

FACTORS AFFECTING OCCUPATIONAL WELL-BEING OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION EMPLOYEES IN POLAND

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Purpose: This article identifies the factors affecting occupational well-being and determines their significance for people employed in public administration institutions in Poland between 2020-2021.

Methodology: The present analysis is based on the authors' proprietary empirical research conducted in 2021 by the CAWI method on a representative sample of 202 public sector employees. The authors assessed their research's outcome by means of a hierarchical cluster analysis, Ward's method as well as one-way ANOVA test.

Findings: The study has revealed that the most important factors determining the occupational well-being of employees in public administration institutions are job security and appealing work content. By contrast, the factor which turned out to least affect their well-being was a good rapport with their supervisor. The research has found that the power of the impact of individual factors varies according to gender and the type of contract under which occupational tasks are performed.

Research limitations/implications: The study captures the variables of occupational well-being of public administration employees in a static perspective. The determinants in question are prone to time and change. Further research is recommended to place them in a long-term perspective. The study focused on Polish employees exclusively. In order to gain more standardized results, the research should be extended to a wider range of regions and countries. The research identified the determinants of well-being through employees' self-judgements. For a complete picture, other sources of evaluation should also be taken into account.

Originality/value: The article fosters understanding of the underlying determinants of occupational well-being of public administration employees. The results are significant for the informed management of employees and provide practical tips to facilitate employee motivation.

Keywords: occupational well-being, employee well-being, public administration, cluster analysis.

1. Introduction

Over the last two years, we have observed a resurgent interest in the concept of employee well-being in the literature, as well as in management practice. This is a natural consequence of the challenges arising from the uncertainty caused by various distressing circumstances. As a result of the pandemic, more than 40 per cent of employees experienced a decline in well-being and three quarters suffered from stress (Nationale-Nederlanden, 2021).

Up to 80% (71% in Poland) of organizations operating globally declare that employee well-being is important or very important to their success (Deloitte, 2020). An in-depth analysis reveals definition problems. Still, there is no explicit definition of employee well-being (Diener et al., 1999; Forgeard et al., 2011; Keyes et al., 2002; Seligman, 2011; Simone, 2014; Zheng et al., 2015). Employee well-being is a complex multidisciplinary concept. Therefore, it is necessary to specify the essence of the matter. Recognition of the variables that influence the level of well-being is of particular theoretical and practical importance. In addition to this, there is a cognitive gap in the literature in terms of recognizing the factors which determine, i.e. enhance or reduce the occupational well-being of the public administration employees, during such a specific period as the years 2020-2021.

Therefore, the article focuses mainly on identifying these factors and on assessing their importance for the Polish public sector workers between 2020 and 2021. To achieve the purpose, the authors have formulated the four specific objectives, namely:

- to define the nature of occupational wellbeing,
- to identify the key determinants of occupational well-being of public administration employees in Poland between the years 2020-2021,
- to establish the hierarchy of specific factors determining the professional well-being of public administration employees,
- to assess to what extent the well-being determinants vary.

The analysis discussed in this article is based on the authors' proprietary empirical research conducted in 2021 by the CAWI method on a representative sample of 202 public sector employees.

2. The nature of occupational well-being

Contemporary management literature and practice have devoted considerable attention to the issues of well-being in recent years. This concept, understood as a general mental and physical state experienced by a person, is multidimensional in nature, and therefore the interpretation of its essence poses serious challenges (Tabor-Błazewicz, 2021). And yet, it is

essential to identify both the components and the determinants of a person's well-being. Research indicates that psychological well-being is the most significant factor affecting the sense of well-being in the work process (Johnson et al., 2018). Therefore, conceptualizing employee psychological well-being from a eudaimonistic perspective, focused on human potential, seems closest to management and quality sciences (Czaplinski, 2012; Ryan, Deci, 2001). Eudaimonic well-being embraces six core aspects: positive attitude towards oneself (self-acceptance), positive interpersonal relationships, a sense of freedom, autonomy, a sense of purpose in life and opportunities to personal growth (Ryff, 2013). The above-mentioned aspects indicate that employee well-being is shaped by work-related factors. It is therefore appropriate to specify the scope of the concept of employee well-being. The authors propose to restrict the crux of the concept to occupational well-being, understood as a mental and physical state experienced by a person in relation to their performance of occupational tasks or functions. This proposal has practical relevance, as it will allow employers and managers to orient their efforts towards factors within their control that directly affect employees' occupational well-being.

