

MANAGING EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING IN A TURBULENT ENVIRONMENT OF ORGANISATIONS

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Purpose: The purpose of the article was to identify and analyse the physical, psychological and social needs of employees in order to enable effective management of their sense of well-being, which could ultimately contribute to their life comfort and the development of an organisation.

Design/methodology/approach: The analysis of the research included the determination of the study objectives, the selection of the research sample and data collection methods, as well as qualitative and quantitative analyses of the results. The authors conducted a detailed analysis of the literature and secondary sources on employees' physical, psychological and social needs. This was followed by a survey among 234 corporate employees with the use of a survey questionnaire as the measurement tool.

Findings: Employees are aware of their needs and understand the extent to which a particular need may have a positive impact on their health, mental stability and social relationships, while employers know that being aware of their subordinates' expectations in each area of their lives will allow them to select specific solutions with mutual benefits.

Research limitations/implications: The research focused on the physical, psychological and social needs regarding well-being and expectations of employees in different organisations and industries. The relationship between aspects of well-being and demographic factors or workplace of the respondents was not explored. In-depth analyses would have provided a broader picture of individualised needs of employees.

Practical implications: The research is a vital resource for managers who want to learn about their employees' needs as well as a source of inspiration for the development of effective motivational systems and personnel strategy.

Social implications: Employer and employee awareness of the importance of well-being can have a positive impact on people's functioning at work and out of work as well as on the perception of an organisation as a friendly workplace.

Originality/value: The article makes an important contribution to the field of management by linking the psychological aspects of well-being to the role of leaders responsible for the effectiveness of their teams.

Keywords: physical well-being, psychological well-being, social relations, employee needs, well-being tools.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Managing employee well-being is one of the greatest challenges for contemporary organisations. Healthy, satisfied workers are able to carry out their tasks properly, which can also result in an organisation's competitiveness. People are most valuable resources of companies, so managers should take care of the needs of their staff, namely physical, psychological and social ones.

In modern organisations that operate in a changing environment, well-being should be consistent with companies' mission and goals, as well as their organisational culture. It must be one of the core values and an investment in the employees' potential, which, when developed and implemented over time, contributes to the success of a company.

Despite the benefits of implementing the well-being concept, not all organisations are aware that it is not a single benefit or preventive action with the aim of taking care of health, but a certain way of operating organisations on the basis of mutual respect, shared values and goals. It is a win-win activity whose aim is to develop organisations and their employees.

Well-being is an issue often addressed in scientific literature. A substantial number of articles and books focus on psychological well-being which refers to a person's subjective experience of states that make them happy, such as pleasure, satisfaction or fulfilment. These include the work of Seligman (2002) or Diener et al. (2010). Other works link well-being to employee motivation (Cornwell et al., 2023).

This article is an attempt to answer the question of what is important and what is expected from organisations as well as what they offer to their employees in physical, psychological and social areas of well-being in the current volatile and uncertain environment. The paper also suggests what topics related to physical and psychological well-being should be included in employee education. Besides, the benefits of management of well-being for both employers and employees will be presented.

The presented results make a significant contribution to the literature on the subject and will be a valuable source of knowledge for managers regarding the physical, psychological and social needs of their employees, as well as a source of inspiration when developing motivational systems and personnel strategy in contemporary companies.

2. Definition and areas of well-being

The literature contains many definitions of well-being, as it is a multidimensional phenomenon and refers to radically different theoretical underpinnings. Importantly, these strands are intertwined and put emphasis on different aspects of well-being.

Most commonly, they include personal, professional and social areas. According to Tov (2018), well-being encompasses all the ways in which people experience and positively evaluate their lives. Some may equate well-being with happiness, others understand it as a long-term state of contentment, while for others it may be related to physical well-being and mental health. Well-being can also be seen as a more holistic construct that includes work-related variables, e.g. task fulfilment, intention to leave work and such life variables as emotional and physical health (McCoy, Newell, Gardener, p. 311).

