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## Well-being among IT Employees Working Remotely: Post Covid-19 Reality from the Perspective of IT Industry

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Elwira Gross-Gołacka<sup>1</sup>, Ewa Szkudlarek, Agnieszka Brzegowy,  
Teresa Kupczyk<sup>2</sup>, Magdalena Ligaj<sup>3</sup>

**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The main goal of the article is to explore and analyse the well-being among IT employees working remotely and provides some practical implications for employer branding and virtual teams management in the post-covid reality.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** Researchers were particularly interested in the IT industry as being extremely competitive in terms of maintaining job satisfaction of its employees. The quantitative research was administered in September 2021, on a group of 1,889 remote workers from the seven Polish branches of the international IT corporation, which is one of the biggest employers in the Polish IT industry.

**Findings:** Although the majority of enterprises in Poland in IT Industry do not implement well-being strategies the implication indicates that the overall level of well-being of employees in remote work is high. Additionally the research indicates that the well-being programs should be developed by companies to maintain the high level of remote workers' well-being in three dimensions, mental, social and physical.

**Practical implications:** This paper recommends companies to invest in well-being that according to managers' assessment has a significant impact on their sustainable development. The pandemic-induced dramatic large-scale transition to remote work, and provides an opportunity to learn about how this way of working affects employees' well-being. The authors concluded that employer branding strategies should be revised and include a new perspective of remote workers' well-being needs.

**Originality/Value:** This research contributes to enrich the theoretical framework for the Polish context regarding well-being among IT employees and it allows contrasting the evidence with other studies at national levels.

**Keywords:** Employer branding, well-being, leadership, virtual teams, remote working, IT.

**JEL codes:** C12, J24, O34.

**Paper Type:** Research article.

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<sup>1</sup>Department of Organization Theory and Methods, Faculty of Management, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland, [egross@wz.uw.edu.pl](mailto:egross@wz.uw.edu.pl);

<sup>2</sup>Department of Management, General Tadeusz Kościuszko Military University of Land Forces, Poland, ORCID: 0000-0003-0361-2128, e-mail: [teresa.kupczyk@awl.edu.pl](mailto:teresa.kupczyk@awl.edu.pl);

<sup>3</sup>Department of Management and Command, War Studies Academy, Poland ORCID: 0000-0002-0615-9739, e-mail: [m.ligaj@akademia.mil.pl](mailto:m.ligaj@akademia.mil.pl);

## **1. Introduction**

The Covid-19 pandemic has permanently changed the approach to work and employees. Globally implemented restrictions and lockdowns have become a source of new challenges for the organization of work and employee motivation, which has also given a new perspective to employer branding activities. Although remote working was, one of the best solutions to stop the spread of the Covid-19 it is imperative to be aware of the difficulties and challenges that employees are facing (Satici *et al.*, 2020; Bartik *et al.*, 2020).

It should be noted that although remote working can be beneficial for both companies and employees, there is a huge difference between choosing that lifestyle and being forced into it as a result of a global pandemic (Muralidhar *et al.*, 2020). Long-term remote work forces not only changes at the level of working tools, but also in the entire organizational culture (de Lucas Ancillo, 2021; Muralidhar *et al.*, 2020) as well as in the area of employees' well-being (Krug *et al.*, 2021).

As enterprises begin to notice significant operational savings due to employees switching to remote working, therefore the new approach to work may not change after the pandemic (Narayanan *et al.*, 2021). Rather, it should be assumed that solutions and processes designed during a pandemic for the organization of work, employees motivation and employer branding will become the new standards. This indicates the need to revise the activities implemented so far and implies significant changes in the area of employer branding, which must adapt to the requirements of remote working and virtual teams.

