

WELL-BEING OF EMPLOYEES WORKING REMOTELY – PHYSICAL HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

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Abstract: *This literature review explores key aspects of employee well-being in the context of teleworking. The pervasive use of teleworking brings new challenges and opportunities for organizations and employees. The paper focuses on three key elements of well-being. The review provides a comprehensive overview of the impact of teleworking on employees' physical health, mental health, and work-life balance. The impact of teleworking on employees' physical health is explored, including aspects such as ergonomic features of the work environment and changes in physical activity levels. The mental health of employees in the context of teleworking is analyzed in detail, exploring stressors, challenges related to social isolation, and strategies for maintaining psychological well-being. Finally, a special focus is placed on the balance between professional and personal obligations, considering the challenges and approaches to maintaining harmony in this increasingly dynamic work environment. Through a critical review of theoretical frameworks, empirical research, and practical examples, this literature review provides a deeper understanding of the factors that shape the well-being of employees working remotely. The work provides a foundation for further research in the future. Key*

words: employee well-being, remote work, physical health, mental health, work-life balance

Key words: *employees, working remotely, physical health, mental health*

JEL classification: *I31, J81, M54*

1. INTRODUCTION

In an era of constant economic dynamics and rapid technological change, the importance of caring for employee well-being cannot be overstated. Employee well-being, encompassing aspects of physical health, mental health, and work-life balance, has emerged as a priority in organizational strategies.

Organizations are realizing that their most valuable assets are not just the products they create or the services they provide, but the people who power their operations.

The well-being of these individuals is not only a moral obligation, but also a strategic imperative as it profoundly impacts individual and organizational performance.

This literature review begins a journey through the vast field of employee well-being, illuminating its multidimensional nature and the complex interplay between physical health, mental health, and work-life balance.

The aim is to unravel the many threads that make up this complex picture, providing insights into the theories, research findings and best practices that have shaped our understanding of employee well-being in contemporary work environments.

In this introduction, we will explore the rationale for researching this topic, its relevance in the context of contemporary work settings and the fundamental questions that drive this body of research.

By analysing the existing body of knowledge, the aim is not only to contribute to the current debate on employee well-being but also to provide a basis for organisations, policy makers and individuals to improve the holistic health and vitality of their workforce.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

As a starting point for the research, three research questions were identified, which are based on the topic of well-being of employees working remotely.

These three research questions relate to:

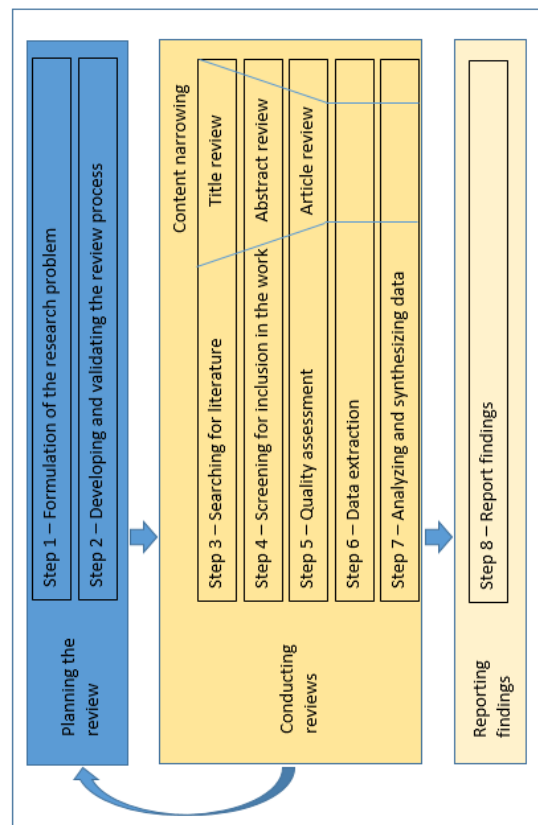
physical health, mental health, and work-life balance.