The concept of well-being is mainly considered from these two perspectives: a clinical and a psychological one. The former focuses on the absence of symptoms causing stress, anxiety or depression. Well-being, as defined by the World Health Organisation, is “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO, 1948, p. 1). From a psychological perspective, it is a subjective sense of satisfaction. Definitions of psychological well-being are integrative and combine elements of the eudaimonic and hedonistic approaches, namely they consist of an individual’s subjective feeling and an objective assessment of the realisation of their potential (Wychowaniec, 2022, p. 184).

The representatives of the hedonistic school put emphasis on the evaluation of one’s own life, viewing well-being as experiencing positive emotions and a low accumulation of unpleasant feelings. The state of happiness, according to the subjective conception, includes the following four elements: satisfaction with life, frequency and quality of positive feelings, absence or rarity of unhappiness and negative emotions, and health (Argyle, 2004).

In the eudaimonic approach, well-being is equated with the fulfilment of human potential which can be assessed objectively. This approach focuses on meaning and self-actualisation, it defines well-being in terms of the degree to which a person fully aspires (Ryan, Deci, 2001, p. 141). According to the eudaimonic theories, not all desires – not all goals, things a person may value – will result in well-being after their achievement. Even though they give pleasure, they do not always ensure well-being. Thus, from the eudaimonic perspective, subjective happiness cannot be equated with well-being (Ryan, Deci, 2001, pp. 145-146).

Hedonistic well-being and eudaimonic well-being interact with each other (Ilska, Kolodziej-Zaleska, 2018, p. 178). The theory that brings the two schools together is Martin Seligman’s well-being theory, also called the PERMA model. The elements of a well-being diagnosis in this concept are: positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships with other people, meaning and achievement (Seligman, 2018).

Another idea that integrates all ideas defining the concept of well-being is Keyes and Waterman’s (2003) three-dimensional concept of well-being. It takes into account emotional, psychological and social well-being. Well-being is therefore not only an emerging research agenda, but also a key issue concerning individual and social development (Ng, Fisher, 2013, p. 308). Psychological well-being is the result of cognitive and emotional appraisal of one’s life and it consists of high levels of fulfilment and life satisfaction (Niśkiewicz, 2016, p. 140).

In order to achieve well-being, people also need to function effectively despite social challenges and tasks. Social well-being can be considered in five dimensions, namely social integration, social contribution, social cohesion, social actualisation and social acceptance. Social integration refers to an individual's ability to be a part of a society; social contribution is the extent to which a person can offer something valuable to the world; social cohesion is whether a person finds the events and contingencies around them understandable and coherent; social actualisation refers to whether a person can envision the future and potential of society; and social acceptance refers to whether a person can trust and accept both the good and the bad aspects of human nature. Individuals who achieve high levels in all aspects may enjoy good mental health (Keyes, Lopez, 2002).

3. Employees needs and expectations in relation to their health and well-being

Nowadays employees have growing expectations with regards to their health and well-being at a workplace. Companies are increasingly taking these needs into account, as well-being can have a positive impact on a company performance. What is more, at present employees talk about their needs more boldly and are prepared to seek out organisations that meet them. In the VUCA/BANI world, known for its constant change, complex reality and unpredictability, employees need some reference point. They want to know the meaning of their work. Corporate social responsibility is therefore becoming more and more important for employees and the younger generations regard this factor as one of their decision-making criterium, as they want to work in organisations that not only care about the bottom line but also about the environment (Business Insider, 2019).

During the COVID-19 pandemic people started to realise how valuable their health is, that is why workers are now showing greater sensitivity to their own and their relatives' health. Physical and mental development needs are important for the well-being of employees. Physical activity responds to their needs and helps offset the negative effects of "home office". Employees expect their employers to provide health benefits, all occupational health support and employee assistance programmes. According to the 2020 report, "The future of well-being and employee benefits", as many as 72.6 per cent of employees believe that their employer should introduce mental well-being benefits (Future of Wellbeing Report, 2020), for example by offering them training in stress management, conflict resolution and advice on how to assess risk or deal with difficult conversations. The plan to introduce mental health support for employees is a response not only to the significant impact of the pandemic on well-being, but also to the growing belief among employers that traditional employee assistance

programmes or support lines are insufficient to meet their mental health needs (Mindgram, 2021, p. 10).

