

## CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES FACING COMPANIES. “OCCUPATIONAL BURNINGOUT” IN THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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**Purpose:** Nowadays the concept of sustainable development of a company includes job burnout, a new phenomenon which is still poorly recognized and rarely considered in company's activities. Burnout syndrome is a spectrum of symptoms of a physical and emotional nature, resulting from various burdens, including the professional ones, and most often caused by stress. The awareness of the problem should, and already results in preventive measures and a reaction to the existing syndrome of occupational burnout among companies representing sectors especially exposed to this phenomenon. Such sectors include Education, IT and Healthcare, among others. The solution to the growing problem is seen in the complex of well-being activities, comprised in the holistically approached concept of sustainable development. The aim of the paper is to define the basic research categories of the subject of the study and to define the structure of the contemporary model of the concept of sustainable development and the ways of its implementation in the area of "suppressing, preventing and mitigating" the negative effects in the business, environment, and human sub-spheres, with special focus on the latter sphere.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The research is exploratory in nature. It includes methods of quantitative and qualitative **analysis** for the needs of discussion on the results of secondary research. The conducted primary research is only a pilot study, prior to in-depth explanatory research planned for the near future.

**Originality/value:** The obtained results show that the necessary condition for the implementation of contemporary models of sustainable development is a holistic approach of companies to the implementation of its sub-areas, especially those aimed at preventing and reducing occupational burnout, which is expressed in a wide spectrum of ways in which it is perceived and experienced by the employer and an employee, and which are different for these two professional groups, and the three surveyed sectors.

**Keywords:** sustainable development, model of sustainable development, professional burnout, well-being.

**Category of the paper:** conceptual paper.

## 1. Introduction

**Burnout syndrome** is certainly another civilization disease that affects modern society. Burnout was first described in 1974 in the United States. It was associated only with the performance of activities related to providing help and support to others. Today, research shows that the burnout syndrome can be diagnosed in representatives of almost all professions that require high emotional, cognitive, social and physical involvement (Janowska et al., 2005, p. 377).

American psychiatrist H.J. Freudenberg was the first to describe a burnout syndrome characterized by a sense of mental and physical exhaustion, impatience, excessive irritability, cynicism and a sense of chronic boredom, a tendency to isolate and suppress emotions (Kuc et al., 2009, p. 113). Ch. Maslach describes burnout as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depreciation, and a lowered sense of personal achievement that can occur in people who collaborate with other people in certain ways. On the other hand, according to E. Aronson, burnout is a physical state, similarly to the above-mentioned definitions of emotional and mental exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in situations that are emotionally burdensome (Bartkowiak, 1999, p. 103).

The WHO European Forum of Medical Associations defines burnout as a syndrome of depletion of emotional, physical and cognitive energy, reflected in exhaustion in these areas, as well as in the lack of efficiency and competence (Bartkowiak, 1999, p. 103). The symptoms of burnout may be so strong that they do not allow for the daily performance of professional duties. The lack of any actions and reactions from the environment may lead to making mistakes by the employee, which may result in serious consequences for the company. Therefore, considering the above, in June 2019, WHO included burnout in the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD), which has been in force since January 1, 2022. Statistical data show that the burnout syndrome has recently affected 4.2% of respondents in Poland (5.2% of women and 3.3% of men), most often aged 40-59 (Bezpieczeństwo pracy... [*Work safety*]). At present, September 14 is the International Day for Combating Burnout.

Occupational burnout certainly causes serious psychological damage, which is reflected in the erosion of values, dignity and will. It is a condition that develops gradually, in a continuous and uninterrupted manner, especially in the absence of preventive measures. It can become a clinical syndrome over time. Burnout is an important phenomenon both in individual and social dimension, from the point of view of self-realization and social existence, value building and self-acceptance, as well as the value of the structure (company, institution, society) for which, and in which, the individual functions. Hence, this problem seems to be crucial from the point of view of the effectiveness of a company operations and may constitute a modern way of implementing the concept of sustainable development through the prism of a comprehensive approach to its sub-areas, including the set of well-being activities.

## 2. Methodology

The research conducted for the purpose of the implementation of the topic of this study is exploratory in nature and includes methods of quantitative and qualitative analysis to discuss the results of secondary research. The study uses the information published on internet portals, e.g., Praca.pl, HR.pl, Eksperci Infor.pl. The results of the research conducted by the Association of Business Service Leaders (ABSL), Kronos Incorporated and Future Workplace, STADA Group and Savanta Inc, The Adecco Group, Gamma Company are quoted and analyzed. The conducted primary research is only a pilot study, prior to the explanatory research. In the study, a pilot categorized interview was addressed at a selected group of typical entities (HR departments of the service sector). The aim of the conducted research was to define the basic research categories as well as to define the structure of contemporary models of the concept of sustainable development and the methods of their implementation, considering the issues of the well-being of the individual and the organization, in the sectoral approach.

