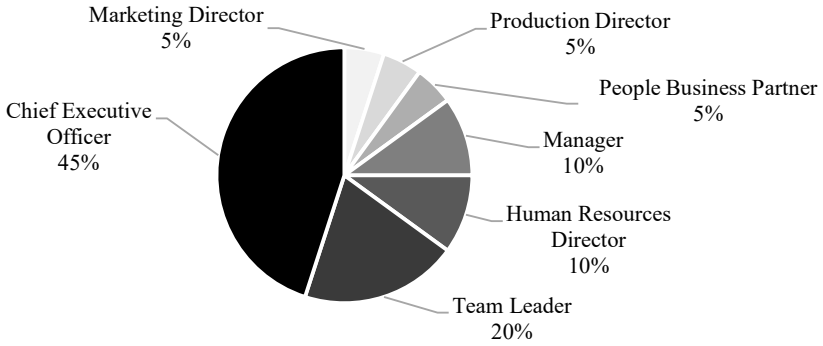


Figure 4.3. Profession
Source: Own elaboration

4.2. Analysis of the VRIO Model

About the VRIO Model, the analysis was based on the four interpretative questions from the interview mentioned above, each of which was allocated to each parameter of the Model. This model was used because it allows us to understand, based on the views of 20 interviewees, whether they consider the 4-day week to have the potential to generate a

source of sustainable competitive advantage for the companies where they work. Table 4.1 provides a comprehensive overview of the respondents' answers to each of the questions. Furthermore, Figure 4.4 it is possible to see that 30% of respondents considered the 4-day week to be a Temporary Competitive Advantage, 25% considered it a Sustainable Competitive Advantage, 25% considered it an Unexploited Competitive Advantage, 15% considered it a Competitive Disadvantage, and only 5% considered it a Competitive Parity. In the rest of this chapter, we will analyze the reasons why respondents gave these answers to each metric of the VRIO Model.

Table 4.1. Respondents' Answers

	VRIO Model			
	Valuable?	**Rare?**	**Inimitable?**	**Organization?**
Interviewee 1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Interviewee 2	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Interviewee 3	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Interviewee 4	Yes	Yes	No	No
Interviewee 5	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Interviewee 6	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Interviewee 7	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Interviewee 8	No	Yes	Yes	No
Interviewee 9	No	Yes	Yes	No
Interviewee 10	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Interviewee 11	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Interviewee 12	Yes	No	No	Yes
Interviewee 13	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Interviewee 14	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Interviewee 15	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Interviewee 16	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Interviewee 17	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Interviewee 18	No	Yes	No	No
Interviewee 19	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Interviewee 20	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

Source: Own elaboration

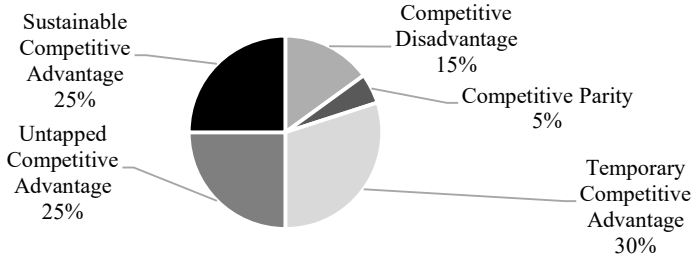


Figure 4.4. Competitive Implications
Source: Own elaboration

For the analysis of data related to interpretive questions, the answers to each question were compiled in separate documents, one for each question, and subsequently translated into English using DeepL, in order to facilitate the use of the aforementioned software and ensure the quality of the information.

4.2.1. Value

Regarding the first metric of the VRIO model, the analysis explored whether managers perceive the four-day work week as capable of creating value for their organizations. Overall, 85% of respondents considered that this policy has the potential to generate value and help differentiate the company from its competitors.

The narratives emphasize, above all, improvements in work–life balance, employee motivation, and productivity. Interviewees frequently associated the four-day week with giving employees "more time for themselves," enabling better personal and family management, and consequently increasing satisfaction and engagement at work. This perceived balance is seen as a driver of greater focus, efficiency, and quality of performance, suggesting that the four-day week can foster a more energized and committed workforce.