Apart from the typical benefits such as health insurance and a sports and leisure card, flexible working arrangements have also gained in importance. Surveys consistently show that working five days a week from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. is becoming less and less popular. As many as 68% of employees believe that a hybrid model is the ideal working model and 1 in 3 would not want to work for an employer that requires them to work 100% stationary (Mindgram, 2021, p. 9).

An ergonomically designed workplace, that is an open and inclusive organisational culture that promotes honest communication, has also become important to employees. Nowadays, it is known that the organisational space can influence employees' psychological state, give them a sense of belonging to a group, and shape their happiness. Work will be satisfying when relationships between colleagues are good, the atmosphere is pleasant and employees are appreciated and rewarded (Wychowaniec, 2022). Employees have different needs when it comes to their social relationships at a workplace. Building positive bonds is the key to increasing engagement and performance. The research indicates that the need for relationships can be met by feeling part of a larger group and surrounding oneself with kind and helpful people (Puchalska, Kaminska, Łądka-Barańska, Roczniówka, 2021). Also, employees expect integration beyond work duties, mutual support, active listening and respect for others as well as small gestures of kindness and support.

According to the research, the relationship between supervisors and subordinates has a major impact on the job satisfaction of employees. Workers expect their leader to involve them in decision-making, to take an interest in their development, to motivate them appropriately and to show them the way to go or to give them feedback. Relationships based on mutual trust are also important, as disagreement with colleagues and supervisors is one of the most frequently cited reasons for leaving a particular workplace (Hays, 2024).

Employees have many needs, including the need for financial well-being. They expect an employer to have a fair pay policy, a flexible benefits system or pre-retirement courses for those approaching retirement. To put it simply, financial well-being, or financial health, is a situation in which employees achieve a state of financial security and do not experience any financial stress. They can overcome financial problems and have savings for unexpected expenses. They can achieve their financial goals and take decisions that allow them to enjoy life. A low sense of financial security results in difficulties in decision-making, reduced efficiency at work as well as absenteeism.

Higher remuneration offered by a new, prospective employer is the most common reason of changing a workplace. Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI) found out that workers who suffer from a substantial financial stress have a greater tendency to absenteeism.

Many employees are looking for a job that gives job satisfaction and work-life balance. According to the “Global Talent Trends” report by McKinsey, 49% of respondents claimed that work-life balance is one of the vital factors in choosing an employer. In addition, a study conducted by Gallup research company suggests that employees who feel they have successful careers and good personal lives are more engaged and productive.

Taking care of their needs, recognising their contribution to companies and providing clear guidelines lead to productivity, engagement and a positive atmosphere at a workplace.

4. Employee well-being management in contemporary companies – benefits for employers and employees

Employee well-being management aims to meet workers needs related to their safety, development or task fulfilment. Employees who are supported by their organisation are more committed to their work, have a better mood and feel less stressed about their daily responsibilities (Chen et al., 2009, p. 120). Satisfied employees are also more willing to face new challenges, and try to develop their competencies as well as create an atmosphere of trust. This enables an organisation to build a strong brand in the market. In such a case it has a good reputation among its employees and a greater chance of attracting competent job candidates (Treven, Treven, Šarotar Žižek, 2015, p. 23). Happy employees also tend to get higher income (Peterson et al., 2011), have more friends (Diener, Seligman, 2002) and engage in more social activities (Lucas, Le, Dyrenforth, 2008). Over time, happy individuals report more fun and active interactions with others, as well as necessary or informational interactions (Vittengl, Holt, 1998).