**Table 1.**

*Basic information on the survey conducted (data labels)*

Specification	Characteristics
secondary information sources	industry journals, websites, sponsored interviews, on-line interviews, expert portals, websites of HR departments of companies
research methods	quantitative and qualitative analysis of secondary sources categorized interview with managers of HR departments, questionnaire survey (electronic questionnaire) among employees of direct customer contact
sample selection	targeted selection of typical units, by the declared concept of sustainable development
sample size	52 managers of HR departments in the service sector 220 companies from the modern services sector (ABSL) 12,347 respondents, professionally active people (SAVANTA Inc.) 18,000 respondents, professionally active people (STADA) 3213 surveys of employees working in 37 organizations (GAMMA) 122 employees of direct customer contact
geographical scope	national and global scale
time scope	2019-2022

Source: own elaboration.

The research, in the form of an on-line interview, was performed on 52 managers of HR departments in service enterprises, the education, IT and healthcare sectors. The electronic questionnaire was also addressed to employees of direct customer contact. In total, 174 opinions of the respondents were analyzed.

### 3. Burnout as a challenge facing companies; current situation

From the psychological point of view, occupational/professional burnout syndrome is a very serious problem of modern times and generally speaking, concerns work-related fatigue. It should be emphasized that burnout is a process that usually begins with high motivation and "enthusiasm for something". When the work and energy involved do not bring the expected results, we start to burn out.

#### 3.1. Measurement tools

The most frequently used **tools for measuring** the severity of the burnout syndrome include the Burnout Inventory developed by Christina Maslach (Maslach, 1981) (*Maslach Burnout Inventory*, MBI) consisting of 21 statements (Maslach et al., 1996; Leiter et al., 1995)<sup>1</sup> and LBQ (Link Burnout Questionnaire).

Christina Maslach, an American social psychologist, identified three components of professional burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased self-esteem, especially if these conditions are observed over a longer period of time. They represent:

- feeling of fatigue or lack of energy,
- depressed mood, negative feelings or indifference manifested by behavior, which is cynical and lacking empathy,
- reduced professional performance, lower assessment of own achievements and the feeling that everything that is done, does not make sense or is not good enough (Sęk, 2020, pp. 13-31; Maslach et al., 1981).

All Maslach MBI items are scored using a 7-level frequency rating from "never" to "daily". MBI has three component scales: emotional exhaustion (9 items), depersonalization (5 items), and personal achievement (8 items). Each scale measures its own unique dimension of burnout. The scales should not be combined into a single burnout scale. It is important that the recommendation to examine the three dimensions of burnout separately suggests that in practice, MBI is a measure of three independent constructs - emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal achievement. On the other hand, LBQ is the Italian version of the Link Burnout Questionnaire by Massimo Santinello (Santinello, 2007). It is designed to measure occupational burnout in people working in professions related to helping other people and teaching. LBQ consists of 24 items describing the feelings of the examined person regarding their professional work. The answers are given on a 6-point scale, the next points of which refer to the frequency with which these feelings occur. LBQ allows for the assessment of four aspects of occupational burnout: psychophysical exhaustion (the dimension related to

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<sup>1</sup> Currently, there are five versions of the MBI: Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS), Human Services Survey for Medical Personnel (MBI-HSS (MP)), Educators Survey (MBI-ES), General Survey (MBI-GS), General Survey for Students (MBI-GS [S]).

the assessment of one's own psychophysical resources), the lack of involvement in relationships with clients (the dimension describing the quality of relationships with clients), the sense of professional ineffectiveness (the dimension related to the assessment of one's own professional competences) and disappointment (the dimension of existential expectations).

### 3.2. Process stages and its causes

Actions taken by the employer depend on the degree and phase of the burnout process (Jaworowska, 2020).