As a consequence of these deliberations, the main aim of this article has developed, namely to identify the state of implementation of the well-being concept in organisation within IT industry, as well as determining whether this concept presents benefits to organisations, and if so, then what are they. The article aims also to explore the well-being among IT employees working remotely and provides some practical implications for employer branding and virtual teams management in the post-covid reality.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***Employer Branding in Remote Work Reality:***

Since the 1990s, the concept of employer branding has been gaining in importance both from an academic and business perspective. Aggerholm *et al.* (2011) emphasizes the key role of employees in modern organizations underlining that attractiveness, profitability and future actions depend on the willingness to put employees and future employees first and to recognize them as the most important

stakeholders in the development of the organization (Aggerholm *et al.*, 2011). The first and most frequently mentioned employer brand definition was developed in 1996 by Ambler *et al.* The authors defined it as "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company" (Ambler *et al.*, 1996). This definition is still current and emphasizes a wide range of employer branding activities. The development of employer branding strategy is built on two levels - internal and external.

Internal employer branding activities focus on employee engagement and motivation (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). In the pandemic reality, researchers point out the important role of internal employer branding in building employee satisfaction (Nelke, 2021; Carlini and Grace, 2021). The internal employer branding refers to the development of the value proposition that meets the needs of current employers. It should be emphasized that the value proposition is not related only to the financial aspects.

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) indicate that the starting point for building the value proposition should be based on such elements as organizational culture, management style, employer image and the feelings related to the product or service offered by the company (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). As research conducted by A. Dabirian, J. Kietzmann and H. Diba illustrates, the value proposition should cover seven areas (Dabirian *et al.*, 2017):

- Social value relating to building a people-oriented organizational culture,
- Interest value related to innovation and new skills that each employee can develop individually,
- Application value that emphasizes the attractiveness of doing the work that matters,
- Development value understood as features of the workplace related to one's own professional development,
- Economic value connected with the financial aspects,
- Management value indicating the huge impact of good or bad managers on the perception of the workplace,
- Work-life balance understood as an opportunity to combine professional and private life.

Such a broad approach to building value proposition is particularly important in the IT industry, where employees pay a lot of attention to non-wage factors (Korunka *et al.*, 2008; Moro *et al.*, 2020; Phuong and Vinh, 2021). In the developed model of job satisfaction in the IT industry, Phuong and Vinh indicated that apart from the pay and promotion potential, the main factors influencing job satisfaction are, workplace environment, fairness and workplace relationship. Researchers also pointed to the

fact that job satisfaction is related to both employee loyalty and job performance (Phuong and Vinh, 2021). In particular in the post-covid reality, employer branding strategy requires reorganization and paying broader attention to the new needs of employees.

***Virtual Teams Challenges:***

Researchers indicate that remote working brings out unique challenges - there are no managers or teammates nearby to consult with or to provide immediate responses or support, no one is looking over one's shoulder to keep focused and on tasks, also keeping work and home-life balance can be extremely complicated (Bailey and Kurland, 1999; Prasad *et al.*, 2020; Wheatley, 2012). Therefore, the problem of the well-being of remote workers becomes more and more important and proposing a satisfactory value proposition of employer brand requires a new perspective.

The existing empirical evidence and scientific publications on the association between flexible form of work (including remote work) and employee well-being are not conclusive (De Menezes *et al.*, 2011). Some researchers (Hoeven and Zoonen, 2015), found that the greater the flexibility in the workplace, the greater the work-life balance, professional autonomy and effective communication that positively impact the well-being of employees (Hoeven and Zoonen, 2015).

Other studies suggest that people who use distance working experience the negative emotions of loneliness, disconnections, increased pressure, isolation, irritability, worry and guilt (Mann and Lynn, 2003; Clark *et al.*, 2021). As a consequence, working remotely may become disadvantageous as workers actually intensify their professional activity (Kelliher and Anderson, 2010). Researchers point to the need for a broad focus on the employees demands working remotely (Ferreira *et al.*, 2021; Galanti *et al.*, 2021; Como *et al.*, 2021). Prasad points to four areas that represent a set of factors influencing remote work (Prasad *et al.*, 2020):