A positive correlation between employee well-being and company performance is also indicated, hence it is worth seeing a sense of well-being as an important resource available to employees, with significant value not only for workers but also employers (Wawrzonek, 2022, p. 219). Achieving good results at work is related to well-being manifested in three dimensions: psychological, physical and social one.

Work helps people achieve both their professional and private goals. They may feel satisfaction, develop their competences and establish new relationships. Work is therefore beneficial for physical and mental health, while unemployment is associated with the opposite. What is more, work can reverse the adverse health effects of unemployment (Waddell, Burton, 2006).

Besides, well-being plays a key role in determining employees’ levels of motivation and productivity (Kaur, 2013). Work-life balance, financial stability and other benefits keep personnel satisfied and content, with better performance, higher productivity and lower absenteeism. This also results in customer satisfaction, emotional stability and physical health.

Satisfied employees constitute also organisations' assets in the marketplace (Mejia Rubio, A.R., Mejia Rubio, D.M., 2023), so measures should be taken to put a company in a positive light throughout the employee's life in the organisation.

5. Methodology of the research

The research was exploratory in nature and aimed to find out employees' views on the measures that organisations should take to improve their workers' well-being in the workplace, check to what extent they fit in with employees' expectations and deliver the intended benefits. This had been preceded by a thorough analysis of the literature on employee well-being. Due to the fact that well-being is a multidimensional concept, the authors used both psychological publications and studies including data on tools offered to improve employees' physical and mental health. A diagnostic survey method was used for the study.

The main aim of the study was to identify and analyse employees' needs in the physical, psychological and social areas in order to effectively manage employees' sense of well-being, which will consequently contribute to their comfort of life and the development of the organisation.

The partial objectives included:

1. To determine the degree of importance of employees' physical, psychological and social needs.
2. To identify the factors influencing employee health and well-being in a changing organisational environment.
3. To determine superiors' activities that influence the sense of well-being of their workers.
4. To identify the needs of employees in terms of raising their awareness of how to stay physically and mentally fit.
5. To identify programmes and tools in the area of well-being that are relevant from the point of view of employees.
6. To identify the benefits to employers and employees, resulting from taking care of employee well-being in modern companies.

The research used a purposive sampling technique. The sample consisted of working adults who were willing to participate in the survey. The research with the use of a measurement tool in the form of an electronic survey questionnaire was conducted in 2023 and 2024. The survey was anonymous and the participants were informed of the purpose of the data collection collected as well as assured of the confidentiality of their responses. A total of 234 correctly completed questionnaires were obtained. The results were subjected to further qualitative and quantitative analyses. There were no wider analyses taking into account the relationship

between the needs in relation to well-being and gender, age, job position, size of organisation and industry. Such analyses would have highlighted the real needs of the selected groups of employees and individuals.

6. Research results analysis

A total of 234 respondents took part in the study on employee well-being management, 67.9% of whom were female and 32.1% were male. The age of the respondents was between 18 to 55 years. Older people did not show a willingness to participate in the research. Three quarters of the respondents held executive positions, with the remainder holding managerial positions. They were employees of large (42.1%), medium (30.9%) and small (27%) organisations across a range of industries, with the most common sectors being catering, administration, IT and TSL.

The first part of the study focused on identifying the extent to which the factors presented in the physical, psychological and social areas are important to employees. For this purpose, a 5-point scale was used, where 1 meant – “not important at all” – and 5 meant “very important”. Preventive health care and easy access to a GP and specialists were identified by the respondents as the most important factors for maintaining physical health. As many as 63% of respondents considered these to be vital. Such a response seems to be most justified, especially as the pandemic period has shown how fragile human life is. Also, people are increasingly aware that regular doctor appointments can protect them from a severe course of illness or even death. Employees also pointed out that the company should take care of the safety of its employees, hence the second most frequently indicated answer was the provision of furniture and equipment needed to protect their health (53% of the respondents regarded these aspects as very important and 37% as important). Flexible working hours (49% of the respondents) and a possibility to start work at later hours (45% of the responses) were very important. Getting enough sleep or adapting work to one’s chronobiological rhythm results not only in greater efficiency, but also in a better mood at work. Interestingly, physical activity and healthy eating were less important to respondents, in an era of promotion of a slim figure and organic products. The ranking of the importance of these factors, determined by the mean values from the responses presented as numerical variables (from 1 to 5), may be observed in Figure 1.

