# WELL-BEING AT WORK – THE ESSENCE, CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE PHENOMENON

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#### **Abstract**

**Background**. World literature in the area of management, which takes into account the psychological aspects of human functioning in the work situation, more and more deals with the phenomenon of well-being. Many authors emphasize for example the economic benefits to the organization resulting from the concern for the well-being of their employees.

**Research aims**. This article aims to summarize and organize current knowledge of the phenomenon of well-being at work.

**Method**. Due to the complexity of this concept it was necessary to clarify it for organizational implementation. For this purpose the analysis of many reports from empirical and theoretical studies in recent years was done.

**Key findings**. The model of well-being experienced by employees which includes its causes and consequences is the result of the presented analysis of various theories and available research results in the literature.

Key words: Well-Being, Work, Organization, Employee, Human resources management

### INTRODUCTION

The notion of personal well-being is used more frequently by both researchers and practitioners of various areas of life. Its popularity may be certainly contributed to the growing role of a domain called positive psychology. Well-being is a key notion in this field. It is also a notion strongly connected to the quality of life, which functions as a significant variable not only in psychology, but also in other branches of science, such as sociology, management, pedagogy and medicine. Moreover, it transpires that well-being, as a notion defined by psychology, has consequences influencing so many areas of our lives that it aspires to be an interdisciplinary term.

# Well-Being as a Psychological Phenomenon

Personal well-being in its most general meaning is a positive state connected to emotions experienced and a cognitive evaluation of own life (Deci & Ryan, 2008). In the international literature it is assumed that well-being may be analysed from two points of view – hedonic, understood as a pleasant life and eudaimonic – meaning a valuable life (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & King, 2009). The hedonic conceptualization is operationalised

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as positive emotionality (positive emotional balance) and positive cognitive evaluation of life – life satisfaction. However, the eudaimonic approach does not concern the pleasure gained from life, but rather its meaning, value and purposefulness. The eudaimonic well-being is a definitely more complex notion than the hedonic well-being. Researchers representing this way of thinking accurately point out its multidimensionality (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Seligman, 2005; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Furthermore, in the literature there are classifications of several areas of well-being, which together constitute general well-being. Usually personal well-being, social well-being and employee well-being are distinguished.

Personal well-being is understood as a positive assessment of personal life, which includes life satisfaction, positive emotional balance, positive selfimage, a sense of purpose of own life or personal development (Schueller & Seligman, 2010; Ruff & Singer, 2008). Social well-being refers to life in bigger groups and societies to which we are not as attached as to family and friends. It is connected to the satisfaction obtained from belonging to a given society, the emotions experienced in that society or the sense of integration with the society, the acceptance of own social environment, the sense of own contribution to the society, the sense of purpose of social environment development and the sense of coherence in the society (Keyes, 1998). Employee well-being is defined as the assessment of own professional life in the context of evaluation of both job type and social professional environment. Once again there are two possible ways for its conceptualisation. If the measurement concerns job satisfaction or positive emotional balance at work, it adopts the hedonic approach. If we are talking about the meaning and value of work revealed in the form of a sense of mission in the profession (Czerw & Borkowska, 2010), then the measurement is performed within the eudaimonic approach.

The analysis of researches conducted in the scope of well-being has shown a positive relationship between personal and social well-being (Keyes, 2002), personal and employee well-being (Judge & Watanabe, 1993; Hart, 1999; Rode, 2004; Bajcar, Borkowska, Czerw, & Gąsiorowska, 2011) as well as a positive relationship between hedonic and eudaimonic personal well-being (King, Hicks, Krull, & Del Gaiso, 2006; Fowers, Mollica, & Procacci, 2010; Schueller & Seligman, 2010; Delle Fave, Brdar, Freire, Vella-Brodrick, & Wissing, 2011). However, the data has shown that it is rather the eudaimonic well-being that creates the hedonic well-being and not the other way round (Gallagher, Lopez, & Preacher, 2009; McMahan & Estes, 2011).