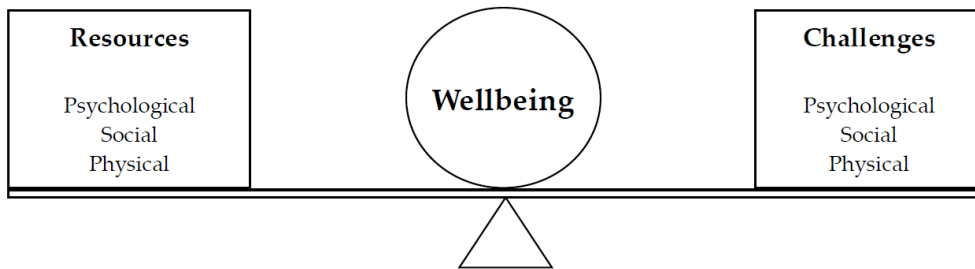
- External factors: communication, different working zones, interruptions, lockdown restrictions, family fulfilment,
- Organizational factors: communication, policies, workplace isolation, peer, job related issues, climate, team work,
- Individual factors: bad health habits, prioritizing work, working too much, lack of guidance, team pressures, family distractions, job satisfaction,
- Opportunities: social support, minimal supervision, flexible working, no workplace pressure, no daily commutation, no workplace politics.

The above-mentioned factors may negatively or positively affect well-being remote workers, and their impact should be taken into account in the development of employer branding strategy.

### **Employees' Well-Being:**

The concept of well-being is undeniably complex and most scholars find it as multidimensional construct (Diener 2009; Stiglitz *et al.*, 2009; Taris and Schaufeli, 2015). Dodge *et al.* propose a definition of well-being based on the balance between an individual's resource pool and the challenges an individual faces (Dodge *et al.*, 2012) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Definition of well-being by A. Daly Dodge, J. Huyton and L. Sanders



**Source:** Dodge *et al.* (2012), *The challenge of defining wellbeing*, *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 2 (3), p. 230.

According to the authors, the see-saw represents the individual's desire to return to a predetermined point of well-being, as well as emphasizing the individual's need for balance or homeostasis. Basically, sustainable well-being is when individuals have the psychological (mental), social, and physical resources they need to meet specific psychological (mental), social, and/or physical challenges. When individuals have more challenges than resources, the see-saw decreases with their well-being, and vice versa. Well-being of employees can be analysed from the perspective of three areas, mental, social and physical.

Mental well-being at work assesses the psychological and emotional quality of an individual's life in relation to their work. WHO describes it as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community” (WHO, 2004).

Social well-being relates to the degree to which individuals function well in their social relationships at work including the depth of relationships as well as the availability of social support (Charalampous *et al.*, 2019). Researchers found social support to be one of the resources that ran out when employees worked extensively remotely, something that increased their level of emotional exhaustion (Sardeshmukh *et al.*, 2012). The conducted research also confirms that developing

and maintaining good relationships is extremely important for the level of satisfaction with the work of remote employees (Fay, 2012; Golden, 2008) and for organizational commitment (Golden, 2008).

Physical well-being consists of the ability to perform daily activities and social roles without being physically restricted and experiencing body pain, and having enough energy to function optimally (Capiro *et al.*, 2014). At work, physical well-being can be directly affected by health promotion programs, and more indirectly by the work environment. The work environment includes both the physical environment and the culture and policies of the organization. A healthy workplace is therefore not only risk-free, but also provides an environment that allows employees to thrive. Ergonomically designed work environments and safe work guidelines are essential to avoid physical discomfort and irritation (Garza *et al.*, 2012).

The scientific research proves the well-being of employees has a positive impact on productivity and performance at work (Nielsen *et al.*, 2017; Miller, 2016). Now, more than ever, the well-being of employees should be at the forefront of organizational priorities, particularly in the IT industry. Researchers indicate that in the COVID-19 pandemic reality well-being and productivity of IT professionals are strictly connected and influence each other (Russo *et al.*, 2021).

### **3. Materials and Methods**

To verify the thesis T1 and to answer the research questions, we used literary analysis and criticism, diagnostic survey, and statistical methods. Grounded theory COVID-19 Pandemic as an Agent of Change in Well-being of Employees methodology was used to build theory based on collected empirical data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978). The tools used in the described study were mainly quantitative, based on deductive reasoning, relying on "hard" scientific evidence, generalizing, and using numbers to analyze and present the economic reality under study (Colander, 2000; Holt, Barkley, and Colander, 2010; Spencer, 2013).