The literature review methodology is based on the methodology provided by Xiao and Watson (2019), and consists of eight steps:

1. formulating the research problem,
2. developing and validating the review process,
3. searching for literature,
4. screening for inclusion in the work,
5. assessing quality,
6. extracting data,
7. analyzing and synthesizing data,
8. reporting findings.

These eight steps form the basis of a systematic literature review. In this paper, forward and backward reviews are omitted because the literature review is biased.

Figure 1. Literature review process



Source: Created based on Xiao and Watson (Xiao & Watson, 2019)

Since the defined topic was to be from the field of management theory and management technology, the field of information technology was also taken into account when defining the starting point, and the topic of employee well-being in remote work was reached. Given that this is a broad area, it was necessary to narrow the research area. The narrowing was done by defining specific research questions, namely physical health, mental health and work-life balance. It is important to emphasize that in this review the focus was on “normal” situations, and an attempt was made to avoid works that talk about the impact of the past pandemic (COVID-19) as much as possible. This means that an attempt was made to prevent the inclusion in the literature review of everything that was done “hastily” or abruptly in order to adapt to the newly emerging situation. Of course, not all works are excluded, and thus some appear that talk about the work of employees after the pandemic. Employee well-being is one of the main areas of human management, and has recently been extended to include remote work. The relevance of the topic is also evidenced by the works published in previous years, which have seen a sharp increase in the number of works, as will be seen below.

After defining the relevant topic, the literature review began with a search of the Web of Science electronic database. No restrictions were placed on the observation period, and the years that resulted from the search were taken into account (from 2011 to 2023). The keyword, or rather the entire phrase, that was used was “Employee well-being in remote work”. The search date was 13.09.2023.

The search results obtained were as follows: the total number of works that resulted from the search was one hundred and fifty-three (153). The period from the first mention of the entered phrase to the present is from 2011 to 2023. By analyzing the number of papers by year, it can be concluded that the topic has become significantly represented since 2021. Respectively, the number of papers by year is as follows: 2011 – 1, 2012 – 1, 2013 – 1, 2017 – 2, 2018 – 4, 2019 – 3, 2020 – 5, 2021 – 36, 2022 – 69, 2023 – 31. In 2014, 2015 and 2016, no paper was found that deals with the well-being of employees working remotely. The first criterion for excluding papers from the review was that they were based on Covid-19, and then that the paper was in English (one paper was excluded because it was in Russian). After that, twenty (20) papers remained. A review of the titles determined that all twenty papers corresponded to the research area. After that, an analysis of the abstracts was initiated, where it was determined that all twenty papers were also eligible. Certain papers were available, and several were requested through Research Gate. Two (2) papers were not found, six (6) were requested through Research Gate, from which two (2) papers were obtained. The final result is fourteen (14) papers that, after this process, were suitable for the research topic.

The next step is the assessment of the quality of the papers. The analysis of the papers (reading) was carried out, and the criterion for inclusion in the review is that the paper provides significant information for any of the three research questions, or preferably for all three. Of the fourteen (14) papers selected, all fourteen were suitable for inclusion in the literature review, and the majority of papers provided significant information for all three research questions.

After analyzing and synthesizing the data (step seven), the eighth step was conducted – reporting the results. The research results are presented in the next section of the paper.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW RESULTS

Since the suitability of the paper for inclusion in the review was decided based on reading the text of the paper, it means that a more lenient criterion for accepting papers for inclusion in the literature review was used. This criterion is textual narrative

synthesis (narrative review) – according to the authors Xiao and Watson, 2019.

As the three research questions were defined in the research, three sub-points are defined below. Their synthesis and joint analysis were carried out at the end in the discussion and drawing conclusions.