As the research shows, the assessment of occupational well-being is partly determined by personal characteristics of an employee, which are relatively permanent, fixed individual dispositions. Consequently, opinions among employees on the type and strength of factors influencing occupational well-being vary. Therefore, individualized analyses and occupational well-being programs addressing the specifics of occupational activities and the main characteristics of employees are desirable. The need for such analyses is confirmed by the contemporary labor market conditions, described as a market of experiences, in which employees, in addition to fair pay, expect personalized values as well as individual experiences and sensations (Lipka, 2022).

3. The importance of exploring the factors of occupational well-being

Without understanding of the key determinants of well-being, organizational managers are confused about how they could respond to any deterioration in occupational well-being in their teams (Ilska, Kołodziej-Zalewska, 2018). And yet, there is a profound rationale for the investment in well-being. 95% of HR executives agree that job burnout affects employee retention rates negatively (Deloitte, 2022b). A study by Limeade and Quantum Workplace found that employees with high levels of well-being are more engaged in the work they enjoy and therefore are more likely to recommend their employer to others (Peterson, 2022). Over the past four decades, behavioural science research has highlighted the competitive advantage that a sense of employee well-being generates for companies (Lester et al., 2022). According to this year's Deloitte survey, 94% of respondents agreed that well-being affects company performance

to some extent. Respondents claimed it improved customer service standards, financial results, reputation, innovation and adaptability (Deloitte, 2022a). Other studies have found that employee well-being, and its opposite, i.e. the sense of unhappiness, are contagious, and can be shared by people functioning within the same social group (Lester et al., 2022). This can exert consequences for employees' sense of belonging and thus their level of stability.

The body of literature presents various sets of factors affecting employees' occupational well-being, embracing multiple dimensions: quality of life, sense of work, likelihood of job burnout, severe fatigue, work-life integrity, suicidal ideation, e.g. the Employee Well-Being Index (eWBI) (Dyrbye et al., 2016). The authors have chosen to apply a framework developed by the Gallup Institute (Gallup-Healthways, 2017) based on a multi-year study, which considers five core factors:

- a) purpose - a sense of satisfaction, a sense of influence and meaning of one's performance,
- b) social: a good work atmosphere, friendly and supportive relationships with others,
- c) financial: security, financial stability,
- d) community: a sense of belonging to a larger group, being proud to work in a particular place,
- e) physical health - good health, physical activity (Gallup-Healthways, 2017).

4. Research methodology

The survey was conducted by the CAWI method in January 2021. It involved two hundred and two respondents working in public sector institutions, predominantly male (53%), with a university education (69%), employed in medium-sized organizations (employing 50-249 people) (38%), on a contract basis (86%), in non-managerial positions (70%).

The specific characteristics of the research sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Structure of the survey sample (in %)

Sex	Female	47
	Male	53
Age	18-29	12
	30-39	19
	40-49	36
	above 50	33
Education	Vocational	2
	Secondary	29
	Higher	69
Form of Employment	Employment contract	86
	Civil law contract	8
	Proprietorship	6

Cont. Table 1.

Company Size	Up to 50 employees	23
	50-249 employees	38
	250-500 employees	14
	Over 500 employees	25
Position	Non-managerial	70
	Managerial	30

N = 202.

Source: own study.

To meet the main and specific objectives, three research questions were formulated:

1. What key factors affect the occupational well-being of public administration employees in Poland between 2020 and 2021?
2. How significant are the particular determinants of occupational well-being of public administration employees?
3. What is the variation in the factors affecting the occupational well-being of public administration employees?

The survey contained a total of 22 questions concerning respondents' opinions on specific aspects of employees' occupational well-being, engagement and assessment of pay equity¹. Respondents rated statements on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represented 'strongly disagree' and 5, 'strongly agree'. To explore occupational well-being, fourteen questions based on the 'Gallup-Healthways, Well-being 5 Index' tool were used (Gallup-Healthways, 2017). In order to diagnose the key factors, ten questions in the survey were analysed. Three additional questions were used to characterise the selected factors of occupational well-being. This was followed by an analysis of the hierarchy of determinants of well-being from the respondents' viewpoint.

Respondents were asked to rank the following factors from the most important (1st place) to the least important (8th place): interesting job, employment security, prestige of the job, sense of fair remuneration, personal growth opportunities, friendly atmosphere at work, work-life balance and good rapport with the supervisor.

The first stage of the analyses focused on the calculation of descriptive statistics. Then, a hierarchical cluster analysis was applied using Ward's method with the square of the Euclidean distance. On the basis this, homogeneous groups of employees were identified according to their ratings of the determinants of occupational well-being. The results were analyzed with a one-way ANOVA test. The tests confirmed statistical significance in the variation of means.