**Table 2.**

*Phases in the burnout process*

Phases in the burnout process by The American Psychology Association	Ten levels of occupational burnout by Jörg Fengler	Phases resulting from the observation of the employee by the employer. The results confirmed in a categorized interview among 52 managers of HR departments in the service sector in Poland, January 2022
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• honeymoon - a period of fascination with work and full satisfaction with professional achievements, energy, enthusiasm and optimism,</li> <li>• awakening - a time when it is noticed that the idealistic assessment of work is inadequate, a period of increased work and efforts to ensure that the idealistic image of work is not disturbed,</li> <li>• roughness - the implementation of professional tasks requires increased effort, problems in social contacts arise,</li> <li>• full-blown burnout - full mental and physical exhaustion, symptoms of depression, feeling of emptiness and loneliness, willingness to be free and escape from work,</li> <li>• regeneration - the time of healing wounds resulting from occupational burnout.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• politeness and idealism</li> <li>• overwork</li> <li>• decreasing politeness</li> <li>• feeling guilty about it</li> <li>• increased efforts to be polite and dependable</li> <li>• lack of success</li> <li>• helplessness</li> <li>• loss of hope</li> <li>• exhaustion, aversion to people, apathy, anger</li> <li>• burnout.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• burnout as a feeling of gradual exhaustion and increasing body fatigue. Weekends are not enough for the employee to rest and start working with new energy;</li> <li>• reduction of activity - withdrawal and apathy appear. The employee does not want to get involved in either company or private affairs;</li> <li>• emotional reactions such as verbal aggression towards colleagues, cynicism, negating the opinion of others; the employee becomes difficult to cooperate with;</li> <li>• decline in condition shown on the level of creativity, motivation to work, commitment and cognitive functions - work begins to take more time and the effects are getting weaker;</li> <li>• degradation of contacts with others, emotional tension is high, mood swings from anger to sadness appear;</li> <li>• psychosomatic reactions, health problems occur, and such disorders include both problems with sleep, more frequent colds or decreased sexual performance, as well as heart and digestive system diseases;</li> <li>• desperation that can lead to the development of reactive depression, addiction and even suicide.</li> </ul>

Source: own elaboration (Jaworowska 2020; Fengler, 2001), the results confirmed in a structured interview among 52 managers of HR department service sector, in Poland, January 2022.

The phases of occupational burnout do not have to occur in the composition described above and always in the same sequence. Several phases can occur simultaneously. The return to the previous phases is also possible (Tucholska, 2001).

**The reasons** for the occurrence of this phenomenon can be divided into at least two groups: individual, i.e., personality-related, and those resulting from improper functioning of the organization. The causes also include the interpersonal sphere. Hence the following reasons are distinguished (Tucholska, 2001; Sęk, 2007):

- **individual** - personality traits such as passivity, oversensitivity, defensiveness and low self-esteem predispose to burnout; on the other hand, also ambitious people who think unrealistically about what they can do at work, perfectionists with an excessive need for control and workaholics who identify themselves with their own work, as well as lonely people are more likely to develop this syndrome,
- **interpersonal (interhuman)** - excessive emotional involvement in the matters of service users (e.g., patients, students, applicants) or other employees, lack of ability to "distance" from work, problems in contacts with superiors and/or colleagues, rivalry, lobbying,
- **organizational** - conflicting expectations, vaguely formulated professional roles, lack of resources to fulfil tasks, lack of development and promotion opportunities, too many duties or their equally destructive shortage, too low pay, lack of adjustment to one's own job position or the company values and culture, lack of time for family life, the need to hurry at work or monotony and work in the evening and at night.

### 3.3. Current situation

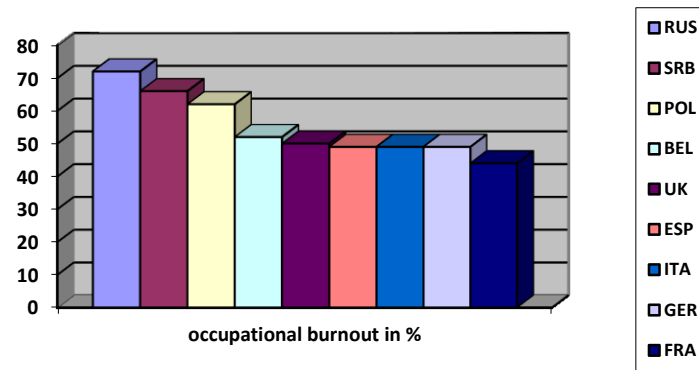
According to a study by Kronos Incorporated and Future Workplace, burnout **is affected by the following** factors (The Future...):

- inadequate remuneration (41%),
- work overload (32%),
- overtime (32%),
- ineffective management in the company (30%),
- no relationship between the role of the employee and the company's strategy (29%),
- low work culture (26%).