3.1. WELL-BEING OF EMPLOYEES WORKING REMOTELY - IMPACT ON PHYSICAL HEALTH

Remote work, which has become increasingly prevalent in recent years, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, requires specific skills and competencies from employees. This is reflected in the need for self-discipline and self-motivation, which are key elements for maintaining employees' physical health (Charalampous et al., 2022).

Setting boundaries between work and private space at home is also of great importance for maintaining physical and mental health, especially at a time when work and private space are increasingly merging (Charalampous et al., 2022).

Changes in working patterns during the pandemic, including remote work, require adaptation of the work environment to ensure employee comfort and productivity. The ergonomic adaptation of remote work spaces can be crucial for maintaining physical health (Demirhan and Bulgur, 2023).

Remote work allows flexibility in choosing where to work, which can contribute to maintaining employees' physical health by reducing the need to travel to work (Felstead and Henseke, 2017). However, it is important to note that these changes in the work environment can lead to challenges such as blurred boundaries between home and work (Felstead and Henseke, 2017).

The use of smart home technologies in the home work environment can significantly reduce physical stress and discomfort, which has a positive impact on employees' physical health (Marikyan et al., 2023). The ability to set up an ergonomically adapted work environment at home with the help of smart devices can reduce the risk of physical problems such as back or muscle pain (Marikyan et al., 2023).

Teleworking can contribute to reducing employees' work centrality, enabling greater work-life balance, which has positive effects on physical health (Gillet et al., 2021). Effective work recovery training programs can be useful in improving the physical health of employees who work remotely (Gillet et al., 2021).

The effects on employees' physical health are diverse, including positive aspects such as less

time spent commuting, but also negative aspects such as increased sedentarism and poor ergonomics at home (Ferrara et al., 2022). The intensity of teleworking during the workweek can significantly affect physical health, with varying levels of stress and strain for employees (Ferrara et al., 2022).

The ergonomics of the work space and the level of physical activity during the workday are also important factors for the physical health of employees who work remotely (Ronda and de Gracia, 2022). There is a need to provide support to employees to ensure that their working conditions at home promote physical health (Ronda and de Gracia, 2022).

As Grant et al. (2013) state, remote work can lead to physical health problems, including overwork, burnout, and stress. The expectation of 24/7 availability due to remote work can negatively affect workers' sleep and recovery, therefore it is important to maintain a balance between work time and time for physical activity to maintain physical health.

The use of instant messaging (IM) at work can positively affect employees' work performance. Better work performance can result in reduced work-related stress and improved physical health of workers, as the pressure to achieve a specific work task is reduced (Hurbean et al., 2022).

When it comes to the use of video conferencing, remote work and intensive use of video conferencing can negatively affect the physical health of workers. Increased exposure to video conferencing can result in increased sedentary behavior and physical discomfort due to prolonged sitting in front of a computer (Johnson and Mabry, 2022).

According to Carlson et al., (2023), a sense of control over one's home environment plays a key role in creating a balance between work and family life and promotes the physical health of remote workers.

Furthermore, as Martin et al., (2022) state, the use of digital tools after work hours can have negative consequences on the physical health of employees, especially due to extended working hours and lack of time for rest. Increased hyper-connectivity and constant checking of email or work phones outside of working hours can cause stress and disrupt employees' sleep.

To maintain physical health in the era of remote work, it is important to balance work commitments with self-discipline strategies, setting clear boundaries between work and private time, making proper ergonomic adjustments to the home workspace, and maintaining physical activity.

Support and training programs can also be essential to improving the physical health of employees who work remotely. It is important to promote awareness of these factors in order to enable a long-term healthy remote work environment.

3.2. WELL-BEING OF EMPLOYEES WORKING REMOTELY - IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

Work-life balance is a key component of employees' overall well-being in today's changing work environment. Remote work and transformations in work patterns can significantly impact employees' cognitive resources (Demirhan and Bulgur, 2023). In order to preserve employees' mental health, it is particularly important to consider their psychological well-being (Demirhan and Bulgur, 2023).