The calculations were performed with the SPSS statistics package version 27.

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5. Research findings

5.1. Key factors determining the occupational well-being of public administration employees in Poland in the years 2020-2021

The survey found that public administration employees rated their occupational well-being relatively well. Such a statement is mandated by the fact that in all statements, positive ratings exceeded those which were negative (Table 2).

The highest rated factor was the feeling that their work is of purpose, with as many as 76% of respondents confirming a belief in the sense of work. Slightly fewer respondents (65%) felt satisfaction with their work. Respondents also rated the team atmosphere highly (74% of respondents). In contrast, far fewer (only 59%) rated the working relationship with their supervisor positively. At the same time, 29% of those who responded to the survey had no opinion on this, which is twice as many as on the team atmosphere. The opinions on the sense of work and team atmosphere correspond with the assessment of the sense of pride in work. 69% of employees are proud of the work they perform. Meanwhile, it appears that just as they are critical about work rapport with their superior, they distrust the supervisor and their work colleagues either. Fewer than a half (58%) have a sense of trust and 28% have no opinion on this issue.

The lowest rating among employees is for determinants related to finances, i.e. the conviction that salaries are appropriate to the work performed (only 39% of respondents confirm this statement), and that salaries for different positions are appropriately diversified (42%). At the same time, as many as 32% of respondents do not have an opinion on this, which testifies the lack of transparency in pay diversity.

Health-related factors, especially in terms of feeling intellectually and emotionally exhausted, were also critically assessed by respondents. 46% of respondents confirmed that they felt them and only 30% denied it, while 24% have no opinion on this.

Table 2.
Employee well-being analysis (in %)

Well-being aspect	Statement	Definitely no	Rather not	Difficult to say	Rather yes	Definitely yes	Negative rating	Positive rating
Purpose	My work gives me satisfaction	3%	6%	25%	41%	24%	10%	65%
	I believe my work is of purpose	2%	3%	18%	47%	29%	5%	76%
Social	There is a nice and friendly atmosphere in my team	2%	8%	15%	49%	25%	11%	74%
	My rapport with my superior is very good	4%	8%	29%	37%	22%	12%	59%

Cont. table 2.

Financial	My pay is adequate for my job	13%	25%	23%	25%	14%	38%	39%
	The pay for different positions at my workplace is well varied	9%	16%	32%	28%	14%	25%	43%
Community	I am proud of the work I do	2%	7%	21%	37%	32%	10%	69%
	I have trust in my colleagues and supervisor	2%	12%	28%	39%	19%	14%	57%
Health	My health and fitness are adequate for the job I do	1%	6%	22%	51%	19%	7%	71%
	I feel intellectually and emotionally worn-out by my work	11%	19%	24%	31%	15%	30%	46%

Source: own study.

Based on the results of the survey, it can be concluded that the majority of the surveyed public administration employees admitted that they enjoy their work - as many as 79% of the respondents agreed with the statement and only 7% gave a negative answer (Table 3). The majority (60%) of respondents were optimistic about what the future holds. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents declared having a work-life balance.

Table 3.

Selected determinants of employees' occupational well-being (in %)

Statement	Definitely no	Rather not	Difficult to say	Rather yes	Definitely yes	Negative rating	Positive rating
I have a work-life life	2%	9%	24%	44%	20%	11%	64%
I look to the future with hope and enthusiasm	4%	13%	23%	43%	17%	17%	60%
I enjoy my job	2%	5%	13%	44%	35%	7%	79%

Source: own study.

The above opinions allow to optimistically assess the occupational well-being of public administration employees and to conclude that there is a good basis for influencing the well-being of employees. In order to do so, identification of the determinants of occupational well-being and their importance is needed.

5.2. Hierarchy of individual factors determining the occupational well-being of public administration employees

The research indicates that the most important factor determining the occupational well-being of public administration employees is job security (Table 4). It was ranked as the most important in the hierarchy, among the eight factors analysed, by more than a third of respondents.

Table 4.

Hierarchy of factors determining the occupational well-being of public administration employees

Factor	Average rank	Standard deviation	Factor ranked first (% of respondents)	Factor ranked last (% of respondents)
interesting job	3.5	2.2	26%	6%
job security	3.1	2.1	36%	4%
sense of fair pay	5.4	2.2	10%	7%
opportunity for personal development/growth	4.1	2.1	5%	16%
friendly atmosphere at work	5.3	2.0	9%	10%
prestige of the job	4.3	2.2	6%	23%
work-life balance	4.9	2.1	5%	12%

Source: own study.