Already in December 2018, 62% of Poles experienced the sense of occupational burnout (Fig. 1)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> STADA Group Health Report "The Future of Your Health" 2019 was prepared on the basis of the results of the opinion poll conducted in November and December 2018 at the request of Kantar Health on behalf of STADA Arzneimittel AG, on a group of respondents from Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Spain, Great Britain, n = 18,000.



**Figure 1.** Occupational burnout in selected countries.

Source: (STADA, 2019).

According to Savanta Inc., the COVID pandemic caused the most stressful period ever, and negatively affected the mental health of 78% of employees worldwide in 2019. According to a global study, 82% of employees would be willing to undergo psychotherapy. The pandemic has made people around the world struggle with increasing anxiety and depression at work<sup>3</sup>. The study especially shows that:

- 70% of respondents assess that this year they experience stress and anxiety at work which are greater than ever before,
- increase in stress and anxiety negatively affects the mental health of 78% of employees worldwide and causes greater stress (38%), imbalance between work and private life (35%), burnout (25%), depression due to lack of social contacts (25%) and loneliness (14%),
- the difficulties caused by the global pandemic overlapped with daily work-related stressors such as pressure to meet performance standards (42%), performing routine and tedious tasks (41%), and an overwhelming amount of work (41%).

The global pandemic has intensified problems with mental health at work, and their consequences are not limited to working life. Therefore:

- 85% of respondents believe that problems with mental health at work (i.e., stress, anxiety and depression) affect their personal life,
- the most common consequences of these problems include insomnia (40%), poor physical health (35%), less satisfaction with personal life (33%), deterioration of family relationships (30%) and isolation from friends (28%),
- remote work made the boundaries between private and professional life started to blur increasingly. 35% of people work more than 40 hours more per month, and 25% suffer from burnout due to overwork,

<sup>3</sup> The survey results are based on a survey conducted by Savanta Inc. between July 16 and August 4, 2020. 12,347 respondents from all over the world (United States, United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates, France, Italy, Germany, India, Japan, China, Brazil and Korea) participated in the survey. The study included people aged 22 to 74. (Infor, 2022).

- despite the experienced disadvantages of remote work, 62% of respondents now assess it better than before the pandemic; employees claim they now have more time for their family (51%), for sleep (31%) and for performing their duties (30%).

Workers around the world expect support for their mental health. The research results show that:

- 76% of respondents believe their companies should do more to protect their mental well-being. 51% admitted that their companies introduced mental health services or support in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic,
- 83% of employees would like their employers to provide technologies that would support their mental well-being, such as self-service access to resources related to healthcare (36%), psychological services available on demand (35%), preventive health monitoring tools (35%), access to health and meditation apps (35%), and chatbots answering health-related questions (28%),
- 84% of respondents struggle with difficulties when working remotely, while the most frequently indicated challenges include the lack of boundaries between work and private life (41%) and greater mental health problems, including stress and anxiety (33%),
- 42% of respondents claim that work-related stress, anxiety or depression make them less productive, and 40% indicate that this leads to making wrong decision more frequently. 85% of respondents believe that work-related stress, anxiety and depression have an impact on their private lives.

#### 4. Business model in the concept of sustainable development

Business operation models of enterprises are dynamic by nature - they are subject to continuous modifications, which are a consequence of changes and trends that take place in a given sector, as well as changes and megatrends of non-business sources, exerting pressure on already established business models (Majchrzak, 2019, pp. 79-93). The environment of the organization, both internal and external, is a key source of forces influencing the dynamics of business models. The scope and intensity of changes taking place in the environment determine the nature of changes in business models (Globocnik et al., 2020, pp. 231-243).

Considering business models from a dynamic perspective, two main types of changes can be distinguished (Saebi, 2015, pp. 145-168):

- *Business Model Innovation* – BMI,
- *Business Model Adaptation* – BMA.



In an increasingly complex and dynamic environment, innovations in business models (Giesen et al., 2020, pp. 17-26), which may contribute to the modification of the existing and/or development of new models (Rachinger et al., 2019, pp. 1741-1779) are of vital significance for the success of an organization.

According to the norms and documents of the United Nations: "Sustainable development of the Earth is development that meets the basic needs of all people and preserves, protects and restores the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem without threatening the possibility of meeting the needs of future generations and without crossing long-term boundaries of the capacity of Earth's ecosystem". Following the assumption, a modern innovative business model referred to as the 3 XP model (from English), represents a sustainable model that takes into account welfare in three dimensions and strives for a balance between: planet - people - profit. The model of sustainable development of a company, organization or individual represents a number of complementary activities, as well as a way of thinking that assumes sustainable development in many areas and at various levels (Amit, 2010, pp. 1-15; Boons et al., 2013; Sztangret et al., 2017).