## **REVIEW**

It is worth pointing out that the issue of well-being in the work place is a relatively new area of research, which is conducted by a relatively small number of scientific communities (especially in Poland). This issue has become surprisingly popular in the United States as a result of positive psychology development, whereas in Europe it is mostly popular in Scandinavian countries. Searching for causes and results of an individual's well-being at work is of interdisciplinary nature as it is situated on the border of human sciences, mainly psychology and management, especially human resources (cf. the notion of "quality of work-life" as cited in: Al-Outop & Harrim, 2011). The importance of the issue of the functioning of a person at work is proven by the worldwide initiatives undertaken in order to gain and spread knowledge on determinants of the so-called well-being of an individual in various areas of his/her functioning. The governmental project of Great Britain entitled Mental capital & well-being: Making the most of ourselves in the 21st century, whose results were published in 2008, may serve as an example. It involved research on well-being throughout the entire life of a person, but the aspect of job-related wellbeing was one of its major issues. Another example is the international movement Positive Organizational Scholarship (www.centerforpos.org) concerning positive psychology of management. As may be observed, the issue is up-to-date and developmental.

Reflecting on the presence of the concept of well-being in the interests of science in the area of human resource management, it was decided to review the literature in the area of management and the psychology of work and organizations. Analysis was restricted to literature available in the Ebsco database during the last 15 years. Well-being at work or in an organization were keywords in the searching process. The lower limit of time period was considered for the Year 2000, in which Martin Seligman (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) founded the positive psychology for which well-being is a key concept. The analysis showed a higher number of articles in the field of management (85 735 articles), compared to a pure psychological point of view (39 303 articles). Thus it may be seen that well-being at work is a very popular concept not only in psychology but in management science too.

# Well-Being at Work Measurement

As the theoretical understanding of well-being at work is based on two different perspectives: hedonic and eudaimonic, the tools for measuring them differ as well. In the hedonic perspective tools referring directly to the emotions experienced at work and to job satisfaction are used both abroad and in Poland.

When emotions at work are concerned, tools specially dedicated to professional jobs are used, such as "Job Affect Scale" (Burke, Brief, George, Roberson, & Webster, 1989). The questionnaire consists of a list of twenty emotions, which are to be evaluated on the basis of the intensity of

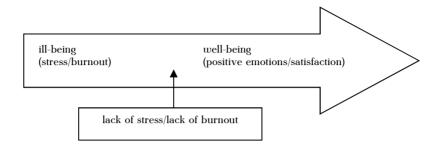
their experience at work during last two weeks. The emotions constitute two scales: Positive Affect (pleasant engagement, low arousal) and Negative Affect (unpleasant engagement, high arousal). The questionnaire has its Polish adaptation prepared by Zalewska (2002). Sometimes researchers use general tools diagnosing emotions experienced, such as "Positive and Negative Affect Schedule" – PANAS (Watson & Clark, 1997), changing instructions so that they relate to job situations. In this case we have sixty different emotions available, which constitute two general scales: General Negative Affect and General Positive Affect as well as a few more specific scales, such as: fear, fatigue, hostility (negative) or joviality, self-assurance, serenity (positive). There is also a Polish version of the tool available (Brzozowski, 2010).

As it is assumed that the hedonic perspective on job-related well-being does not have to involve only the emotional dimension, but also the cognitive aspect, tools evaluating work satisfaction are used. For example Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (Spector, 1997) and Work Description Inventory (Neuberger & Allerbeck, 1978 as cited in: Zalewska 2001) are used abroad. The latter one has its Polish adaptation (Zalewska, 2001). It is a tool encouraging employees to analyse carefully their satisfaction with different aspects of work. The authors have included eight work dimensions in the tool. For each of them there are several detailed statements to which employees respond to with the use of a scale of agreement. What is more, every dimension is evaluated on a graphic scale in the form of schematic drawings of a face (from very unsatisfied to very satisfied). This questionnaire is certainly the most multifunctional tool for measuring job satisfaction. Obviously there are also many other tools, more or less expanded, which measure job satisfaction. It is worth mentioning the example of a relatively short Polish "Job satisfaction scale" (Bajcar et al., 2011), which allows diagnosing the satisfaction within eight dimensions of work (with the use of single questions), the satisfaction related to the company as a whole and additionally, the satisfaction with the choice of profession. In this regard, the tool goes beyond the perspective of an organisation.

It is the job satisfaction that seems to be the most frequent indicator of well-being in the perspective of management (Ertreten, Cemalcilar, & Aycan, 2013; Huhtala, Feldt, Hyvönen, & Mauno, 2013; Kooij, et al., 2013;), and this is, however, only one of hedonic faces of well-being. The authors of the management area use the employees' emotions much less – the second dimension of hedonic well-being (Zineldin & Hytter, 2012).