At the same time, respondents highlighted that the value created by this policy is conditional. Several managers stressed that its effectiveness "depends a lot on the type of business," on the nature of the activities performed, and on how work is organized. For this reason, some interviewees expressed reservations or partial agreement, arguing that in certain contexts, the four-day week might not generate sufficient value or might even introduce operational pressure if workload is not adequately redesigned. These views help explain the 15% of respondents who did not consider the policy value-creating in their current organizational reality (see table 4.2 and table 4.3).

Table 4.2. Bigram - Value

Table 4.3. Trigram - Value

Trigram	Frequency
Four-day week	6
Work-life balance	4
Be more productive	3

Bigram	Frequency
More time	8
More productive	6
More motivated	5
Working hours	5
Work life	4
Life balance	4
Well-being	4
Increase productivity	4
Their families	3
Balance between	3
Have more time	3
Depends a lot	2
With their families	2
Type of business	2
Time for themselves	2
Work per week	2

Source: Own elaboration adapted from Online Utility – Text Analyzer

The findings indicate that the four-day work week is largely perceived as a value-creating resource to the extent that it enhances employees' well-being, motivation, and productivity, while supporting organizational differentiation. From a VRIO perspective, these perceptions reinforce the Value dimension, as the policy is seen as capable of improving both human outcomes and competitive positioning when properly implemented.

4.2.2. Rarity

The second metric, rarity, focused on whether managers considered the four-day work week to be a rare policy among their competitors. Ninety-five percent of respondents perceived it as a rare or unusual practice in their market context (figure 4.5).



Figure 4.5 Word Cloud - Rarity
Source: TagCroud

Managers described the four-day week as an emerging idea, still in an early stage of diffusion and mainly associated with isolated pilots or experimental projects. References to "few companies," "pilot project," and "emerging measure" illustrate a

shared perception that the policy is not yet widespread and remains confined to a limited number of organizations. Respondents repeatedly stressed that adoption is strongly influenced by the sector, type of business, and organizational culture, noting that some industries are structurally more compatible with shorter working weeks than others.

At the same time, respondents identified significant resistance and implementation difficulties, which help to explain why the four-day week remains rare. Many argued that the policy challenges established norms regarding working time and demands substantial changes in processes, customer service, and internal expectations. Even when managers recognized its potential benefits, they frequently described it as "difficult to implement" in their current context.

The four-day week is perceived as a scarce and distinctive policy, still far from becoming a standard practice in the market. In VRIO terms, these perceptions support the Rarity dimension: the policy is viewed as a rare configuration of working time that can distinguish organizations in the labor market, particularly in Portugal, where awareness of the four-day week is closely linked to a limited number of pilot experiences.

4.2.3. Inimitability

The third metric examined whether managers considered the four-day work week difficult or costly for competitors to imitate. The responses were more divided: 60% of interviewees agreed that the policy is difficult or expensive to replicate, while 40% did not share this view (figure 4.6).

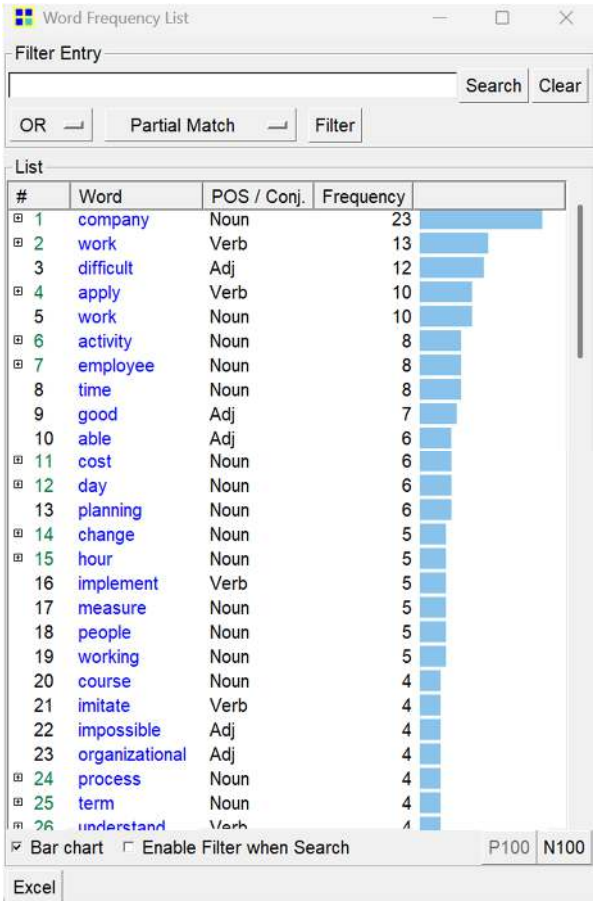


Figure 4.6. Word Frequency List - Inimitability
Source: KH Coder 3 Folder

Those who perceived the four-day week as difficult to imitate emphasized the need for significant organizational restructuring and changes to existing working methods. They argued that successful implementation demands careful redesign of processes, maintenance of salaries, and adjustments to schedules and responsibilities. These managers also highlighted the importance of good planning and investment in research and development to adapt the model to each organization's specific context. In their view, these requirements create barriers that not all competitors are willing or able to overcome.

Conversely, those who did not consider the policy inimitable stated that, once a company demonstrates that the model works, other organizations "can do the same" if they decide to invest and reorganize. For these respondents, the main obstacle is not the intrinsic difficulty of imitation but rather the willingness and strategic decision to implement the policy. In this sense, the four-day week is seen as a practice that could be replicated by any competitor with sufficient commitment and resources, limiting the potential for lasting differentiation.

The results thus reveal ambivalence in relation to inimitability. On one hand, the need for restructuring, planning, and cultural adaptation suggests the presence of imitation barriers. On the other, some managers see these barriers as surmountable for determined competitors. From a VRIO perspective, this ambiguity indicates that the four-day work week may generate at best a temporary advantage in terms of inimitability, dependent on how deeply it becomes embedded in leadership capabilities, organizational routines, and culture.

4.2.4. Organization

The last metric of the VRIO model, organization, focused on whether firms have the internal capacity to organize themselves so as to effectively exploit the four-day work week. Here, responses were more evenly split: 55% of respondents believed their organization would be capable of organizing effectively around a four-day week, whereas 45% considered that this would not be feasible at present (figure 4.7).

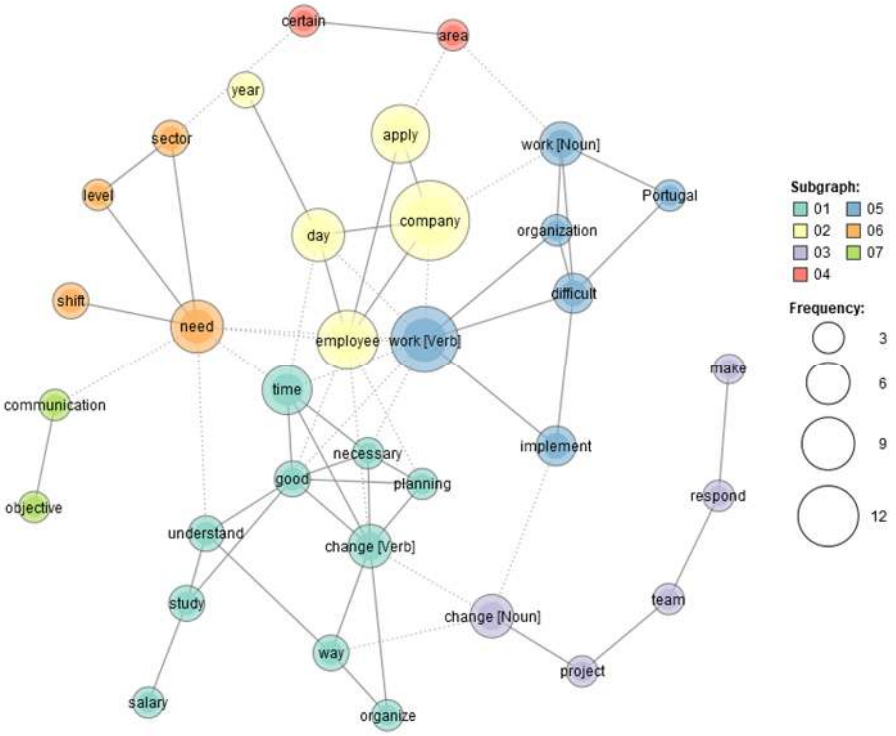


Figure 4.7. Mind Map - Organization
Source: KH Coder 3 Folder

Managers who expressed doubts highlighted several organizational challenges. They stressed the need for prior studies to assess feasibility, analyze workload, and understand the impact on different areas and sectors of activity. Many respondents argued that the

four-day week would require thorough planning, including the redesign of working methods and the adoption of new forms of scheduling—such as shift systems—to ensure that the company remains available to clients five days a week. Concerns about the ability to "respond to customer needs" with one fewer working day were recurrent, especially in sectors with intensive service or operational demands.

Respondents also emphasized the importance of clear communication with employees so that they understand the company's objectives and the rationale behind any changes. They noted that without transparent communication and alignment, there is a risk of misunderstanding, resistance, or perceived unfairness. At the same time, several managers recognized that, with adequate planning, structural adjustments, and strong leadership, it would be possible to implement the four-day week successfully, even if not in the short term.

The results suggest that organizational capacity is perceived as the critical bottleneck for turning the four-day week into a sustainable advantage. From a VRIO perspective, these results reflect the Organization dimension: even when the policy is seen as valuable, rare, and potentially difficult to imitate, its effectiveness depends on whether firms develop the structures, processes, and leadership practices necessary to support and institutionalize the new working model.

Taken together, the analysis of the four VRIO dimensions shows that managers tend to view the four-day work week as a promising but still conditional strategic resource. The policy is broadly perceived as valuable, insofar as it can enhance work–life balance, motivation, and productivity, and as rare, given its limited diffusion and emerging character in the Portuguese context. However, perceptions of inimitability and organizational capacity are more ambivalent: while some leaders identify significant barriers related to restructuring, culture, and planning, others believe that determined competitors could replicate the model if they choose to invest in it. As a result, the four-day work week appears, in the current stage, to operate mainly as a form of temporary competitive advantage, with the potential to become sustainable only in organizations that manage to embed it in robust leadership capabilities, supportive cultures, and well-aligned structures and processes. This pattern reinforces the relevance of the VRIO framework for understanding how an intangible policy such as reduced working time can, under specific conditions, evolve from an experimental initiative into a source of durable strategic differentiation.

5. Discussion

Based on the data analysis previously carried out, this chapter aims to analyze and interpret the results of this analysis, focusing on the four research questions, and discuss these results with the theory presented in the literature review. Thus, this chapter is organized by research question, and at the end, contributions to theory and practice will be described.

As this is a single-sample study, it is important to note that the interpretation of the data cannot be generalized to a general context, allowing only for possible conclusions about trends and new findings.

6. 5.1 Value Creation: Linking Well-Being and Performance to RBV and Strategic HRM

The findings indicate that most managers perceive the four-day work week primarily as a source of value through improvements in work–life balance, motivation, and productivity. This view is consistent with empirical research showing that reduced working hours can increase efficiency, focus, and employee satisfaction (Cui et al., 2019; Delaney & Casey, 2022; Fathya et al., 2024) and support better mental health and family life (Ahmad & Munir, 2023; Burchell et al., 2024; Venczel, 2024). In line with the literature, interviewees tended to interpret value less in narrow economic terms and more in terms of human and social outcomes—greater well-being, higher morale, and stronger engagement.

From a Resource-Based View (RBV) perspective, these perceptions suggest that the four-day week can be conceptualized as an intangible resource that creates value by aligning human resources with strategic outcomes (Barney et al., 2021; Dresch et al., 2018). Strategic human resource management (SHRM) frameworks likewise emphasize that work–life balance and flexibility practices can form part of a strategic HR bundle that strengthens employer branding, motivation, and retention, rather than being mere administrative benefits. The results therefore reinforce the idea that the four-day week is valuable when it is deliberately integrated into a broader strategic HRM architecture, linking employee well-being to organizational competitiveness. At the same time, managers' emphasis on "type of business" and operational constraints underlines that value creation is context-dependent and contingent on careful workload redesign, echoing

concerns in the literature about implementation quality and task deadlines (Fathya et al., 2024; Tessema et al., 2023).

5.2 Rarity and Market Differentiation

Managers consistently described the four-day work week as an emerging and rare organizational policy in their competitive environments. This perception echoes the literature, which portrays the 4DWW as a relatively recent innovation concentrated in pilots and specific sectors (Campbell, 2024; Jahal et al., 2024), and more challenging to implement in companies providing continuous services to customers (Tessema et al., 2023; Copeland & James, 2023). Respondents' references to "few companies," "pilot projects," and the Portuguese experience of limited experimentation confirm that, at present, the policy is far from widespread.

Within the VRIO framework, this rarity has strategic implications. Early adopters can benefit from first-mover advantages, using the four-day week to differentiate their employer value proposition and strengthen their position in the labour market (Chung, 2022; Fathya et al., 2024). At the same time, managers' emphasis on sector, business model, and culture suggests that rarity is not only a matter of market scarcity but also of institutional and organizational constraints: some industries and organizational cultures are perceived as structurally less compatible with shorter working weeks. This reinforces the idea that the four-day week currently operates as a rare and contextually bounded resource, capable of generating differentiation where conditions allow, but not yet mature enough to show clear long-term effects at the macro level.

5.3 Inimitability, Strategic HRM and Leadership Capabilities

The empirical results reveal a more ambiguous picture with regard to inimitability. A majority of managers consider the four-day week difficult or costly to imitate, citing implementation challenges, required restructuring, salary maintenance, and the need for investment in new working methods and technologies (Bernstein, 2023; Deshpande, 2023; Dhal et al., 2021; Earley, 2024; Gomes, 2022). Others, however, argue that once a company proves the model is viable, competitors could replicate it if they are willing to reorganize and invest, limiting the scope for enduring differentiation.

This ambivalence can be understood through RBV and strategic HRM lenses. The four-day week itself, as a formal policy, may be relatively easy to imitate; what is harder to copy are the bundles of capabilities that make it work—leadership practices, cultural norms, and HR systems. Strategic HRM research highlights the importance of socially complex and causally ambiguous resources, such as trust-based cultures, participatory decision-making, and integrated HR practices, which competitors cannot easily reproduce. The findings point in this direction by underlining the role of planning, communication, and change management as critical conditions for success (Rafferty et al., 2022; Bersin et al., 2023; Tessema et al., 2023; Venczel, 2024).

Here, leadership emerges as a central mediating factor. The notion of tightrope-walking leadership (Abdullah et al., 2025) is particularly useful: leaders must balance flexibility with efficiency, stability with change, and control with autonomy when implementing the four-day week. Where such leadership capabilities are present—combining openness to experimentation with operational discipline—the policy is more likely to become a non-trivial, difficult-to-imitate configuration of practices and routines. Where leadership is more rigid or purely instrumental, the four-day week risks remaining a surface-level scheduling change that competitors can reproduce more easily.

5.4 Organizational Feasibility and Change Readiness

The organization dimension of VRIO appears as the most sensitive and critical in the findings. Although slightly more than half of the respondents believed their organizations could be structured to exploit the four-day week effectively, a substantial proportion expressed doubts about feasibility. Managers frequently mentioned the need for feasibility studies, workload reconfiguration, and revised working methods to ensure that customer needs continue to be met. Some suggested hybrid or shift-based models as possible solutions to reconcile four-day schedules with five-day operations, stressing that implementation is far from straightforward in many sectors.

These concerns resonate with classic theories of organizational change, which emphasize readiness, alignment, and iterative adaptation as prerequisites for successful transformation. For the four-day week to be fully “organized” in the VRIO sense, it must be supported by coherent structures and processes—including planning mechanisms, performance indicators, and communication channels—that embed the policy into routine

operations. The findings confirm that clear communication of objectives and alignment with employees are seen as essential to avoid misunderstanding, resistance, or perceived unfairness (Bersin et al., 2023; Tessema et al., 2023; Venczel, 2024).

In this context, tightrope-walking leadership again plays a crucial role. Flexible and efficient leaders, capable of adjusting processes dynamically while safeguarding performance, function as organizing capabilities that transform the four-day week from a symbolic initiative into an institutionalized practice. Their ability to coordinate structural changes, manage tensions between service continuity and reduced hours, and engage employees in the transition is central to achieving organizational alignment and exploiting the policy's full potential.

5.5 From Temporary to Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Bringing these dimensions together, the study suggests that, in its current stage of diffusion, the four-day work week tends to generate at most a temporary competitive advantage. Organizations can derive short-term benefits in terms of talent attraction, employer branding, well-being, and productivity, particularly while the policy remains rare in the market. However, if competitors adopt similar practices or if implementation difficulties persist, these advantages may erode.

The findings allow us to identify several conditions under which the four-day week could evolve from a temporary to a sustainable advantage in RBV and VRIO terms. First, the policy must consistently create value, not only by improving well-being but also by maintaining or enhancing performance and service quality. Second, it must retain or be combined with forms of rarity, whether through early adoption, integration with distinctive HR practices, or embedding in unique cultural and sectoral contexts. Third, it should be supported by inimitable capabilities, including tightrope-walking leadership, trust-based and participatory cultures, and technological infrastructures that enable productivity with fewer hours. Fourth, it needs to be fully organized and institutionalized, with structures, processes, and metrics aligned to sustain the model over time.