However, remote work can lead to conflicts between professional and family life. Therefore, it is essential to educate employees on strategies to overcome these conflicts in order to improve their mental well-being (Charalampous et al., 2022).

As Demirhan and Bulgur (2023) also state, setting clear boundaries between work and private life and time management become key factors in preserving mental health. Organizations and managers need to create a safe environment where employees can openly share their needs and preferences in order to preserve their mental health.

According to Felstead and Henseke, (2017), remote work also brings certain benefits to employees' mental health, such as greater time flexibility and greater commitment to work. However, they are of the opinion that research suggests that there are also challenges related to the separation of work and private life that can create conflicts and require additional efforts to maintain balance.

The use of smart home devices for work can help reduce stress and improve employees' mental health, allowing them to have greater control over their work environment (Marikyan et al., 2023). However, individual beliefs and attitudes towards these technologies can also influence the perception of well-being and mental health of employees who work remotely (Marikyan et al., 2023).

Outsourcing and remote work often provide greater autonomy to employees, but they can also create a need for additional connectedness and social support, which can impact their mental health (Gillet et al., 2021). Managers who support autonomy and provide support to their remote

employees can contribute to improving their mental health (Gillet et al., 2021).

As Ferrara et al., (2022) argue, remote work can have a complex impact on employees' mental health, including positive aspects such as greater autonomy and flexibility, but also negative aspects such as feelings of loneliness and stress. According to them, organizational support and training in managing work-life boundaries can improve the mental health of remote employees.

Ronda and de Gracia, (2022), also mention the challenges of remote work when it comes to mental health. They highlight certain elements such as isolation, stress, and difficulty managing work and personal commitments. They state that organizations should consider a strategy to support the mental health of employees working remotely, including access to counseling and resources to cope with stress.

Technological stress, especially that associated with the use of instant messaging, can negatively affect the mental health of employees (Hurbean et al., 2022). "Zoom fatigue" and emotional exhaustion in the context of video meetings are also factors that affect mental health (Johnson and Mabry, 2022). Quality social support from colleagues and superiors in video meetings can significantly contribute to mental well-being (Johnson and Mabry, 2022).

Grant et al., (2019) mention the term E-Work Life and the scale based on it. They highlight the association between the dimensions of the E-Work Life (EWL) scale and the mental health of teleworkers, which indicates the need for proper management of telework to support their mental well-being.

A sense of control over the home environment plays a key role in creating a balance between work and family and promotes the mental health of teleworkers (Carlson et al., 2023). According to Martin et al., (2022), telework experiences show that experienced and new teleworkers experience different benefits from resources such as flexible working hours. This indicates the need to adapt the work framework to support the mental health of new workers.

3.3. WELL-BEING OF EMPLOYEES WORKING REMOTELY – IMPACT ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE

As Demirhan and Bulgur (2023) point out, work-life balance is becoming increasingly important in the world of remote work, where the boundaries between these spheres can become blurred. Organizations play a key role in supporting this balance by implementing flexible work schedules and supporting effective time management. Access

to mental health resources can also further support work-life balance.

Setting clear boundaries between work and private life at home can be crucial to maintaining this balance (Charalampous et al., 2022). Organizations should also consider flexible work models that allow employees to spend some time in the office, which can contribute to the balance between remote work and physical presence in the workplace (Charalampous et al., 2022).

Felstead and Henseke, (2017) state that remote work can provide greater spatial and temporal flexibility, thereby contributing to a better work-life balance. However, according to them, the lack of clear boundaries between work and privacy at home can create challenges in maintaining this balance.

Smart home technologies can be helpful in achieving work-life balance through better time and task management (Marikyan et al., 2023). Productivity and well-being at work, which are improved by the use of these technologies, can facilitate the achievement of a balance between professional obligations and personal life (Marikyan et al., 2023).