Apart from emotions and satisfaction, the hedonic paradigm frequently uses declared stress level as an indicator of well-being, for example by using well-developed "Psycho-social working conditions" questionnaire (Cieślak & Widerszal-Bazyl, 2000) or professional burnout inventory – "Maslach Burnout Inventory" (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). However,

this practice is not compatible with the assumptions of positive psychology, which states that well-being is something more than just the lack of stress or burnout (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Ill-Being and Well-Being Relationship in Positive Psychology Context

Source: own elaboration.

What is interesting is that in researches on employee well-being, the hedonic perspective dominates or sometimes is even the only approach adopted. The researches which concern variables connected to functioning at work may be seen as a representation of the eudaimonic approach, however, they are not described as such by their authors. This is the case with such notions and measuring tools as: meaning of work (Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003), a sense of professional mission (Czerw & Borkowska, 2010) or values performed at work (Bajcar et al., 2011; Czerw & Gasiorowska, 2011). An example of an extremely popular tool used abroad is "Utrecht Work Engagement Scale" (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008), which is also available in Polish (Szabowska-Walaszczyk, Zawadzka, & Wojtaś, 2011). However, it must be noted that the statements in the questionnaire concern both emotional states (e.g. "I am enthusiastic about my job") and the meaningfulness of work (e.g. "I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose"). For this reason it is hard to classify them as belonging to the eudaimonic approach.

As it has been already mentioned, the eudaimonic approach is much more complex than hedonic one. For this reason almost all tools are multidimensional and it can be said that they evaluate positive attitudes towards own job and company. Perhaps this complexity is the cause of inaccurate identification of eudaimonic well-being in the research conducted over the workers or research in organizations. It is worth mentioning that also in the managerial literature, there are studies based on eudaimonic indicators such as the sense of purpose (Zineldin & Hytter, 2012) or organizational commitment (Kooij et al., 2013).

# Theoretical Employee Well-Being Model: Causes and Consequences

When thinking about the fundamental causes of job-related well-being, it seems that it is possible to assume that they are to be found in the context of a person-job environment fit. The fit has two aspects: person-job fit (P-J fit) and person-organisation fit (P-O fit).

The basis for the model adopted are the relations between both types of the fit and well-being. On the one hand employees experience well-being at work when they feel that their characteristics are compatible with the characteristics of tasks they perform, that is person-job fit. On the other hand, what also has an impact on employees' well-being is person-organization fit, that is the feeling that the organisation is somehow similar (e.g. when values are concerned) to a given employee or that the employee and the organisation have something valuable to offer each other. The job-related well-being experienced at work has consequences for employees themselves (connected mainly to their health and the work-life relationship), but also for the organisation (e.g. lower employee rotation, civic attitudes). These relations are shown in Figure 2.

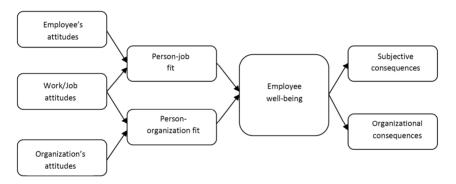


Figure 2. A Theoretical Employee Well-Being Model

Source: own elaboration

Modern industrial and organizational psychology stresses that the person-work fit is influenced by the individual's characteristics such as abilities, competences, knowledge, skills, preferences and vocational interests (Parsons, 1909, as cited in: Herr & Cramer, 2001), as well as by the personality traits and temperament (Barrick, Mount, & Li, 2013). Practically all of those characteristics are usually taken into account in the process of vocational counselling and job recruitment. Usually vocational counsellors and employers try to define the characteristics of a candidate and then assign him/her to the appropriate job type or tasks carried out at work.

The researches analysing P-J fit stress that a good fit results not only in job and professional satisfaction (Bretz & Judge, 1994; Warr & Inceoglu, 2012), but also in effective task implementation (Caldwell & O'Reilly, 1990), whereas lack of a fit results in tension, stress, frustration and ineffective work. These aspects of stress and dysfunctional behaviour at work are usually mentioned in the context of so-called demands and resources theory e.g. JDC – Job demand-control (Karasek, 1979), JDR – Job demands and resources (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), and also in conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989). These theories, apart from referring to demands imposed on employees by their profession or type of work, talk about demands imposed by the organisation, what leads to another notion related to effective functioning at work, that is P-O fit – person-organisation fit.