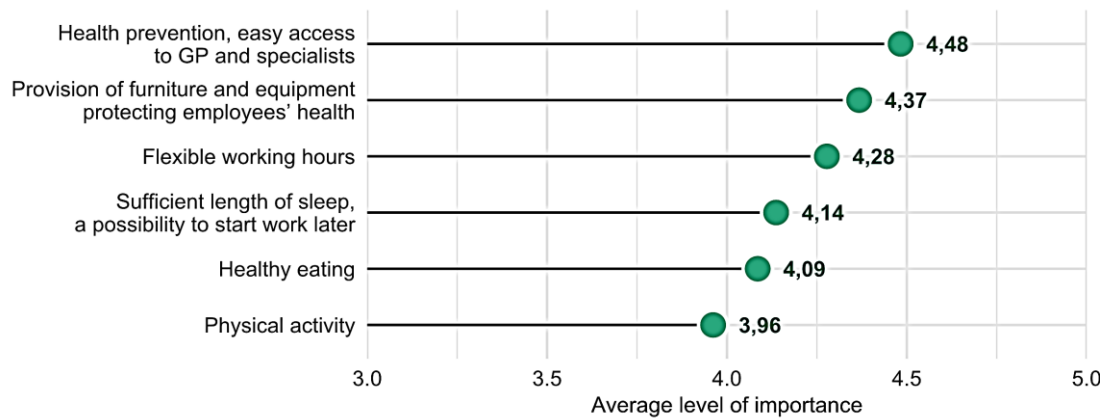


Figure 1. Importance of factors in the physical area.

Source: The authors' own study.

As far as the psychological aspects are concerned, among the factors that respondents considered vital were: fair treatment, reward for results and praise, identified as a very important factor by 78% of respondents. People also chose work-life balance (76% of respondents). Slightly fewer responses were given to a sense of stability and job security, the ability to cope with stress, the opportunity for promotion, recognition of an employees' talents and the opportunity for personal development, continuous learning, acquisition of new skills (each above 64% of the responses). Such results clearly indicate that employees want recognition for their contribution to organisations' goals. They want to develop themselves, but also to balance their professional and personal activities. Employees are increasingly aware of the danger of constant stress at a workplace. Consequently, they value balance, security and development. The ranking of the importance of factors in the psychological area is presented in Figure 2.