As Lima and Gaspar, (2021) state, flexible work practices are key to work-life balance. They also note the importance of the role of leisure and link the role of leisure and family with greater employee satisfaction. They also emphasize that different generations have different needs and values that should be addressed. They conclude that personalized treatment and support for employees at different stages of life can increase their satisfaction, well-being and performance.

Remote work can help employees achieve a better work-life balance, reducing conflicts between work and family domains (Gillet et al., 2021). Managers should promote family support practices for their remote employees to facilitate work-family balance (Gillet et al., 2021).

However, teleworking can change employees' perceptions of work-life balance, with potential challenges in achieving that balance (Ferrara et al., 2022). Organizations should consider strategies to support employees in maintaining work-life balance in the context of teleworking (Ferrara et al., 2022).

Similarly, Ronda and de Gracia, (2022), advise that organizations should promote awareness of the importance of maintaining balance. They state that employees may become confused due to the unclear boundary between work and leisure time.

As stated by (Grant et al., 2013), teleworking can improve work-life balance, but it can also create

challenges due to constant access to technologies. Clearly defining work and personal boundaries is becoming crucial for maintaining work-life balance. They argue that the use of technology, such as social media, can help maintain social relationships and communication while working remotely.

To support work-life balance for employees who work remotely, organizations should consider the following policies and practices:

Supportive policies: Organizations should consider policies that support the optimal use of time at work to achieve a balance between employees' work and personal commitments (Hurbean et al., 2022). This includes setting guidelines for the use of time outside of work hours to prevent unnecessary interference with personal life (Hurbean et al., 2022).

Adapting work environments and tools: Work environments and communication tools should be adapted to reduce the negative effects of technological stress and support work-life balance (Hurbean et al., 2022). This may include adjusting notification settings, communication timeframes, and policies that encourage time off for special commitments (Hurbean et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

Based on all of the above, it can be concluded that remote work, as the main topic of this paper, has a significant impact on the well-being of employees in the organization. Positive and negative aspects are presented. As the topic is newer in the field of research, but also in its application by organizations, it is interesting that the observations of the researchers are largely the same. Their aspects of observation were relatively different, but the research questions of physical health, mental health and work-life balance led to, one might say, homogeneous conclusions.

Remote work brings a number of challenges and potential effects on the physical health of employees. In order to preserve physical well-being in this environment, it is crucial to set clear boundaries between work and private life, properly ergonomically adjust the workspace at home, and promote physical activity. Additionally, support, recovery programs, and awareness of these factors play a crucial role in ensuring a long-term healthy work environment for employees who work remotely.

Turning to the second research question, it can be said that the mental health of employees in the context of remote work plays a key role in overall well-being. Remote work can bring a number of challenges, including work-life conflicts. Therefore, it is important to properly manage time,

set clear boundaries between work and privacy, and provide support to maintain mental health. Technological stress and the use of communication tools can affect mental health, requiring thoughtful strategies to manage these challenges. Maintaining control over the home environment and adapting the work framework can contribute to the mental well-being of workers. This is especially important in the changing work environment brought by new generations of remote workers. All of these components require careful organizational support and understanding to ensure that teleworking contributes to, rather than compromises, employees' mental health.

This research review clearly points to the growing importance of work-life balance in the context of teleworking. Organizations play a key role in supporting this balance by implementing flexible work schedules, setting clear boundaries between work and home life, and providing resources to support mental health. While teleworking can provide greater flexibility, the lack of clear boundaries can create challenges. Smart home technologies can help with better time and task management, while customizing the work environment and communication tools plays a key role. It also highlights the importance of flexible work practices, family support, and a personalized approach to employees to achieve work-life balance. Clearly defining work and private boundaries becomes crucial, and organizations should promote awareness of the importance of maintaining this balance and implement appropriate policies and practices to support their employees who work remotely.

The work serves as a basis for continuing to conduct empirical research, therefore all of the above serves as a theoretical basis for further research.

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