The research was conducted based on a survey questionnaire on the opinions of the respondents. The quantitative research was administered using the CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) in September 2021, on a group of 1,889 remote workers (43% of the females and 57% of men) from the seven Polish branches of the international IT corporation, which is one of the biggest employers in the Polish IT industry.

The main aim of the study was to examine the level of well-being of employees in three areas - mental, physical and social. The main research question was defined as 'What is the level of mental, physical and social well-being of remote workers from

the IT industry during COVID-19 pandemic?

The survey consisted of six statements:

- Statement 1 (general opinion): Employee health and wellbeing is a priority at XXX Group.
- Statement 2 (mental and physical well-being): XXX Group provides enough support for my mental and physical well-being for me to carry out my work effectively.
- Statement 3 (mental well-being): I receive enough support to deal with the competing demands of my role.
- Statement 4 (physical well-being): My physical work environment supports my physical health.
- Statement 5 (physical well-being): I feel able to take time away from work.
- Statement 6 (social well-being) I feel I can speak to my manager about challenges I am facing outside of work.

Employees provided answers on the basis of a 10-graded scale, where 1 meant dissatisfaction and 10 meant full satisfaction in the surveyed area. The survey was carried out through the specialized employer branding web application Workday Peakon Employee Voice, which is an international tool for researching employee job satisfaction.

#### 4. Results

The aim of the analysis was to identify and examine the level of well-being of employees in three areas - mental, physical and social. Table 1 presents the average of scores from the responses of all respondents. The respondents showed the greatest satisfaction in the area of social well-being that was audited under the statement 6 as well as in the area of physical well-being that was investigated over the statement 4. The least satisfaction was related to the company's support of employees to carry out their work effectively, which was the subject of statement 2.

**Table 1.** Average of all employees' response ratings

| Statement   | Average rating |
|---|----------------|
| Statement 1: Employee health and well-being is a priority at XXX Group.   | 7,9/10         |
| Statement 2: XXX Group provides enough support for my mental and physical well-being for me to carry out my work effectively. | 7,7/10         |
| Statement 3: I receive enough support to deal with the competing demands of my role.  | 8,1/10         |

|   |        |
|---|--------|
| Statement 4: My physical work environment supports my physical health.                      | 8,2/10 |
| Statement 5: I feel able to take time away from work.                                       | 8/10   |
| Statement 6: I feel I can speak to my manager about challenges I am facing outside of work. | 8,2/10 |

**Source:** Own study, n= 1,889.

The detailed analysis of the collected data presented in Table 2 provides further insights. The average ratings for all questions broken down by employees age, shows that the least satisfied group of employees are employees aged 35-39 yo as well as 45-54 yo. While the greatest satisfaction with the company's activities in the area of well-being was indicated by employees aged 25-29 yo. It should also be added that out of all the grades issued, Statement 5 received the lowest grade (7,1) among all questions issued by respondents 45-54 yo. On the other hand, Statement 4 received the highest grade (8,9) indicated by the respondents at the same age.

**Table 2.** *Employees ratings broken down by employees age*

| Statement   | 20-24 yo   | 25-29 yo    | 30-34 yo    | 35-39 yo    | 40-44 yo | 45-54 yo    |
|---|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------|-------------|
| <b>Average rating for all questions</b>   | <b>8,1</b> | <b>8,15</b> | <b>8,05</b> | <b>7,87</b> | <b>8</b> | <b>7,87</b> |
| Statement 2: XXX Group provides enough support for my mental and physical well-being for me to carry out my work effectively. | 7,6        | 7,7         | 7,7         | 7,5         | 8        | 7,8         |
| Statement 3: I receive enough support to deal with the competing demands of my role.  | 8,2        | 8,3         | 8,1         | 8           | 7,9      | 7,3         |
| Statement 4: My physical work environment supports my physical health.  | 8,4        | 8,4         | 8,2         | 7,9         | 8,3      | <b>8,9</b>  |
| Statement 5: I feel able to take time away from work.   | 8          | 8,1         | 8,1         | 8           | 7,8      | <b>7,1</b>  |
| Statement 6: I feel I can speak to my manager about challenges I am facing outside of work.                                   | 8,4        | 8,4         | 8,3         | 8           | 8,1      | 7,9         |

**Source:** Own study, n= 1,889.

No significant differences were identified in the assessment of employees in terms of gender breakdown, which is presented in Table 3. Both genders indicated the lowest scores in Statement 2 - in both cases, the score was 7.7. While the highest grades



were indicated in Statement 4 by male respondents (8,3), and in Statement 6 by Female (8,3).