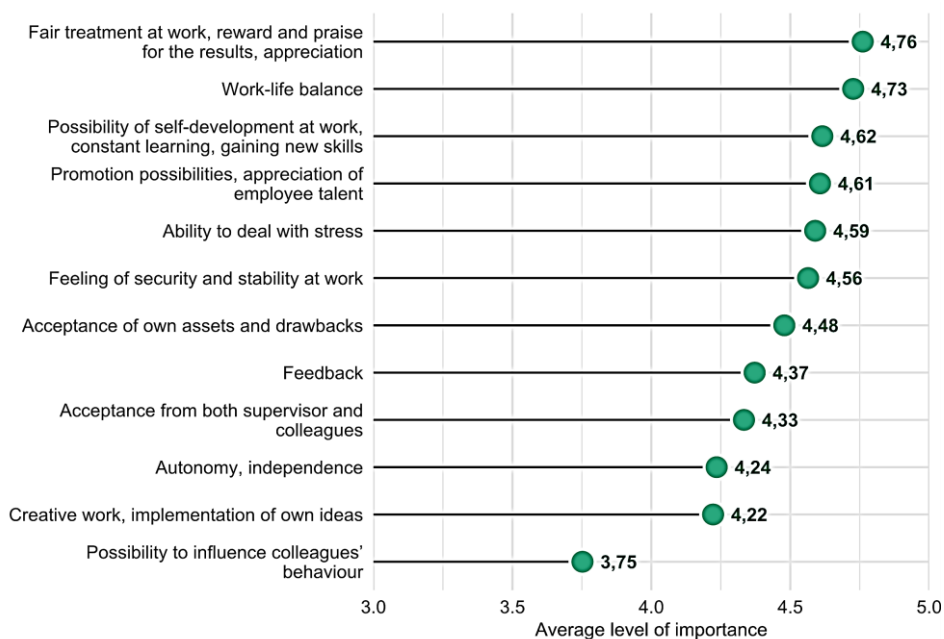


Figure 2. Importance of factors in the psychological area.

Source: The authors' own study.

Social relationships at a workplace are essential for building an organisational culture and teams based on trust and loyalty. The ranking of the importance of factors in the social area is shown in Figure 3. Employees appreciate a good atmosphere at a workplace (this answer was marked by as many as 82% of the respondents), as well as good relations in employee teams (68% of the answers). Also, clarity and transparency of communication is the factor that is important in the social area, according to respondents (64% of indications). Although employees care about a good atmosphere in their working environment, they are indifferent to informal meetings outside work. Hence, the task of managers is to create such teams in which their members feel comfortable in their company. Cohesive teams are committed and quicker to achieve their goals as well as care about a company's performance.

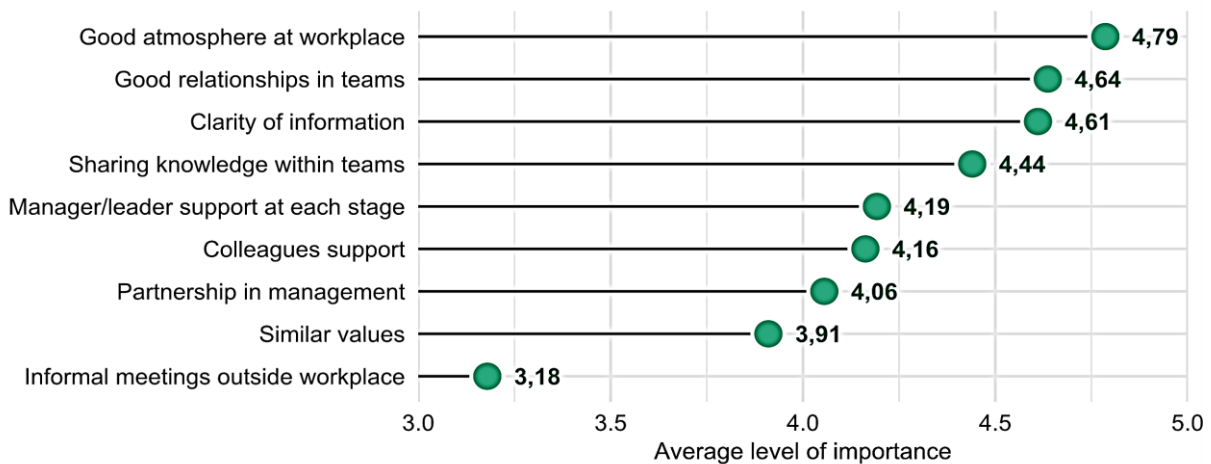


Figure 3. Importance of factors in the social area.

Source: The authors' own study.

The next ranking of factors is related directly to the aspects of well-being. The averaged responses are presented in Figure 4. Employees of modern organisations operating in the era of globalisation and changing environments feel the need for psychological balance, want to have time for leisure and to be in touch with their families (such responses were marked by 78% and 74% of respondents respectively). They also seek personal development and a sense of fulfilment at work. Many also highlight the beneficial aspect of sleep.