When these conditions are met, the four-day work week moves closer to the profile of a sustainable strategic resource as defined by RBV and VRIO: valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and supported by appropriate organizational systems. The study thus contributes to the literature by showing that the four-day week should not be interpreted

merely as a human resource or well-being initiative, but as a strategic change process that reconfigures resources, capabilities, and leadership practices. It bridges debates on work–life balance, strategic HRM, and leadership/organizational change, clarifying the mechanisms through which an emerging work-time policy may—or may not—evolve into a durable source of competitive advantage.

5.6 Strategic Leadership Lens on the Four-Day Work Week

Although this study focuses on leadership and managerial perceptions rather than employee experiences, this perspective is intentionally adopted to address a gap in the existing literature. Most prior research examines the four-day work week from the employee standpoint well-being, motivation, and work–life balance while overlooking how strategic decision-makers interpret its feasibility and competitive value. In contexts such as Portugal and other European countries, organizations are now using the four-day work week as a strategic tool to attract and retain scarce talent in competitive markets. Therefore, understanding the strategic rationale behind adoption provides complementary insights to employee-centered studies. Future research should integrate both perspectives to capture the full organizational dynamics of this transition.

5.7 Theoretical, Practical, and Societal Implications

This study generates important implications for research, managerial practice, and society. From a research standpoint, it contributes to bridging the gap between strategic management theory and contemporary debates on work organization by demonstrating how the VRIO framework can be applied to analyze non-material resources such as organizational policies and leadership practices. By framing the four-day work week as an intangible strategic resource, the paper advances the Resource-Based View (RBV) literature and opens avenues for future studies that combine strategic, behavioral, and socio-economic perspectives. It also provides a conceptual foundation for mixed-method or longitudinal investigations that could assess, over time, how leadership attitudes evolve and how the perceived value and rarity of the four-day work week change as its adoption expands across industries and countries.

In practical terms, the findings highlight that the success of the four-day work week depends not only on structural and technological readiness but also on the leadership behaviors and managerial attitudes that shape its implementation. The research reveals

that leaders who approach this policy as a strategic investment—rather than a social experiment tend to perceive higher potential for creating competitive advantage through enhanced talent attraction, retention, and organizational engagement. As such, the study offers valuable insights for executives and HR decision-makers designing strategies that align employee well-being with business performance, especially in contexts such as Portugal and other European labor markets, where the four-day work week is emerging as a distinctive tool for attracting skilled professionals and addressing work–life balance expectations.

Beyond organizational practice, this study also has implications for teaching and public policy. In the educational field, the findings can be used in management, leadership, and human resource development programs to illustrate the intersection between strategic decision-making and evolving models of work. In the policy sphere, the study underscores the relevance of leadership-driven approaches in ensuring that the transition to shorter work weeks enhances productivity and equity rather than merely redistributing workload. Finally, at the societal level, the research contributes to the broader discourse on the future of work by suggesting that leadership perceptions play a decisive role in determining whether the four-day work week can genuinely improve quality of life, foster inclusivity, and promote sustainable economic competitiveness. The alignment between leadership vision, employee well-being, and organizational capacity thus emerges as a critical factor in translating the four-day work week from a temporary managerial trend into a lasting social and economic innovation (see table 5.2).

Table 5.2. Main topics and theoretical and practical contributions

Authors (year)	**Main Topics**	**Main Theoretical or Practical Contribution**
Copeland & James (2023)	Effect on talent retention.	The 4-day week can enhance employee well-being, thereby contributing to talent retention.
Delaney & Casey (2022)	Productivity is the most compelling metric for implementing the 4-day week.	The 4-day week can increase employee productivity.
Fathya et al. (2024)	Need for an inclusive work culture and constant feedback.	Adopting a 4-day week may require effective communication, as well as a work culture that is

		conducive to its implementation.
Gomes (2022)	Beneficial technological changes to implement the 4-day work week.	Companies with more digitized work processes can create favorable conditions for implementing the 4-day week.
Gomes (2022)	Increased productivity and employee happiness.	The 4-day week can improve worker satisfaction and productivity.
Jahal et al. (2024)	Positive effect on workers' lifestyles.	With the adoption of the 4-day week, workers may have more time for their families.
Kamerāde et al. (2019)	Definition of the ideal number of hours in a 4-day work week that maximizes worker productivity.	Requirement for the possible need to change working methods and carry out internal reforms.
Rafferty (2022)	Advance planning in the implementation of the 4-day week depending on the business you are running.	The viability of the 4-day week may depend greatly on the sector and type of business of the company implementing it.
Tessema et al. (2023)	The importance of work-life balance and employee well-being when implementing a 4-day work week.	The adoption of the 4-day week may lead to improved well-being in the lives of workers.

