

EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING VERSUS REMOTE WORK – OPINIONS OF THE GENERATION Z EMPLOYEES

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Abstract: The objective of this article is to present the opinions of Generation Z representatives on selected factors shaping the well-being of employees doing remote work. The empirical part of the study is based on the results of a survey carried out in 2022 among employees who are representatives of Generation Z. The results of the survey indicate that, according to young people from this generation, remote work provides a sense of comfort, reduces stress and enables greater independence at work. Furthermore, according to the respondents, remote work allows for a work-life balance. The results of the study show that young people from Gen Z do not perceive any threats to the well-being of employees doing remote work among the factors analysed.

Keywords: employee well-being, Generation Z, remote work, work-life balance

Introduction

Employee well-being generally understood, refers to the employee's satisfaction, well-being, sense of comfort in both work and non-work activities (Marcinkowski 2017, p. 42). The idea of developing employee well-being is linked to the primary objective of human resource management, which is to provide the company with staff with the right skills and predispositions to work effectively and to create working conditions that encourage employees to stay with the organisation. An implementation of this idea in management covers corporate wellness programmes treated as long-term organisational activities that support the physical, mental and social well-being of employees (Lichwa 2008, p. 39; Burke, Richardsen 2014, p. 8). The issue of work-life balance is closely linked to employees' sense of well-being. Shaping work-life balance (WLB) is about employees having an impact in how much time, when and where they spend on work-related tasks and activities relating to their non-work life (Greenhaus, Collins, Show 2003, pp. 510-531). Particularly for Gen Z employees, the ability to exercise a kind of autonomy in this area relates not only to quality of work but also to quality of life in general.

The objective of this article is to present the opinions of Generation Z representatives on selected factors shaping the well-being of employees doing remote work. The empirical part of the study presents the results of a survey conducted among young people representing Generation Z. The survey was carried out using quantitative research methods, employing a survey technique. The study conducted posed the following research problem: How do the representatives of Gen Z perceive the impact of remote work on shaping employee well-being? In the study, a number of specific problem questions about employee well-being, including work-life balance, in relation to remote work were asked.

Employees' well-being – basics of the research issue

Well-being in the context of work is defined as a situation in which the balance of emotions felt by the employee is positive and when the employee's own work (in a given organisation, with a given employer) is felt to be satisfying (Boniwell, Henry 2007, pp. 3-18). The key factors regarding employee well-being are related to:

- matching the people employed, in terms of their competences and personality traits, to the nature of the work they do and the tasks assigned to them;
- working conditions and the ability of employees to set goals, make decisions and solve problems (Syper-Jędrzejak 2019, pp. 21-22).



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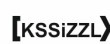
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Applying the idea of wellness in human resource management is based on the premise that an employee's psycho-physical state translates into his or her effectiveness and commitment at work. In this context, corporate wellness is understood as a healthy lifestyle for employees, leading to well-being and psycho-physical harmony and thus ensuring maximum efficiency at work.

According to Syper-Jędrzejak (2019, pp. 10-11) employee well-being can be analysed in relation to its two pillars - physical well-being and the broadly-defined balance of employees. Physical well-being consists of: ergonomics of the workplace and work organisation, as well as the health protection of employees, and a health-promoting lifestyle. On the other hand, employee balance in a broad sense includes: taking care of internal balance and stress prevention, and shaping work-life balance, as well as supporting the development of non-work interests.

The emphasis on employee balance in the broadest sense is linked to the belief that, in addition to physical health, an employee's mental and social well-being is also important, enabling them to establish satisfying relationships and solve problems constructively (Strykowska 2009, p. 187). As the issue of work-life reconciliation affects every working person, regardless of their age, the result is that there is a wide variety of attitudes to the problem (Chen, Powell, Greenhaus 2009, pp. 510-531).

The method in which individuals from a given generation approach work-life balance issues is influenced by a number of factors, including: technological development, economic, social and cultural changes, as well as the life experiences common to many individuals from a given generation. However, how the representatives of a particular generation perceive the work-life balance is crucially influenced by their attitudes towards work and the place that work, family and leisure occupy among the values they follow (Beutell, Witting-Berman 2008, pp.507-523; Robak 2017, pp. 569-584).