Engaging work content came in at the second place. This factor was the most important for 26% of respondents. The importance of the next two factors, i.e. the opportunity for personal development and the prestige of the job, ranked in the middle of the scale and was similar. It is noteworthy that, in the opinion of the surveyed employees, three factors had little influence on the level of occupational well-being, namely: a friendly atmosphere at work, a sense of fair pay and a good rapport with the supervisor. The last one, i.e. rapport with the supervisor, is, according to the respondents, the least important of the eight factors analyzed.

5.3. Variability of factors determining the professional well-being of public administration employees

The hierarchy of factors determining occupational well-being established in the study represented the sentiments of the public administration employees surveyed as a whole. Therefore, further analysis was necessary to identify relatively homogeneous groups of employees in terms of factors determining occupational well-being.

For this purpose, a cluster analysis was performed. Using a one-way ANOVA test, the variables differentiating the distinguished groups were identified. To characterise them, selected personal characteristics (i.e. age, gender, education, post, type of contract) and organizational characteristics (i.e. company size) were adopted. It turns out that the characteristics differentiating public administration employees' opinions on their occupational well-being were only gender and the type of contract under which their occupational tasks are performed (for these variables statistical significance was obtained from tests of mean variables). By contrast, age, education, post, size of the company were not significant in differentiating the employees' sentiments.

The description of the distinguished clusters was preceded by an analysis of the structure of each cluster (Table 5). Cluster one was dominated by women (58%) and those employed under a contract of employment (94%). Cluster two was dominated by men (65%). Employment contracts also predominated here (78%), but a relatively large proportion of this group were sole proprietors (12%). In cluster three, the majority were men (58%) and employed on an employment contract. A relatively high proportion represented those employed under a Civil Law contract (11%).

Table 5.*Structural characteristics of the clusters*

	Cluster I	Cluster II	Cluster III
Gender			
Female	58%	35%	42%
Male	42%	65%	58%
Type of contract			
Employment contract	94%	78%	82%
Civil Law contract	5%	10%	11%
Self-employment	1%	12%	7%

Source: own study.

By means of cluster analysis, three relatively homogeneous groups of workers were identified (Table 6) in terms of factors determining occupational well-being.

Table 6.*Clusters of factors determining occupational well-being*

Factor	Skupienie I (N = 344)		Skupienie II (N = 423)		Skupienie III (N = 233)	
	mean rank	standard deviation	mean rank	standard deviation	mean rank	standard deviation
engaging job	4.6	2.2	2.7	2.1	2.6	1.6
job security	1.9	1.1	5.4	1.9	2.7	1.9
prestige of the job	6.7	1.5	6.0	2.1	3.6	1.7
sense of fair pay	3.2	1.7	3.4	2.0	5.6	1.7
opportunity for personal development	6.2	1.6	4.8	2.0	4.5	2.1
friendly atmosphere at work	3.6	1.7	4.4	2.5	5.2	2.1
work-life balance	5.2	1.8	4.0	2.1	5.2	2.3
good rapport with superiors	4.7	2.1	5.2	1.9	6.6	1.5

Source: own study.

Cluster one was represented by women, with employment contracts. What matters for the sense of occupational well-being is job security. A sense of fair pay and a friendly atmosphere at work also matter. The prestige of the job and the opportunity for personal development are of minor importance.

The second cluster included men, among whom a relatively high proportion were self-employed. The occupational well-being of these individuals was shaped primarily by the content of their work and their sense of fair pay. The prestige of their work was not important to them.

The third identified group was dominated by men, a relatively large proportion of whom were employed under Civil Law contracts. The content of their work and job security had a positive impact on their professional well-being. On the other hand, evaluation of the fairness of remuneration and, above all, good rapport with the supervisor did not play a role.

6. Summary

The positive and negative consequences of employees' occupational well-being prove that it is expedient to analyze the determinants in detail. As the research shows, the most important determinants of employees' occupational well-being in public administration institutions are job security and engaging work content. In contrast, their well-being is least influenced by good rapport with their supervisor. The research has shown that the power of the impact of individual factors varies according to gender and the type of contract under which occupational tasks are performed. Therefore, it is possible to distinguish three clusters of employees, with different perceptions of the psychological and physical conditions linked to the performance of professional tasks or functions, among employees of public administration institutions.

The above results suggest practical implications. The actions of employers and managers aimed at shaping the occupational well-being of employees require an individualised approach, which thus implies the need to create a comprehensive scheme of actions, incorporated into the system of human capital management in the company. Measures of an action-oriented, interventionist nature, for example successive bonus benefits and policies focused on health and material conditions do not fully meet these prerequisites.

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