Source: Own elaboration

7. Conclusion

This research set out to examine whether the four-day work week can provide firms with a source of competitive advantage when viewed through the lens of the Resource-Based View (RBV) and the VRIO framework. By focusing on leadership and managerial perceptions, the study reframes the four-day week not only as a human resource practice but as an intangible strategic resource whose value depends on how it is perceived, configured, and supported by organizational capabilities. The empirical findings show that managers largely regard the four-day work week as valuable and rare, particularly in terms of its capacity to enhance work–life balance, motivation, and employer

attractiveness in an emerging adoption context such as Portugal. However, perceptions of inimitability and organizational feasibility are more ambivalent, which constrains the extent to which this policy can currently be considered a fully sustainable competitive advantage.

In theoretical terms, the study contributes to bridging strategic management theory, strategic HRM, and leadership studies. It demonstrates how the VRIO framework can be applied to non-material resources such as organizational policies and leadership practices, extending RBV to the domain of work-time innovation. By showing that the four-day week tends to operate, in the present context, as a temporary competitive advantage—valuable and rare, but only partially inimitable and unevenly organized—the study clarifies the conditions under which such a policy may progress towards sustainable advantage. These conditions include the embedding of the four-day week in distinctive leadership capabilities, trust-based and participatory cultures, and robust organizational systems that align strategy, structure, and human resource practices.

From a managerial standpoint, the findings suggest a clear distinction between short-term practical value and long-term strategic sustainability. In the short term, organizations capable of reorganizing work effectively can use the four-day week to attract and retain talent, signal innovation, and improve well-being and motivation, especially in competitive labour markets where flexibility is highly valued. In the longer term, however, the policy will only contribute to sustainable competitive advantage if it is supported by consistent performance levels, maintained service quality, and credible internal alignment. Without these conditions, initial gains may erode as competitors imitate the practice or as operational tensions emerge.

The results also point to concrete managerial guidelines for organizations considering this transition. First, communication strategies are critical: leaders should clearly explain the objectives, expectations, and constraints of the four-day week, engaging employees in dialogue to mitigate uncertainty and resistance. Second, leadership flexibility—in line with the notion of tightrope-walking leadership—is essential to balance efficiency and autonomy, adjusting processes and targets dynamically while preserving operational discipline. Third, a phased implementation approach is advisable, beginning with pilot projects, feasibility studies, and controlled experimentation in selected units or functions, accompanied by clear performance indicators (e.g., productivity, customer satisfaction,

absenteeism). This gradual pathway allows organizations to learn, adapt, and refine the model before extending it more broadly.

Like any exploratory qualitative study, this research has limitations. The findings are based on a relatively small, single-country sample of twenty leaders and managers in Portugal, which restricts statistical generalizability and reflects context-specific perceptions. The focus on leadership perspectives, while deliberate and theoretically motivated, does not capture employee experiences or quantitative performance outcomes. In addition, the sequential use of the VRIO dimensions may have generated some inconsistencies in responses, with interviewees occasionally rejecting earlier parameters while evaluating later ones positively. These limitations nonetheless open promising avenues for future research. Subsequent studies should triangulate managerial and employee perspectives, incorporate quantitative indicators of performance and well-being, and extend the analysis across sectors and countries through longitudinal and comparative designs. Integrating VRIO with complementary frameworks—such as dynamic capabilities or institutional theory—would further enhance understanding of how the four-day work week interacts with broader organizational and contextual dynamics.

Taken together, the findings highlight both the opportunities and constraints of the four-day work week as a strategic tool. While it does not yet constitute a universally sustainable competitive advantage, under the right conditions—value creation, relative rarity, embedded leadership capabilities, and strong organizational alignment—it holds the potential to evolve into one. As such, the four-day work week should be viewed less as a one-size-fits-all solution and more as a strategic change process that, when carefully designed and led, can contribute to the long-term alignment of employee well-being, organizational performance, and sustainable competitiveness.

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