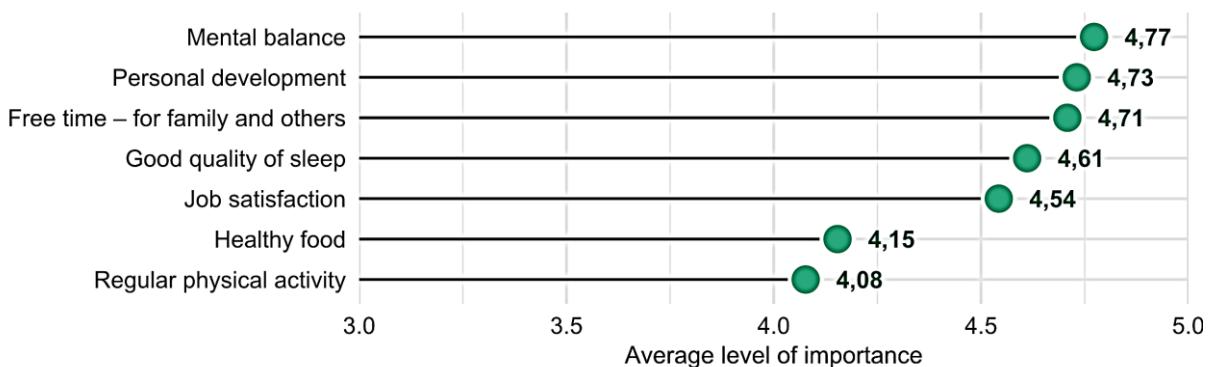


Figure 4. Importance of factors related to health and well-being.

Source: The authors' own compilation.

As it was mentioned earlier, managers play an important role in managing employees' well-being. They are the ones who should recognise the needs of their subordinates and react if their safety is at risk. Leaders are also responsible for the completion of tasks and the flow of reliable information. A wise leader does not only inspire employees, but is also able to mobilise the team even in crisis. Thanks to him or her, to a large extent, the organisation can become competitive. A supervisor is someone who employees listen to, but also evaluate. The survey contained a question what actions employees expect from their supervisor/leader in terms of looking after their well-being. Each of the listed actions was rated on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 meant "I do not expect it at all" and 5 meant "I definitely expect it". The average of the numerical responses allowed the construction of a ranking of expected actions and leader characteristics, which is presented in Figure 5.

In order to take care for well-being of their employees in the physical, psychological and social areas, supervisors are mainly expected to take responsibility for their decisions (73% of indications of "definitely expected") and to provide constructive feedback (64% of respondents). Employees also want their supervisor to have a high personal culture, to be able to appreciate them and to treat them with respect. These responses received more than half of the respondents' votes. It is good for him or her to have high professional competence and to be a trustworthy, emotionally intelligent person. For employees, such a leader is perhaps better able to support their development, motivate them or build commitment that influences efficiency.



Figure 5. Ranking of expectations from the supervisor/leader in looking after well-being.

Source: The authors' own study.

In order to look after employee well-being, it is extremely important to broaden the knowledge on how to improve physical and mental well-being within the organisation. The respondents were asked what training topics, workshops or webinars they were interested in in order to feel well at a workplace. The training topics given were rated on the scale from

1 – “not interested at all” to 5 – “definitely interested”. The ranking of these topics, obtained from the average of the responses, is shown in Figure 6. The respondents were most willing to acquire time management skills. This was the topic most people indicated as being of great interest (51% of respondents). Setting priorities, avoiding so-called time distractions is not an easy task, and working under time pressure can result in many wrong decisions. Learning about methods of effective time management and putting them into practice could contribute to reducing stress and thus better physical and mental health for employees. The respondents were furthermore interested in issues concerning coping with work pressure, stress and managing emotions. They were also keen to learn how they could calm down, relax and concentrate. The answers were more differentiated when it came to training on healthy eating and physical activity.