**Table 3.**

*Business model in the concept of sustainable development of companies*

Pillars of the model	Planet	People	Profit
Focus areas	environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• respect for human rights</li> <li>• employees</li> <li>• social commitment</li> </ul>	compliance and balance
Key stakeholder groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• employees</li> <li>• suppliers</li> <li>• customers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• employees and employees' peers</li> <li>• young talents</li> <li>• consumers</li> <li>• contractors</li> <li>• suppliers</li> <li>• local community</li> <li>• society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• employees</li> <li>• administrative board</li> <li>• shareholders</li> <li>• contractors</li> <li>• consumers</li> </ul>
Fields of action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• resource management (power consumption, procurement, disposal, travel management)</li> <li>• active participation in eco-ventures</li> <li>• "Green economy"</li> <li>• circular management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fair, safe, health working conditions</li> <li>• interesting activities and project</li> <li>• transparent development paths</li> <li>• appealing work environment</li> <li>• attractive remuneration</li> <li>• useful software</li> <li>• secure and ethical handling of information technology</li> <li>• digital education</li> <li>• get young people interested in IT</li> <li>• Declaration of Human rights</li> <li>• code of ethics</li> <li>• protecting employee rights</li> <li>• privacy engineering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• legally compliant and ethically correct procedures in business (dependable partner, exemplary investor, industry expert)</li> <li>• Compliance Management System</li> <li>• Sustainable products and services</li> <li>• risk management</li> <li>• data reporting</li> </ul>

Source: own elaboration based on the online interview analysis of companies by the declared concept of sustainable development and statements of 52 managers of HR departments in three service sectors.

All of the analyzed cases declared a holistic and systemic approach to sub-areas and operational activities. The implementation of the business model was guided by the idea of well-being in its three dimensions: planet/environment, people and profit, with particular emphasis on humans.

## **5. Burnout in the concept of sustainable development - discussion in the light of Polish and international circumstances, results of own research**

According to the common belief that it is better to prevent than to cure the effects of burnout, more and more companies<sup>4</sup> delegate this task to professional HR agencies that possess appropriate tools, thanks to which they are able to:

- examine the level of occupational burnout in employees and its causes,
- evaluate communication in the organization,
- design development and career paths for each employee, group and team,
- propose activities facilitating management of multi-person and multicultural, often scattered, teams,
- influence the increase in the satisfaction with the performed tasks, that is, create an environment of well-being in the company.

### **5.1. Well-being programs**

Well-being theories try to define what is necessary for a holistic approach to the concept of well-being. Hedonistic theories equate well-being with a balance of pleasure and pain. Desire theories claim that well-being is about the satisfaction of desires: the more desires are satisfied, the higher the well-being. Objective list theories state that an individual well-being depends on a number of factors that can include both subjective and objective elements. Well-being is the central topic of positive psychology, the aim of which is to identify the factors influencing human well-being (Slade, 2010).

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<sup>4</sup> The results confirmed in a categorized interview among 52 managers of HR departments in the three service sector in Poland, January 2022.

**Table 4.***Wellbeing model by chosen authors*

PERMA - wellbeing model, developed by Prof. Martin Seligman	The Swarbrick and Yudof model of well-being
1.1 <b>P:</b> Positive emotions 1.2 <b>E:</b> Engagement 1.3 <b>R:</b> Relationships 1.4 <b>M:</b> Meaning (sense of meaning/importance) 1.5 <b>A:</b> Achievement/Accomplishment (achieving and appreciating what is done).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical well-being (energy, form, vitality, power),</li> <li>• Spiritual well-being (sense of meaning in life, life values, spirituality),</li> <li>• Mental/emotional well-being (awareness of emotions and skills in managing them, coping with stress),</li> <li>• Intellectual well-being (open mindedness, willingness to know, learn),</li> <li>• Relationships (building supportive relationships with other people, contacts, belonging),</li> <li>• Finances (sense of financial security, economic management, attitude to money),</li> <li>• Career (consistency between what we do and talents, the sense of creation, value for oneself and others, meaning, development opportunities),</li> <li>• The external environment (surroundings).</li> </ul>

Source: own elaboration based on (Seligman, 2011; Swarbrick, 2015).

When the boundaries between home and work are blurring and the pandemic crisis is affecting people around the world, recent months have revealed a critical need for effective “well-being programs<sup>5</sup>” in the workplace (Kulig-Moskwa, 2020). The coronavirus pandemic, physical isolation and uncertain economic situation have contributed to the deterioration of the mental well-being of thousands of workers. In a global study conducted by The Adecco Group (2020), 28% of workers indicated that their mental health had deteriorated during the pandemic, and 80% stated that their employer should be responsible for ensuring proper functioning in the workplace after COVID. The program is especially focused on the *emotional* aspect related to health and *psychological* support, including consultations with professionals, group sessions, using an individual approach tailored to the rhythm of the employee's day. In addition, companies allow employees to work flexible hours so that professional as well as private and family responsibilities can be reconciled. Many companies have adapted development programs for leadership staff, in which specialists train them on how to *recognize* the first symptoms of overload or burnout and depression in employees, what approach to use towards people who experienced psychotic episodes, or how to care for *well-being* in *task forces*. The *physical aspects* of the working environment are also important. The concept of well-being in the context of the work environment includes creating organizational conditions in which employees can fulfill themselves in a safe and healthy way. This comprehensive approach covers physical space, work model, technologies, management culture and managerial practices.

<sup>5</sup> The Wellbeing Index, an indicator determining the level of employee well-being, developed by the Gallup Institute together with Healthways, includes: *purpose, social, financial, community, physical*.

**Table 5.**

*Elements supporting well-being according to the Swarbrick and Yudof Model, as understood by the respondents, by sector and by professional groups*

Elements of the model	evaluation										
	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
Physical well-being							<i>O I K</i>		<i>Z</i>	<i>HR</i>	
Spiritual well-being								<i>I K</i>		<i>O Z</i> <i>HR</i>	
Mental well-being								<i>I</i>	<i>O K</i>	<i>Z HR</i>	
Intellectual well-being								<i>I K</i>		<i>O Z</i> <i>HR K</i>	
Relations							<i>O</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>HR</i>	<i>K</i>
Finances								<i>K</i>	<i>O Z</i>	<i>I HR</i>	
Career						<i>O</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>HR</i>	
External environment					<i>O</i>					<i>I HR</i>	<i>K</i>

Key:

O – Education sector; Z – Health sector; I – IT; HR – HR department; K – direct customer contact workers.

Source: The results of structured interview among 52 managers of HR departments in the service sector in Poland, January 2022 and 122 first contact employees of the IT, Education and Healthcare sectors.

Respondents share the view concerning the importance of the elements supporting well-being according to the Swarbrick and Yudof's Model. HR managers assign equal importance to all factors, while in the case of employees in direct customer contact, the least importance is attached to energy, form, vitality, strength, whereas the greatest importance is attached to human relationships and external factors. Concentration of opinions on all elements of the model in the range of 3-4 is observed among respondents from the healthcare sector. The representatives of the education sector do not notice the influence of the external environment on their well-being. Careers, relationships and physical well-being are of similar importance to the education sector. Career and physical factors also do not determine the well-being of IT employees either.

However, as the research results show, there is a significant dissonance between what the company offers in its wellbeing programs and what employees expect (Table 6).

**Table 6.**

*Well-being dimensions by employer and employee*

	HR Departments	Workers
	<i>Assessment of the need to act in a specific dimension of wellbeing in your organization by importance</i>	<i>Dimensions of well-being in employees' view from the worst to the best rated (requiring action in the first place)</i>
1	Intellect and mind	Finances
2	Finances	Physical well-being
3	Relationships with other people	Environment and physical conditions
4	Career and development	Career and development
5	Environment and physical conditions	Mental well-being
6	Spiritual well-being	Relationships with other people
7	Mental well-being	Spiritual well-being
8	Physical well-being	Intellect and mind

Source: (Raport HR, 2018); The results confirmed in a categorized interview among 52 managers of HR departments in the service sector in Poland, January 2022.

It should definitely be noted that the physical dimension, which supports healthy lifestyle habits that are important for the surveyed employees is the underestimated dimension of wellbeing in companies.

## 5.2. Employees' work-life balance

The idea of work-life balance was created at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s (Raport HR, 2018; Friedman et al., 2019). Work-life balance is a balance between an individual's priorities at work and their priorities in other aspects of life. Due to the positive balance between work and private life, the conflict between work and home is minimized (Fiksenbaum, 2019, pp. 653-672). Work does not interfere with achieving satisfaction in life outside of work, and aspects of personal life do not have a negative impact on work. Maintaining a balance between work and private life is also a contemporary challenge for companies. The imbalance is caused by the development of technology and all-encompassing communication at any place and time. Establishing a time frame for communication via SMS and email is one of the activities in this area. The key aspect influencing job satisfaction is the compliance of personal beliefs with the company's culture and the values it represents. Hence, the selection of candidates should be based not only on their professional competences, but also on the analysis of the represented values and their compatibility with the company's values. According to the research results, Poles like and appreciate what they do professionally (69% of respondents). Respondents believe that work matters and brings value to other people's lives (59%) (Raport HR, 2018). Promoting a healthy lifestyle of employees and taking care of their general mental state is also a way to integrate employees. The time spent together can be fruitful and translate into greater morale and commitment among employees. This area also covers employees' education, including training in counteracting burnout or coping with stress. Employees believe that they are open-minded and like to learn (82%); they are curious and receptive to new knowledge (84%). 55% of respondents believe that they develop in line with their interests and talents, and 63% that they use their capabilities. The flexibility of the employer as regards the participation of remote work in the whole number of hours and time intervals related to the beginning of the working day is a good practice (Kossek et al., 2011, pp. 289-313).

*Sabbatical leave*, defined as a form of motivation, in particular for experienced employees, consisting in a long, several weeks' or even several months' leave, while maintaining the current workplace is one of the tools for implementing the concept. Sabbaticals are paid leaves for personal and professional development (Miller et al., 1997, pp. 11-16). According to Zahorski (Zahorski, 1994), a sabbatical leave is meant to provide relief from routine work duties (Sabbatical, 2022). In practice, the long regenerative leave is most often used by employees of international corporations and people occupying the most responsible positions in the organization. The leave is most often associated with the improvement of qualifications or skills in a specific field agreed with the employer. This is confirmed by its nature - a long break at work is to have positive effects not only for the employee, but also for the employer. It happens

that the sabbatical leave is used for voluntary activities, which also plays a vital role in the company's CRS strategy.

**Table 7.**  
*Work-life balance in the opinions of the surveyed entities*

Balance factors	evaluation										
	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
Possibility of remote work	<b>Z</b>			<b>O</b>					<b>I HR</b>	<b>K</b>	
Flexible working hours					<b>Z</b>			<b>O</b>	<b>I HR</b>		<b>K</b>
Integration events with the participation of the closest relatives, and family days	<b>Z</b>							<b>O</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>HR</b>	<b>K</b>
Pets allowed to come to the office	<b>Z</b>				<b>O</b>					<b>I HR</b>	<b>K</b>
Promoting physical activity and taking care of employees' health							<b>O</b>	<b>Z</b>		<b>I HR</b>	<b>K</b>
A "home" office in a good location								<b>Z</b>	<b>O</b>	<b>HR</b>	<b>I K</b>
"Satisfaction" surveys and individual meetings with employees								<b>Z</b>		<b>O</b>	<b>I HR K</b>
Organizing and paying for trainings, courses, conferences, etc.										<b>I HR K</b>	<b>O Z</b>
Long leaves, including sabbatical leaves											<b>O Z I HR K</b>

Key:

O – education sector; Z – Health sector; I – IT; HR – HR department; K – direct contact workers.

Source: The results of structured interview among 52 managers of HR departments in the service sector in Poland, January 2022 and 122 first contact employees of the IT, Education and Healthcare sector.

The idea of work-life balance is very important for all groups of respondents, and the ratings are mostly in the 4-5 range. Representatives of the health care sector presented completely different views while totally negating the impact of the possibility of remote work, integration events with the participation of the closest relatives and family days, as well as the possibility of bringing their pets to the office. However, it is a result of the specificity of their profession.

### 5.3. Digital stress of remote workers

Digital stress is a problem primarily for remote workers. Being constantly online results in overstimulation as well as extra tension and stress, which can lead to burnout and depression. This is the *tension that arises during our interaction with digital technologies, i.e., when reading e-mails or browsing news on social media. In this case, information overload, multitasking or a sense of lack of time become the stressor.* The abuse of digital technology negatively affects the psychophysical condition of employees, thus translating, among others, into deterioration of their mood, weakening of social ties, as well as chronic stress hindering

the performance of daily duties, not only professional, but also the family ones. Digital well-being, i.e., *digital detoxes or online workshops in digital well-being* may be the solution here. Digital well-being (Gui et al., 2017, pp. 155-173) is a state in which subjective feeling is maintained in an environment characterized by an excess of digital communication. In conditions of digital well-being, individuals are able to turn the use of digital media towards a sense of comfort, security, satisfaction and fulfillment. Digital well-being is the subjective, individual experience of the optimal balance between the benefits and drawbacks resulting from mobile communication. This empirical state consists of affective and cognitive assessments of the integration of digital communication and everyday life. People achieve digital well-being when they experience maximum controlled pleasure and functional support, along with minimal loss of control and functional impairment (Vanden, 2021, pp. 932-955). From a business point of view, maintaining a healthy digital balance of employees means<sup>6</sup>:

- functioning in a healthy and sustainable manner, and not operating in emergency mode,
- learning productivity and focused work,
- skillful regeneration of the mind and rest from technology,
- caring about digital hygiene,
- building healthy digital habits that reduce stress and improve well-being.

**Table 8.**

*Healthy digital balance of employees in their opinion*

Digital balance factors	scale										
	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
functioning in a healthy and balanced manner, and not operating in emergency mode								HR	O I		Z K
learning productivity and focused work									I HR	O	Z K
skillful regeneration of the mind and rest from technology										Z HR	O I K
care about digital hygiene								Z HR		K	O I
building healthy digital habits that reduce stress and improve well-being									HR	I K	O Z

Key: O – education sector; Z – Health sector; I – IT; HR – HR department; K – direct contact workers.

Source: The results of structured interview among 52 managers of HR departments in the service sector in Poland, January 2022 and 122 first contact employees of the IT, Education and Healthcare sector.

There is no doubt that all surveyed groups of respondents share the view that there is a need to care for a healthy digital balance of employees. All factors were rated in the range of 2-5. The majority of respondents ranked digital balance as the highest priority.

<sup>6</sup> The results confirmed in a categorized interview among 52 managers of HR departments in the service sector in Poland, January 2022.

However, as the research results show, employees expect machines to support their mental health. Other challenges for the employer result from the fact that only 18% of the surveyed respondents indicated that it was people, not robots, which provided support for their mental condition. According to the respondents, robots do not judge (34%), are not biased towards people sharing their problems with them (30%) and quickly answer questions about health (29%). 68% of respondents would prefer to talk about stress and anxiety at work with a robot rather than with a supervisor, and 80% of people would be open to using the robot as a therapist or counselor. 75% of respondents believe that artificial intelligence supports their mental health at work. The most important benefits included providing the information needed to do the job more efficiently (31%), automating tasks and reducing workload to prevent burnout (27%), as well as reducing stress by helping to prioritize tasks (27%). Artificial intelligence has also helped most of the employees to shorten the working week (51%) and extend their holiday (51%)<sup>7</sup>.

## 6. Conclusions

A necessary condition for the implementation of contemporary models of sustainable development is a comprehensive approach of companies to the implementation of its sub-areas (planet, people, profit), in each of the many dimensions, especially those aimed at preventing and reducing occupational burnout, which is one of the factors of social well-being. This well-being is expressed in a wide range of ways of its implementation by the employer (company) and perception by the employee, in terms of their system of values. In the knowledge-based economy, people are the most important capital of an organization, which is why it is so important to create an optimal environment in which employees use their potential. "Well-being", perceived as a set of practices for creating a healthy and engaging work environment is one of such areas. It may become one of the key assumptions of the company's sustainable development concept. The concept of human well-being is undoubtedly important from the point of view of implementing effective concepts of sustainable development of the company, but it is largely an objective category. Its holistic dimension consists of physical, spiritual, emotional, intellectual, relational, financial, career and development-related well-being, as well as the well-being in the living and working environment. Well-being in the company is a continuous and dynamic management of the employee's sense of well-being, by considering their needs in all of the declared dimensions in a comprehensive way, while maintaining a correlation between the company's image of the employee's well-being and their own perception of needs in this area. However, as the research results show, the lack of

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<sup>7</sup> As above.



compatibility between the employer's and employee's perceptions of well-being make the phenomenon even further complicated. Although the study showed different priorities in the field of well-being, there is a clear agreement as to the components of the Model supporting well-being, in its spheres of work-life balance and healthy digital balance of employees, in all surveyed groups of respondents, i.e., HR managers, employees in direct customer contact, education, IT and health sectors. As a result, they bring comprehensive activities including the measurement of the intensity of the phenomenon, identification of the phase of the process and its reasons for building effective well-being programs as a key sub-area of the business model according to the concept of sustainable development.

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