**Table 3.** Average of all employee ratings broken down by employees gender

| Statement   | Male        | Female      |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Average rating for all questions</b>   | <b>8,02</b> | <b>8,03</b> |
| Statement 1: Employee health and well-being is a priority at XXX Group.   | 8           | 7,9         |
| Statement 2: XXX Group provides enough support for my mental and physical well-being for me to carry out my work effectively. | 7,7         | 7,7         |
| Statement 3: I receive enough support to deal with the competing demands of my role.  | 8           | 8,1         |
| Statement 4: My physical work environment supports my physical health.  | 8,3         | 8,2         |
| Statement 5: I feel able to take time away from work.   | 8           | 8           |
| Statement 6: I feel I can speak to my manager about challenges I am facing outside of work.                                   | 8,1         | 8,3         |

*Source:* Own study, n= 1,889.

The average of all employee ratings broken down by their job seniority, presented in Table 4, shows that the least satisfied group of employees are employees with >10 - <15 work experience in the company. While the greatest satisfaction with the company's activities in the area of well-being was indicated by relatively new employees with > 1 month - < 1 year work experience.

The statements with the lowest grades were Statement 2 that received 7,3 grade from employees with > 5 years - < 10 years of experience, and Statement 5 that received 7,3 grade from employees with <1 month of experience. At the same time, Statement 2 gained the highest grade (8,6) indicated by the less experienced employees. The same grade (8,6) was indicated to Statement 1 by employees with >1 month - <1 year of experience.

**Table 4.** Average of all employee ratings broken down by employees' work experience in the company

| Statement                               | < 1 month  | > 1 month - < 1 year | > 1 year - < 5 years | > 5 years - < 10 years | > 10 years - < 15 years | > 15 years - < 20 years |
|---|------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Average rating for all questions</b> | <b>8,1</b> | <b>8,4</b>           | <b>8</b>             | <b>7,8</b>             | <b>7,7</b>              | <b>7,9</b>              |

|   |     |      |     |     |     |     |
|---|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Statement 1: Employee health and well-being is a priority at XXX Group.   | 8,5 | 8,6  | 7,8 | 7,6 | 7,7 | 7,9 |
| Statement 2: XXX Group provides enough support for my mental and physical well-being for me to carry out my work effectively. | 8,6 | 8,45 | 7,7 | 7,3 | 7,7 | 8   |
| Statement 3: I receive enough support to deal with the competing demands of my role.  | 8,5 | 8,45 | 8   | 8   | 7,8 | 7,9 |
| Statement 4: My physical work environment supports my physical health.  | 7,8 | 8,5  | 8,3 | 8   | 7,9 | 8,1 |
| Statement 5: I feel able to take time away from work.   | 7,3 | 8,5  | 8   | 7,8 | 7,7 | 7,6 |
| Statement 6: I feel I can speak to my manager about challenges I am facing outside of work.                                   | 8,4 | 8,1  | 8,2 | 8,3 | 7,9 | 8,4 |

*Source: Own study, n= 1,889.*

## 5. Discussion

The research results presented in the article have shown the new research results and research delivered some new insights in the well-being among IT employees working remotely and provided some practical implications for employer branding and virtual teams management in the post-covid reality. The first implication indicates that the overall level of well-being of employees in remote work is high, which is in line with other surveys (Wood *et al.*, 2021; Russo *et al.*, 2021).

Additionally the research indicates that the well-being programs should be developed by companies to maintain the high level of remote workers' well-being in three dimensions: mental, social and physical.

While the research did not reveal differences in opinions on well-being of male and female employees, the additional insight that was identified is the need to take care of the most senior (experienced) and the oldest employees who may have experienced burnout during the pandemic.

The authors are aware of the limited scope of the research that was carried out only in one country. Therefore, as a future research recommendation, the research sample could be expanded on other countries as well as could explore other areas of the multidimensional concept of well-being.

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