At first P-O fit was interpreted as employees' adjustment to the organisation, but now it is understood as a mutual fit (Czarnota-Bojarska, 2010). The process during which both a person (as a candidate and later on, as an employee) tries to fit in to the organisation and also during which the organisation itself tries to define and fulfil the demands and needs of its employees (Schneider, Smith, Taylor, & Fleenor, 1998) has become the subject of analyses and researches. The fit itself may be understood in two ways. This duality was firstly noticed by Muchinsky and Monahan (1987) and popularized by Kristof (1996). Those authors write about a supplementary fit and a complementary fit. The first one describes a similarity between the employee and organization in the scope of their aims and values. The second one refers to a mutual complementarity of necessary elements missing from the characteristics of an employee and the organisation. This distinction is now generally adopted. The process during which the fit between a person and an organisation occurs is described by for example ASA model (Schneider, 1987). The model assumes that the aims of the founders of a company or other important persons in an organisation have become organisational aims after some time and now other processes, the organisational culture and structure result from them. These aims are the reflection of specific characteristics (the author calls them "personalities") of the company founders. Over time they decide what type of people will be attracted by the company (attraction), selected as its employees (selection) and will decide to stay in it (attrition).

Regardless of whether we are talking about P-J fit or P-O fit, those states result in a sense of "being in the right place" experienced by employees, what eventually leads to job-related well-being, which may be both hedonic – related to positive emotions and satisfaction, and eudaimonic – referring to the sense of meaningfulness and purposefulness of the job.

Creating the feeling of well-being at work is extremely important due to many positive consequences of that state. First of all, well-being is beneficial to employees. The majority of researches in that scope analyse the relation between the hedonic well-being and health. It turns out that a high level of well-being at work reduces or even prevents many health problems (e.g. hypertension, depression) resulting from e.g. stress (Hallberg, Johansson, & Schaufeli, 2007).

It is worth stressing that the lack of health problems of employees results in measurable benefits for an organisation as it reduces absences from work resulting in short-term sick leaves. However, these are not the only positive organisational consequences. Meta-analysis of numerous researches conducted all over the world has shown that a high level of employee well-being is related to for example: (a) more effective use of working time, (b) increased quality of work, (c) better interpersonal relationships at work, (d) loyalty towards the employer, (e) civic attitude towards the organisation and (f) increase in the innovativeness of the organisation (Ford, Cerasoli, Higgins, & Decesare, 2011). Furthermore, relations with customers' satisfaction (Taris & Schreurs, 2009) and lower employee rotation were found (Lee, Joo, & Johnson, 2009).

Therefore it can be said that every reasonable entrepreneur should actively take care of the well-being of employees of his/her company as it is economically justified.

### CONCLUSIONS

# The Role of an Organisation and Mangers in Creating Employee Well-Being

Since the eudaimonic perspective concerns the meaning of work, it should be naturally connected to setting goals. Employers when assigning goals to their employees should take some rules into consideration (Sirgy, 2006). Taking them into account allows for the creation of a pattern for increasing employee well-being. The more rules an organisation is going to apply, the bigger will be the increase in the well-being of its employees.

- 1. The rule of choosing goals on the basis of their importance to a given employee – well-being of employees may be increased by setting them goals which are personally important to them, related to the implementation of their values or giving them a sense of self development. Therefore the rule refers to the subjective value of a goal.
- 2. The rule of choosing goals on the basis of the probability of their achievement well-being of employees may be increased by choosing goals, which are ambitious and not too easy, but possible to implement with increased effort of the employee. The rule refers to the aspirational aspect of goals.
- 3. The rule of choosing goals possible to implement well-being of employees may be increased by giving them goals useful to the

- company, so that the company could make use of it in relation to its own goals. It can be defined as a meaningfulness of the goal.
- 4. The rule of choosing goals giving a sense of achievement well-being of employees may be increased when they have sense of goal achievement. This may be achieved by giving them a clear feedback on the goal. Therefore the rule refers to visible results.

Respect for these four principles, relating to the employees' goals setting, is directly associated with the employee evaluation system procedure. Obviously a key role in this procedure plays a direct supervisor of the employee. It is he or she, who should establish objectives to be achieved in the future and then control their completion. It seems that manager's proper training in the correct purposes communication may be one of the easiest ways to increasing the well-being of employees.