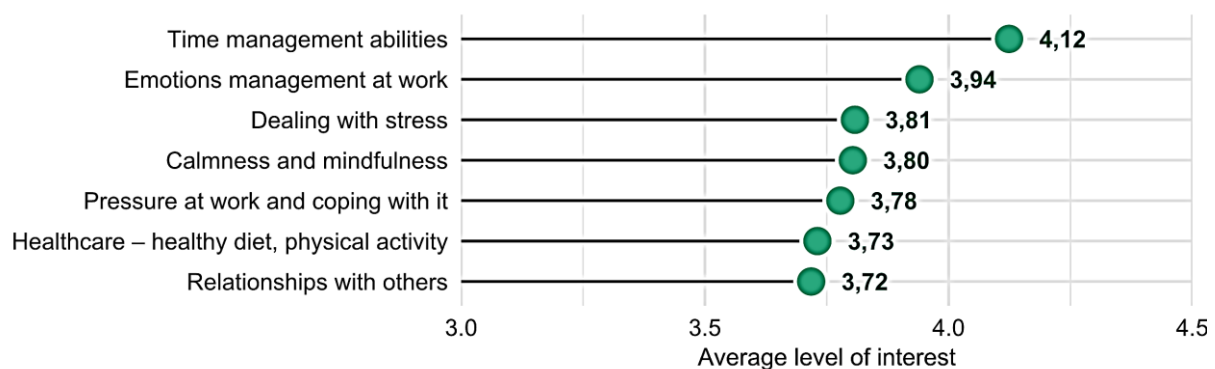


Figure 6. Ranking of desirable training topics related to well-being.

Source: The authors' own study.

Among the numerous well-being solutions currently used in organisations, the most popular were massages for office workers (36%), platforms for benefits management (28%), preventive examinations and health promotion campaigns (28%) or one-to-one consultations with experts, e.g. a psychologist (27%). In the last question in the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to identify unhelpful, apparent solutions in the areas of well-being. The most frequently mentioned solutions were: herb gardens, fit fridges, fruit days, competition between employees, yoga classes or game rooms.

The results of the survey clearly show that employees appreciate the most proven solutions aimed at improving their well-being at a workplace. These measures should be characterised by preventive health care, competence development and improved relationships in work and family life.

In conclusion, according to the respondents, a modern employee wants self-satisfaction both inside and outside work. He/she is a person who is aware of the progress of civilisation and the changes related to it, hence tries to prevent the adverse effects of work on his/her health. He/she expects fair treatment from employers, good working conditions and benefits tailored to their needs. In return, they will give their commitment and competence, which in turn translates into the company's financial results and positive image.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

Well-being is a complex concept that includes physical health, expressed by more than the absence of illness; a person's mental state that allows them to achieve satisfaction through self-realisation; and social relationships based on mutual respect and support.

In the work environment, it is a manager's role to create such conditions for employees that allow them to take care of their health, comfort and give the opportunity to reach their full potential. Employees well-being might be also understood as the success of an organisation, hence companies take proactive measures to improve the quality of life of their employees. In order for these efforts to be fully justified, the most important task is to know the needs and expectations of subordinates regarding each area of their lives and to adapt specific solutions in an individualised manner.

The research presented here shows that people are aware of their needs and know to what extent a specific need will improve their health, mental stability and interpersonal relationships. When it comes to taking care of their physical health, they mainly expect preventive measures, access to a GP and specialists. They also expect their employers to take care of their safety and health by providing the necessary protective measures and equipment. Employees want to be treated fairly at their workplace and want recognition in the form of pay and/or praise for their commitment to an organisation. They also appreciate work-life balance. Atmosphere at a workplace is the factor that has a great influence on their efficiency. Because of this employers should make sure that their workers have the conditions allowing them to get to know each other and to make close social bonds.

Employees who want to enjoy good health and well-being must also find time to develop their passions as well as have time for their family members and relaxation. Among their expectations towards supervisors there are: a responsible approach to work, valuable feedback and recognition of their achievements. They want to be provided with the conditions that will allow them to develop and meet their needs in an individualised way.

Instead of trying to outdo one another with more and more innovative and trendy solutions for the well-being of employees, companies should first listen to what their employees expect. Only such an approach will guarantee the success of an organisation.

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