The relationship between work and non-work life is of particular importance for representatives of the youngest Generation Z on the labour market. Employees of this generation are perceived to place a high value on their private lives and, as a result, they expect freedom and flexibility at work to maintain a work-life balance (Singh, Dangmei 2016, pp. 1-5; Dolot 2018, pp. 44-50). Nowadays, managing the remote work of Generation Z employees is of particular importance, as these individuals are not only aware of their expectations in terms of professional and personal priorities, but are also able to defend the boundary between these two areas of life (Sanchez et al. 2021, pp. 67-100). A high degree of separation between time spent at work and time spent in private life is extremely important to these young workers and, as a result, they are willing to take advantage of the various work-life balance programmes offered by the company.

Shaping the well-being of employed people, including but not limited to dealing with work-life conflict, is supported by the proactive approach of companies that recognise that this has a major impact, not only on employee satisfaction and the atmosphere at work, but also on their motivation and the quality of their tasks (Dąbrowska 2014, pp. 41-53). Corporate wellness measures involve both education and competence development for employees in various areas (physical activity, healthy eating, work-life balance, stress management) so that they can use their full potential and feel satisfied at work and in life (Burke, Richardsen 2014, p. 8). By initiating measures to promote employee well-being, organisational relationships are shaped that foster employees' feelings of security, psychological well-being and opportunities for professional development, while at the same time building respect and trust in the employer. A corporate image, built by implementing initiatives that meet the needs of the people employed, not only makes it possible to attract and retain talented employees, but sustains their commitment at the desired level and allows them to use their personal resources effectively.

Research methodology

The research results presented in this paper are part of a quantitative survey study entitled: "Managerial aspects of remote work management". The study was carried out by Fieldstat sp. z o.o., a specialised market research agency, using quantitative research methods, CATI (Computer Assisted

Telephone Interview 50% of respondents) and CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview 50% of respondents). Ultimately, 387 correctly completed questionnaires were obtained. The survey was conducted in December 2022 among young people, working remotely, representing Generation Z.

The used research tool (questionnaire) was a proprietary survey and was prepared by a research team consisting of staff from the Department of Applied Sociology and Human Resource Management, Faculty of Management, Czestochowa University of Technology. The research tool used was a standardised questionnaire consisting of 57 closed statements and seven questions on the social and demographic characteristics of the respondents and their workplace variables. A five-point Likert scale was used for responses.

The excerpt from the survey results presented here relates to the respondents' views on the impact of remote work on employee well-being. The study conducted posed the following main research problem: How do Generation Z employees perceive the impact of remote work on employee well-being? The study also posed a number of specific problem questions:

- in the opinion of Generation Z, does remote work make the employee comfortable?
- in the opinion of Generation Z, is remote work conducive to stress-free working?
- in the opinion of Generation Z, does remote work allow for more freedom/independence at work?
- in the opinion of Generation Z, does remote work allow for work-life balance?
- in the opinion of Generation Z representatives, does remote work help to protect the boundary between work and private life?
- in the opinion of Generation Z representatives, does remote work disrupt the rhythm of the day and night?

Results and discussion

A total of 387 people participated in the study, including 163 (42.12%) women and 224 (57.88%) men. The Generation Z employees participating in the study varied in terms of age. The least numerous were the youngest people: 76 (19.64%), between the ages of 15 and 24. The following age categories were represented by: 141 (36.43%) of people between 25 and 29 years of age, and 170 (43.93%) of people between 30 and 34 years of age. Employees with various levels of remote work experience took part in the survey. The majority of respondents - 296 people (76.49%) - held executive roles. The remaining respondents - 91 people (23.51%) were employed in managerial roles. Taking into consideration the size of the organisation where the respondents performed their remote work, micro organisations (with 1-9 employees) dominated with 182 (47.03%) indications, followed by small organisations (with 10 to 49 employees) with 86 (22.22%) indications, large organisations (more than 250 employees) with 64 (16.54%) indications, and medium organisations (50 to 249 employees) with 55 (14.21%) indications. Respondents also represented organisations that varied in terms of industry.

With regard to the issue under consideration, a number of indicators were selected from the entire research material to represent respondents' opinions regarding the impact of remote work on the employees' sense of well-being.

The question regarding the perception of Gen Z representatives of their sense of comfort when working remotely was directly linked to the key research problem. People who participated in the survey were mostly convinced that the employee was comfortable doing work remotely. As many as 65.12% of respondents agreed with this statement (including almost one in four respondents who strongly agreed, 24.03%). Only 11.89% of respondents presented the opposite opinion, and 23% did not give a clear answer. The survey participants were also asked whether remote work promotes stress-free working. By far, the largest number of respondents (64.08%) confirmed the positive impact of remote work on reducing the perception of work-related stress. The remaining respondents were divided between those opposed to this statement 10.34%, and those with no clear opinion on the issue 25.58%. Furthermore, when asked whether remote work allows for more freedom/independence, respondents

also had positive opinions in this regard. The majority of respondents, 66.41%, presented the view that remote work allows employees to feel a greater sense of independence when compared to office work (of which 47.79% strongly agreed with this statement). Only 11.63% of respondents presented the opposite opinion and 21.96% were undecided on the issue (see Table 1 for a detailed breakdown of respondents' answers).

Table 1. Percentages of answers in the field of remote work

Remote work	strongly disagree	mostly disagree	neither agree nor disagree	mostly agree	strongly agree
makes the employee feel comfortable	3,36%	8,53%	23,00%	41,09%	24,03%
conducive to stress-free work	3,10%	7,24%	25,58%	34,63%	29,46%
gives more freedom/independence at work	2,33%	9,30%	21,96%	42,38%	24,03%
allows to reconcile work and private life	4,91%	14,99%	26,10%	40,83%	13,18%
allows to protect the border between work and private life	5,17%	15,25%	25,58%	34,37%	19,64%
disturbs the rhythm of day and night	17,31%	30,75%	18,09%	25,58%	8,27%

Source: own study

Questions regarding the work-life balance possibilities of remote workers were also related to the research problem under consideration. As can be seen from the data obtained, the majority of Generation Z employees surveyed, stated (54.01% of indications) that remote work allows for a work-life balance. Of these, 40.82% tended to agree with the statement and 13.18% completely agreed. Only 19.9% of respondents presented the opposite view and 26.1% gave no clear answer on this issue.

Additional light is shed on the assessment of the impact of remote work on work-life relations by respondents' answers regarding other factors impacting the formation of work-life balance. When asked whether remote work supports the protection of the work-life boundary, respondents were mostly (54.01%) positive about such a statement. Only 20.41% of respondents perceived a disadvantageous impact of this form of work, and one in four respondents (25.58%) did not express a clear opinion on this issue. In addition, respondents were critical of the statement indicating that remote work disrupts the rhythm of day and night (blurring the boundaries between different times of day and the behaviours attributed to them). However, this opinion was expressed by fewer respondents (48.06%) - relative to the other issues analysed. As many as 33.85% of those surveyed were of the opposite opinion and 18.09% were undecided on the issue (Table 1). This situation means that, while Generation Z employees have a positive perception of the relationship between remote work and work-life balance, their opinions are more divided regarding the impact of remote work on maintaining day and night rhythms.

The information obtained from the survey corresponds to research conducted by various authors on employee well-being and, in particular, on factors affecting work-life balance, as described in the literature on this subject. The respondents' reported assessments of the impact of remote work on feelings of independence and work-life balance relate positively to other studies on the subject. The beneficial impact of work autonomy on the development of work-life balance has been confirmed in numerous studies (Haar et al. 2019, pp. 261-282). However, as research analyses indicate, remote work can cause both positive and negative consequences on work-life balance (Stankeviciute, Kunskaia 2022, pp. 221-235).

Conclusions

The research carried out indicates that representatives of Generation Z have a positive view of remote work in relation to the analysed factors shaping employee well-being. Those who participated in the survey were mostly convinced that the employee was comfortable doing the work remotely. Additionally, young respondents representing Gen Z were of the opinion that remote work enables employees to feel more

independent when compared to office work. It is also noteworthy that respondents emphasised the positive impact of remote work in reducing the perception of work-related stress.

According to an analysis of the data obtained from the survey, the representatives of Generation Z mostly believed that remote work allows for a work-life balance. Furthermore, respondents were of the opinion that remote work helps to retain the boundary between work and private life. Nevertheless, it should be noted, that the respondents also presented some critical views of remote work and pointed out its potentially dangerous aspects in terms of disrupting day and night rhythms – and thus disrupting the boundaries between different times of day and the behaviours attributed to them.

By presenting the opinions of young people from Generation Z, the results of this research provide a better understanding of their needs in terms of shaping their well-being and, in particular, the right work-life balance in the context of remote work. Thus, they can serve as a basis for reflection and managers taking actions to improve both the effectiveness in performing professional tasks by these young employees and the quality of their private lives. In this context, however, the crucial importance of good continuous communication with superiors and co-workers should be emphasised, which enables support in problems related to building the right work-life relationship and, moreover, develops a sense of employee well-being, which is so important for Generation Z employees.

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