Of course supervisor role is not limited only to goals setting. Many studies also indicates that great importance has leadership style represented by the manager. The most valuable is transformational style and the worst is authoritarian style (Ertreten, Cemalcilar, & Aycan, 2013). In addition, employees well-being is strengthened through trust in direct supervisor and in his organization (Asleigh, Higgs, & Dulewicz, 2012). It transpires that the level of trust moderates the relationship between well-being and positive perception of the various HRM procedures in an organization (Alfes, Shantz, & Truss, 2012). In both cases, the choice of leadership style and trust building, direct supervisor plays a very important role in "positive organization" building (Czerw & Babiak, 2010). Such an organization is focused on creating an organizational climate based on the meaningfulness and purposefulness of work.

However, the meaningfulness and purposefulness of work are not such an obvious issue. It seems that employees may understand them in different ways. Firstly, they may be seen as a part of the profession, experienced regardless of the place of work and so this view does not necessarily equal to the sense of meaningfulness attributed to tasks carried out in a given company. Secondly, the meaning and aim of work may be found in achieving goals important for a given employee or other people that somehow depend on another person's job. It is worth assuming that the meaning and aim of job should be viewed in a matrix divided into two dimensions: micro-macro and altruism-egotism. This gives us four perspectives overlapping each other (Table 1).

As it can be noticed, the matrix allows us to distinct four types of the meaningfulness of work:

- Micro-egotistical meaning implemented in the organisation while thinking about oneself;
- Micro-altruistic meaning implemented in the organisation while thinking about others;

- Macro-egotistical meaning implemented independently of the organisation while thinking about oneself;
- 4. Macro-altruistic meaning implemented independently of the organisation while thinking about others.

Table 1. Types of Job Meaning Perceived by Oneself

	Egotistical perspective	Altruistic perspective
Micro perspective	My job allows me to develop	My organisation needs my work
(organisational)	skills/knowledge needed in my	(e.g. my work allows employees
	position (e.g. I am becoming a	from other departments to carry
	better expert on the sales of my company's products)	out their tasks effectively)
Macro perspective	Thanks to my work, I have	The society benefits from my job
(independent	become a more effective pro-	(e.g. citizens feel safe)
of organisation)	fessional	
	(e.g. doctor, coach, lawyer,	
	teacher)	

Source: own elaboration

From the point of view of the organisation, the micro perspective is more important as it concerns the sense of meaningfulness of a job (and well-being as well), which is implemented in a given work place. As a consequence, the employee implements the organisational aims and contributes to the development of the company. It is of less importance whether his motivation is egotistical or altruistic. Furthermore, it is the organisation, not the employee, who is responsible for creating the sense of meaningfulness of work in the micro perspective. It seems that one of the most important dangers to an organization is a situation in which an employee does not see any meaning in his/her work in a given company, but sees it on the macro scale. The essential characteristic of the macro perspective is the fact that the meaning of a profession/job may be implemented in various organization. For example a teacher supporting the development of adolescents (macro perspective) may work in any schools. That is why if the teacher sees no meaning in working in a given school, it is probable that she/he will leave and look for another place to work, which would allow him/her to achieve a sense of meaningfulness on the micro scale as well.

It seems that from the perspective of organisation management, job-related well-being in the meaning of eudaimonic approach is of more importance than that of hedonic approach. However, it should be remembered that researches show that both types of well-being are probably highly correlated (Steger& & Dik, 2009). Nevertheless, the most probable thesis is the one where the perceived meaning of work may result in a pleasure gained from its performance and not the other way round.

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# DOBROSTAN W PRACY – ISTOTA, PRZYCZYNY I SKUTKI ZJAWISKA

### **Abstrakt**

Tło badań. Literatura światowa w dziedzinie zarządzania, która bierze pod uwagę psychologiczne aspekty funkcjonowania człowieka w sytuacji pracy, coraz więcej miejsca poświęca także fenomenowi dobrostanu. Wielu autorów podkreśla na przykład korzyści ekonomiczne dla organizacji wynikające z troski o dobro swoich pracowników.

**Cele badań.** Artykuł ma na celu podsumowanie i uporządkowanie aktualnej wiedzy o zjawisku dobrostanu w pracy.

**Metodyka.** Ze względu na złożoność pojęcia dobrostanu należało wyjaśnić ją do realizacji organizacyjnej. W tym celu przeanalizowano wiele raportów z badań empirycznych i analiz teoretycznych przeprowadzonych w ostatnich latach.

Kluczowe wnioski. Wynikiem przedstawionej analizy różnych teorii i dostępnych wyników badań w literaturze przedmiotu jest model odczuwanego przez pracowników dobrostanu, który zawiera jego przyczyny i skutki.

Słowa kluczowe: dobrostan, praca, organizacja, pracownik, zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi