



# Improving Wellbeing at Work

Recommending Wellbeing Initiatives to Implement at  
Company X

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The objective of the thesis was to gather information on wellbeing initiatives that could be implemented at Company X. The purpose of the thesis is to provide the commissioning company with recommendations on how to improve the employees and workplace wellbeing by developing the practices in place and adding new ones. Additionally, the thesis will inform the commissioner about the employees' thoughts on wellbeing and how well the firm is doing to support it. The thesis presents a theoretical research section in which literature findings were studied to better understand the generalities of wellbeing and the specificities of workplace wellbeing. A second section consists of an empirical study where a business case with a qualitative research was used to analyze Company X employees' thoughts on wellbeing at work and their working environment through a series of questions answered anonymously.

The findings of the qualitative research suggested that the employees are satisfied with their wellbeing at work and the working environment in which they are evolving. The outcomes also demonstrated trust and loyalty to the firm and respondents considered Company X as an organization that well-supports the individuals' health. However, results proved that improvements to increase workplace wellbeing can be made by installing new initiatives. Thorough analysis of the research results pinpointed potential improvements regarding the physical and social wellbeing, the working environment, and the work-life balance.

The conclusions highlighted the undeniable link between the individual worker's health and the company's success while providing answers to the research questions. The recommendations given to the commissioner were constructed thanks to a cross-analysis between the literary findings and the results of the qualitative research interviews. The recommended initiatives to implement at Company X office are an after lunch break, modifying the office space, having online team events, having flexible policies to adapt the working hours and finally developing the possibility to choose telework over in-office work and vice-versa.

Details regarding specifics of the commissioning company and the information of the research respondents have been removed from this report.

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Key words: human resources management, wellbeing at work, employee wellbeing, work-life balance.

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**ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS**

WB	Wellbeing
PWB	Psychological wellbeing
WLB	Work and life balance
WHO	World Health Organization

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Adults roughly spend 70,000 of their awakened hours at work (Burke 2017, 3), making wellbeing (WB) at work a topic of concern if the workplace does not promote the employee's health and WB. The topic is a popular subject for debate (Burton 2010, 1), and many discuss the importance of workplace WB and how companies can improve the WB at work (Harney, 2019). But this concept is far from being new; years ago, the World Health Organization (WHO) released guidelines on the WB of workers (Kim 2012) discussing its importance for companies' success.

The theme of WB at work is popular and its importance and relevance widely dealt with, it is even considered a crucial aspect in the firm's success (Burton 2010, 2). Focusing on this subject is essential because it is important to maintain employees' health and have present managers to support and encourage when needed (American Psychiatric Association (APA) n.d.). Another reason for choosing this research topic emanates from the unprecedented situation brought by the current world's pandemic and the yet undocumented situation companies and employees are living in (O'Reilly, Eyres, Vrabtchev, & Heyland 2020, 1).

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought new ways of working, like the home-office, having adapted working hours, or working in an online environment; and with it, high risks to damage the WB of workers (O'Reilly, Eyres, Vrabtchev, & Heyland 2020, 1). The significance of the topic demonstrates itself when reading a French research's results detailing that 27% of the respondents affirmed their physical health suffered due to the remote work and an additional 33% informed suffering from psychological damages as well (France Inter 2020).

The relevance of the topic also shows in the real business world as the commissioning company and the employees have seen their work affected; indeed, remote work and adapted working hours have taken upon the traditional nine to five office work. The commissioner demonstrated high interest in knowing more on the topic of workplace WB and finding what WB initiatives emerged from the staff and could potentially be implemented in the office.

## **2 RESEARCH PLAN**

### **2.1. Thesis topic**

WB is a topic that is broadly defined but the concept of employee WB and of a healthy workplace is not always considered as an important point for a company, which is the reason why the topic will be discussed in this thesis. While it has been proven that employees' productivity may decrease up to 63% when the workplace is not providing healthy WB for its workers (Wilson 2017) companies are not always taking the step towards offering the best for its employees in terms of WB initiatives and development ideas.

WB gained popularity this year in the business world and whether it focuses on overcoming the challenges raised by Covid-19 (CDC 2020), or simply details the top WB habits for the workplace in 2020 (Kohl 2020), the attention point is that this year is exceptional and companies' and employees' health link is demonstrated (O'Reilly, Eyres, Vrabtchev, & Heyland 2020, 1). Indeed, this year affected workers' and companies' lives (Fleming 2020) and providing staff with the right mental health resources has never been more important (OH&S 2020). The significance of the concept is raised all over the world, proof being that many headlines have mentioned the words "importance" and "wellbeing" in the same sentence, and companies have offered new options for workers to keep working while protecting their health (Boland, De Smet, Palter, & Sanghvi 2020).

#### **2.1.1 Purpose of the thesis**

It was demonstrated essential to improve and/or sustain employees WB in companies to see them thrive and succeed (Johnson, Robertson, & Cooper 2018, 3). The purpose of this report is to answer Company X's needs and wishes on knowing more about WB at the workplace and conduct a real business-life research focusing on the topic. Even though the commissioning company has existing WB practices in their office, the set objectives include providing knowledge of the concept and information on WB at the workplace and conduct a research with employees to give insightful data on current feelings and future expectations on WB

at work. The gathered information, once analysed, will translate into recommendations and development ideas emanating from the employees and to be reviewed by the higher management to hopefully be further implemented for all inside the office.

### **2.1.2 Thesis objectives**

There are several objectives to this thesis, all of equal importance and related to each other. The objectives have been agreed upon with the commissioner and will lead the report to create a clear reading path. The following goals have been written as questions and provide accurate description of what is to be expected in the report. The ambitions for this thesis are, first, to explain and understand WB in general and at work, and second to inform on existing and useful WB initiatives. In addition to theoretical information and details on WB, the thesis will present a constructive approach on WB initiatives for the commissioning company.

The main research question is: *Which initiatives improving employees' life and WB could be implemented in Company X office in Bordeaux, France?* This question has for mission to lead the way for secondary questions, to be explained below, and guide the theoretical information research towards providing enough valuable insight for the commissioning company. The aforementioned initiatives correspond to ideas and practices presented by reliable sources such as verified articles, professionals and leaders in the field of health, WB, and human resources, and national's health documentations such as the WHO.

In this main question, there is a second essential point to observe regarding the initiatives that could be implemented. The business case will provide answers to this question and grant the commissioning company with the requested information. It will be constructed as a qualitative research and will expose the initiatives found to be interesting for the employees at the company.

The secondary questions are here to guide the research and help building the empirical research meant to discover the well-working practices to be implemented; in this thesis there are two secondary questions. To start, it is important

to focus on the concept of WB and workplace WB; *What is the meaning of WB and why is workplace WB vital for companies and individuals?*, is the question that will serve the thesis as a line to discussing the background information and definitions as to why this topic and the sub-concepts it includes are significant for both the workers and the firms in today's world.

Finally, as sources are fundamental for the success of this thesis, *Which initiatives aiming to promote and improve employees WB can be found in literature?* will disclose concrete ideas that the report should focus on. While literature sources will provide relevant general background information and inform on previously done research, it will also explore the ideas to implement in order to improve and/or sustain WB at work. This question directly links to the practical research with the company as the initiatives discussed in literature will be dealt within the empirical research trying to determine which could be implemented at Company X office.

## **2.2. Concepts and theory**

This section will essentially focus on providing the necessary knowledge on the important concepts and theories that will be further discussed in both the theoretical and practical research sections. Four crucial concepts related to workplace and employee WB will be initially defined here: WB at work, the work and life balance (WLB), the working environment and finally the company culture.

### **2.2.1 Wellbeing at work**

WB is defined by Rokho Kim (2012, 2), member of the WHO, as "a state of complete physical, mental and social WB". WB at work, also called healthy workspace, is directly related to the general definition and involves the collaboration of all level within a company to constantly improve, protect and promote all aspects of WB for workers and the durability of the business (Burton 2010, 15). WB at work must answers the needs for health and safety on several levels: the physical work environment, the psychological work environment, including the working

organization and culture, the personal health resources for workers, and the social WB, such as being a part of the community. (Burton 2010)

### **2.2.2 Work and life balance**

An important concept when dealing with employee WB, is the WLB, the core definition of the concept implies the management and the equity between work-related and non-work-related duties. But it is importance to mention the difference between balance and equality; finding an equilibrium between both sides of one's life does not necessarily means spending the same amount of time in the work and/or the family sphere, which would be equality. The WLB is proper to each individual which is why the balance is to be found personally and not forced on employees. Furthermore, as people's life change, so does the perspective the person has of the needed balance; therefore, WB initiatives meant to support the workers' WLB must consider the individual's own perception of balance and his/her choices to be well-developed. (Day & Hartling 2017, 391)

### **2.2.3 Working environment**

The working environment is important to workplace WB as it is what surrounds and welcomes the employee every day (UMEA University 2019). As mentioned on the Forbes website, providing a positive and healthy work place for the workers is essential for the wellness of the employees but not only, it is also crucial for the company as the firm benefits from having healthy employees and a good working environment (Sawyer 2020). It has been proved that there is a positive connection between the working environment and the job satisfaction, the better the environment presented to employees and the better chances there is that the company's people commit to their work, provide the best of themselves and have a higher satisfaction of their work and tasks (Raziq & Maulabakhsh 2014, 718).

### **2.2.4 Company culture**

This concept represents the aspects shared in an organization, such as its values, traits, and specificities (Doyle 2020). The relevance of company culture to employee WB resides in the fact that some aspects of the work environment as

well as the WB initiatives offered in a firm may vary according to the company culture in place. Knowing the company culture in which they thrive may help leaders deciding what leadership style in use and create a sense of community in the company to best provide workplace WB, and guide employees towards one company or another. (Pratini 2018). To get a deeper understanding of the various type of cultures possible, it is interesting to analyse the figure below (figure 1) representing the eight dimensions of company culture in which employees can find themselves (Pratini 2018).



FIGURE 1: Eight different types of company culture (Pratini 2018).

The two concepts determining a company's culture are found to be people's interactions and people's response to change. The first axis varies from very independent to very interdependent and analyses that companies with a high level of independence value the individuality and competition between staff members, while the interdependent cultures discern the group performance to measure success. The second axis ranges from stability to flexibility, the first one promoting hierarchy and clear guidelines and the second offering more innovation and diversification. Knowing this will allow employees to know best in which type of company culture they will succeed.

### **2.3. Research method**

A qualitative research has been chosen for this thesis as it allows the study of natural social life through various methods and approaches. The data collected and analysed thanks to a qualitative research is mainly, but not only, nonquantitative as such; this means that the information will be gathered and studied with textual tools such as fieldnotes, documents, visual materials amongst other, here the research will use interview transcripts. The testimonies most common purpose is to relates to different human experiences in social context. (Saldana, Leavy, & Beretvas 2011, 3.)

There are multiple objectives to the use of a qualitative method, and it highly depends on the project. The outcomes can be observations, new insights and understanding of a specific topic, evaluation of programs or even critiques on a given subject. This thesis aims at understanding one's opinion on WB at work and discovering new possible initiatives to implement, therefore matching the plausible outcomes of a qualitative research making this method is a perfect fit to reach the goal for this thesis. (Saldana, Leavy, & Beretvas 2011, 4.)

### **2.4. Thesis process**

The thesis will analyse information starting from the theoretical side and moving to the practical business case. But, in the first part of this thesis, the reader will be introduced to the commissioner company and its specificities such as the working culture and the existing WB practices.

Following, the concept of WB and the ideas behind a healthy workplace will be defined and detailed. The importance of WB for both the individuals and the companies will lead the reader towards understanding how WB can become a link to success, and the high impact WLB have on people's productivity and motivation; while a lack of it may lead to a possible burnout. Overall, the reader will learn the influence WB has on both the individual and the organizational levels. To continue, the specifics of workplace WB such as its development, implementation,

and evaluation will conclude the first section and close the theoretical research part.

The segment focusing on the empirical research will continue the reading process. Firstly, the data collection part will divulge the reasons for choosing a qualitative method and discuss the specifics of the research. Secondly, the data analysis part will reveal the questions and the outcomes of the research. The results will provide sensitive information regarding the employees' wishes and expectations on WB initiatives in use and those interesting to implement.

Finally, the conclusion section will uncover development ideas in the mean of concrete initiatives interesting for the employees to see implemented in the office to improve the quality of their work life and workspace. This section will be the final touch to this thesis and will leave the reader with all the necessary information, both theoretical and practical, to implement such practices in their own working environment.

## **2.5. Business case company**

Company X was founded in 2004 in Australia and is an award-winning global corporate travel agency existing around the globe in ninety-five countries. The thesis is conducted for one office of the network situated in Bordeaux, France. The brand-new office opened in January 2020 as a second office space in France (Paris being the first one), to gain access to new profiles in a less crowded and less competitive region, among other reasons.

### **2.5.1 Working culture**

The working culture in place demonstrates an interest in keeping the employees' happiness high and offering a good working environment. The employees work in an environment based on trust and respect with different business units defined in the organizational structure allowing everyone to know with who they are working and to whom they shall report. The employees and the managers are welcome to suggest ideas to the hierarchy on ways to improve the office working

culture and the working environment. For instance, even though the office space in Bordeaux was launched to gain new potential customer in a new region, another reason for it to open was to offer the employees initially working in Paris a chance to relocate in a city considered as offering a somewhat more relaxing working environment.

### **2.5.2 Wellbeing initiatives**

The people working in the office have the chance to enjoy advantages promoting their WB. Firstly, the workers can organize their day as they please and working hours are agreed upon with the manager according to the individual's wishes and the company's needs. Other advantages include snacks, morning coffee, fresh fruits, tidy and clean office space among others such as the possibility to take several breaks in the day. The HR manager is also in charge of conducting small events for the on-site time like birthday parties or other relevant events. In addition of the aforementioned advantages that the team may have access to in Bordeaux' office, all employees working for Company X benefit from an interesting service put in place by the head company and devoted to keeping their people happy and well. Within the firm exists a team of ambassadors, this group is responsible for organising events for the teams working at the agency. The organized celebrations vary depending on the planning and budget allocated

### 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*“The wealth of business depends on the health of workers.”*

Dr Maria Neira, Director, (World Health Organization 2010, iii)

#### 3.1. Generalities of Wellbeing

The concept of WB is often wrongfully understood as being free of illness (Kim 2012, 2), but the definition accentuates different aspects than the sole purpose of being healthy. Indeed, there are three concepts included in the definition: 1. Psychological wellbeing (PWB), such as one’s feeling of happiness, 2. Social WB, represented by one’s relationships with others, and 3. Physical WB, referring to the health and potential illness occurring in an individual’s life. (Burke R. J. 2017, 4.)

##### 3.1.1 Psychological wellbeing

Johnson et. al (2018, 7.) detailed that PWB possesses two essential sides named hedonic WB and eudemonic WB, and to understand these two components better, it is interesting to link them with a psychologist’s finding in 1989 who identified six dimensions of PWB: relationships with others, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, self-acceptance and autonomy. The hedonic PWB refers to the experience of satisfaction and the feelings of happiness such as the three first factors identified by Ryff (1989). While, the eudemonic side of PWB represents what enable the individual to feel like the actions and the work done is purposeful such as environmental mastery, self-acceptance and autonomy. (Johnson, Robertson, & Cooper 2018, 7) (Ryff, C. D. 1989)

A high PWB often refers to feeling happy and/or very satisfied with life (Robertson & Cooper 2011, 3) but the consequences of a low PWB are as important to express as they affect both the personal and professional life and the two aspects of PWB. For example, someone with low PWB may feel unhappy or depressed to the point that he/she is unable to find the purpose of a job or of life. This impact

the hedonic as well as the eudemonic components of PWB, and while they seem to mainly affect the mental health, they may be accompanied by physical problems and lead to a dangerous path that would provide the individual from reaching back to healthy WB. (Martino 2017)

### **3.1.2 Social wellbeing**

Social WB refers to the relationships one person has with others (Burke R. J. 2017, 4), whether it is co-workers, friends or family, relationships are essential to maintain one's WB. Indeed "people are mutually dependent" (Goleman 2020) meaning that they rely on each other for their WB and need to feel a sense of connection and communication with each other; it is this feeling of community and belongingness to a group that will maintain people's social WB high and functioning. (Goleman 2020)

### **3.1.3 Physical wellbeing**

Referring to the definition given in the WHO's regional office for Europe, physical WB means being free of deceases, injuries and illnesses (Kim 2012, 2); but there is more to the definition when it comes to employees. According to Fallowfield (2016) physical WB also involve the notion that any worker should have the energy to do their job every day without too many difficulties. There are three crucial aspects to take into consideration, remembering to allow freedom rather than obligation: 1. The physical activity, 2. The healthy eating habits, and 3. The sleeping schedule. Each of these ideas can be impacted by providing workers with WB initiatives meant to support each of the characteristics, for example, the possibility for a walk, snacks, or a nap. (Fallowfield 2016)

## **3.2. Wellbeing at work**

### **3.2.1 Generalities**

A couple of years ago, the WHO (2010, 4.) expressed the need to focus on WB at the workplace, and explained that one reason some of the most successful

companies are thriving is because they are actively supporting and protecting their employees' WB (World Health Organization 2010, 4). So, it is clear that when it comes to building a healthy workspace, employers have the possibility to start a change to positively impact their staff's feelings about work (Barlett 2018). As Johnson et al. (2018, 3) stated, work will either lead to feeling happy or sick, which is why the smallest action from the company can make a difference for workers.

Knowing that a lot can be done to impact WB and the employee's feelings of their workplace, allows constant room for improvement for firms, whether it is the processes, the company culture, and/or the practices. For instance, simple changes in the spacing and design of an office can already positively impact WB for the workers; and overall, the working environment tells a lot about the company's care for its employees' WB (Barlett 2018). The WHO's representative, Rokho Kim (2012, 12) presented a framework for a healthy workplace (figure 2), in which the pillars are clearly expressed.

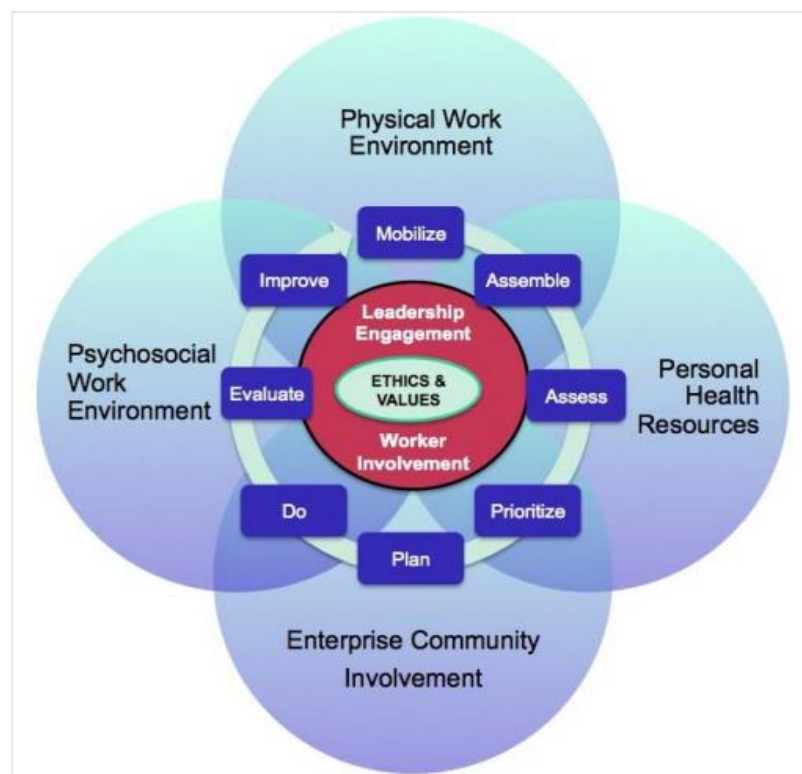


FIGURE 2: WHO Global Framework of Healthy Workplace. (Kim 2012, 12)

The framework demonstrates that the physical work environment is one of the four pillars leading to having involved workers and acting on this point, and any

of the three other pillars can positively impact WB for workers. Each pillar refers to an aspect of WB, the psychosocial work environment links to PWB, the enterprise community involvement deals with social WB and the personal health resources makes sure the physical WB is maintained. Actions such as recognizing the work done, providing relaxing space and healthy choices are the option to choose towards providing WB at work (Kim 2012, 17).

### **3.2.2 Importance for individuals**

For employees, work can lead their WB to two opposite directions; it can make them happy or sick, and the road to one end or the other will greatly depends on three factors. Two of those are personal and cannot be much affected by the working environment, they are who the individual is and what he/she is doing. The third factor, however, entirely depends on the workplace; it is the way the individual is treated at work. When the work does not meet the workers' expectations, the feeling of purpose is lost, or if the job feels to be too much, the eudemonic side of PWB is affected and the risk is to hurt both the mental and physical health of the worker; and the same goes for repetitive tasks, as well as unhealthy social WB – such as hard or inexistent relationships with others. The importance of WB at work for all individual then becomes the one way to prevent damages to the health in general and maintain good WB. (Johnson, Robertson, & Cooper 2018, 3.)

The importance of WB especially matters when it comes to the people's psychological health because PWB can affect the physical health, meaning that illness and problems can appear as a result of a lack of PWB at work. For instance, a research detailed in *Well-Being: Productivity and happiness at work* (2018) discussed the existing link in between PWB and health markers such as the stress hormone, the risk of heart problems and even the immune system. (Johnson, Robertson, & Cooper 2018, 7.). The importance for all employees to work in conditions where their health is supported is crucial, as a lack of PWB at work for individuals could results in symptoms such as stress, burnout, or even physical problem (Pervez & Halbesleben 2017, 105).

### 3.2.3 Importance for companies

By identifying factors such as psychological, physical, and social as part of the interpretation behind WB, the WHO (2012, 2) demonstrates that health is something that allows individuals to enjoy productive lives in all thinkable aspects. With this clarification, the organization establishes that health is an essential component in the socio-economic success, which link workers' health with a company's performance. If the importance of WB is underrated, and thought of as a secondary objective, it could be about half the world's population, that would suffer from unhealthy workplace and a lack of WB. (Kim 2012)

Ronald J. Burke (2017, 4.) also demonstrates the importance of WB at work for companies by writing about the results of a research conducted in 2002 by Keyes. He wrote in his research that "flourishing is a combination of high levels of emotional WB, PWB and social WB" (Burke R. J. 2017, 4), meaning that when all levels are fulfilled the individual is prone to growth. However, the results of the research showed that less than 20% of the respondents were subject to improvement; with these results, the company would have issue keeping the employees loyal and keen on evolving within the firm. In addition, a WHO's representative (2012, 5) reported that unhealthy personal may lead to profit and productivity loss as well as loss in solidarity and equity within the working community, proving the crucial importance of implementing WB at work for companies.

### 3.2.4 A link to success

When employees' WB is maintained high, both the employees and the company tend to succeed better (Burton 2010, 40) proving that WB can be a link to success for individuals and for companies. The below figures (figure 3 and 4) correlate with each other establishing that WB at work implies success for the people (figure 3) and for the company (figure 4). To start, the analyse of the funnel-like diagram (figure 3) exposes that thriving people are such providing that all the aspects of WB, psychological, social and physical, are given to the people; it is then that WB will be made a link to success for the individual. (Johnson, Robertson, & Cooper 2018, 4.)

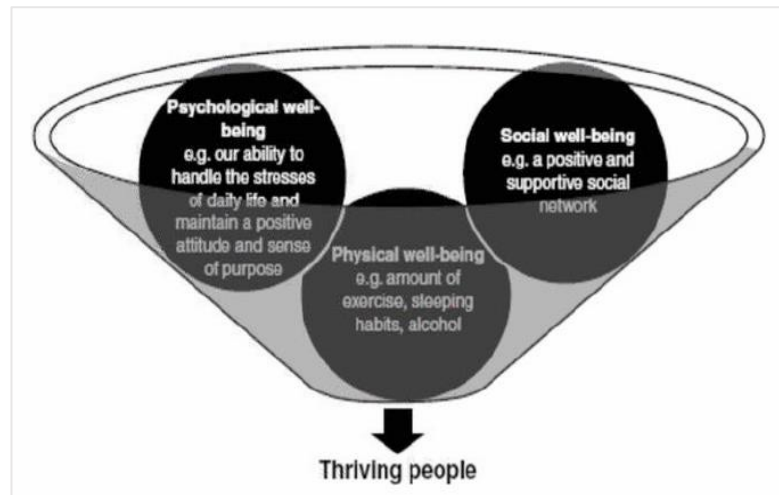


FIGURE 3: The three components of wellbeing (Johnson, Robertson, & Cooper 2018, 4)

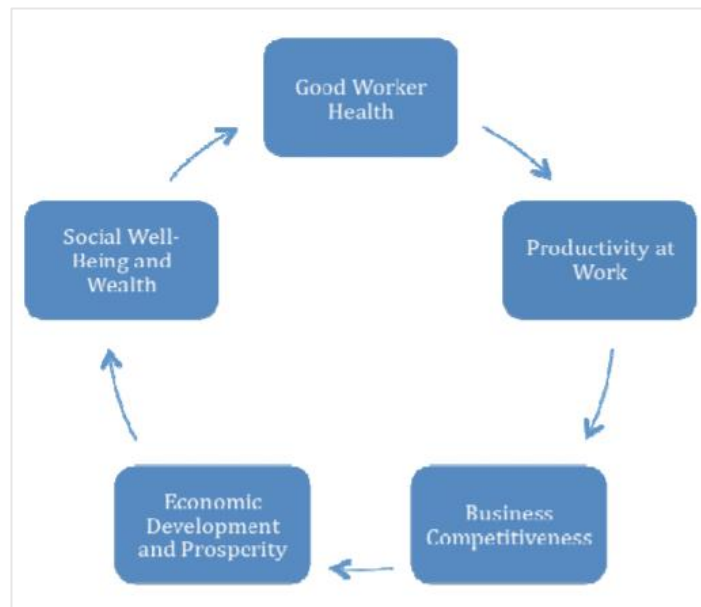


FIGURE 4: Relationship between health and wealth (Burton 2010, 40)

In addition, WB proved to also be a link to success for the company; and as Burton (2010, 40) demonstrated it (figure 4), there is an evident link between the health of the people and the wealth of a firm. This implies that the success of a firm is influenced by the health of its workers, and the relationship expressed (figure 4) pinpoints clearly that “good workers health” is a crucial step to the success of the business. Indeed, the results of healthy workers is productivity leading to business competitiveness, with a step missing, the success of the business is not obvious.

### **3.3. The risk of burnout**

#### **3.3.1 Concept**

Dealing with the importance of WB for companies and individuals oblige mentioning the risk of burnout as the concept is considered an occupational phenomenon (WHO 2019). The definition of a burnout recently evolved from being the result of a stress syndrome to a “conceptualized syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed” (WHO 2019), indicating the important role of the company and managers in employee WB. Indeed, while a burnout is the results of one person’s state of mind (Cambridge Dictionary 2020), the results of it may affect the company just as much knowing that a burnout is triggered by several factors that could lead the worker towards health problems and in some cases lower productivity and/or work performance. Such elements can be the worker’s exhaustion, the feeling of not fitting the working environment, the depersonalisation with work, or the lack of efficacy leading to feeling that no task can be accomplished. (Pervez & Halbesleben 2017, 101)

#### **3.3.2 Consequences**

A burnout will have consequences on both the individual and the company. Focusing on the individual, both one’s professional and personal life will be affected. While it is assumed that a burnout automatically causes lower work performance, it appears that what is caused by the burnout is the feeling of low performance at work. A Dutch study proved this point by demonstrating that employees who suffered from a burnout rate themselves as underperforming, but their managers gave the opposite feedback. Looking at the personal life, two aspects are impacted: the health and the family; indeed, the impact of a burnout on health is considerable and people may suffer from side effects like depression, stress, or higher level of cholesterol during and after the burnout. Alone or accumulated, these may deteriorate the employee’s health and impact its personal life. In 1990, two researchers even found that after the burnout passes, the impact on the family is still present and children of depressed parents presents a bigger risk (Keitner & Miller n.d). (Pervez & Halbesleben 2017, 105)

Analysing the effect of a burnout on the company, the results show that it is not the burnout in itself that will touch the firm, but the repercussion the burned-out employee will bring onto the organisation (figure 5) (Burton 2010, 6). The left-side of the diagram clearly expresses that when the workplace is unhealthy, the workers are prone to a burnout and/or depression. And, when exposing the right-side of the schema, it appears that the consequences on a company level are numerous.

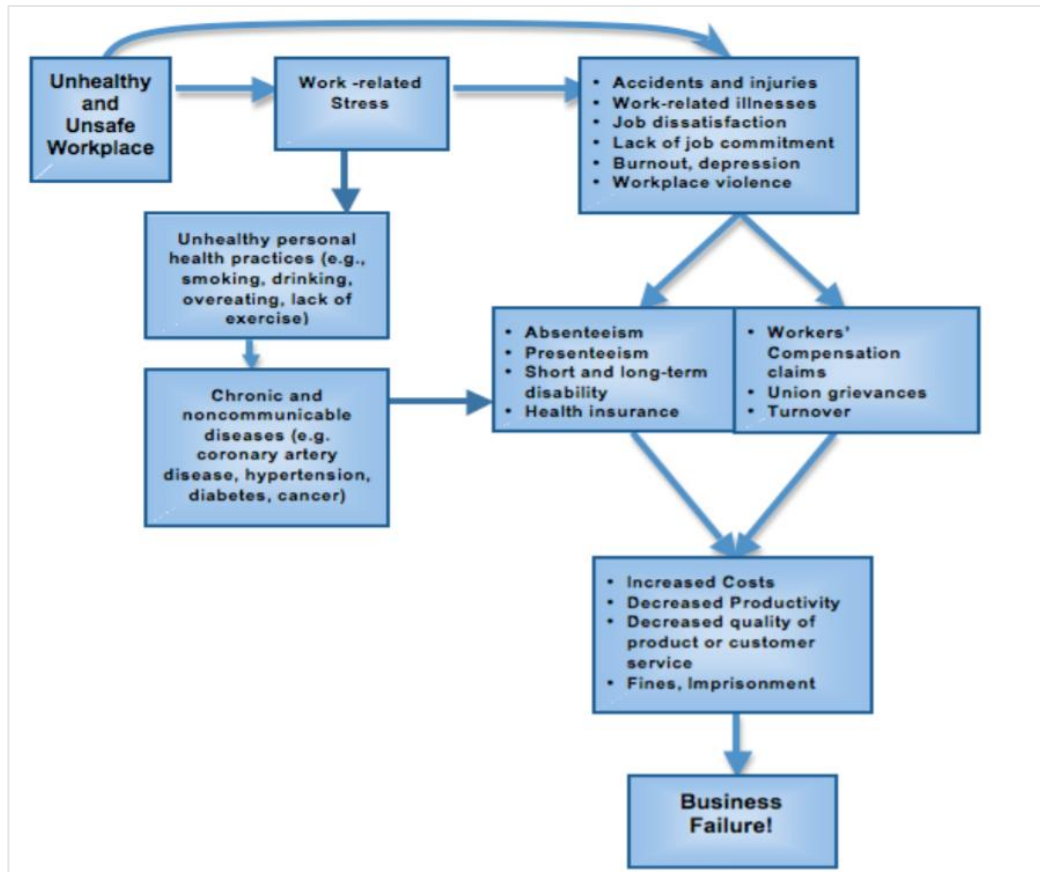


FIGURE 5: Why develop a healthy framework? (Burton 2010, 6)

The biggest consequence will be either absenteeism or presenteeism, respectively meaning that employees fail to report for work as initially planned or having the ill person present at work but with very decreased productivity (Johns 2009, 7). Whichever factor is happening to the organization, it is clear that Johan Burton's figure (2010, 6.) (figure 5) proves that a burnout will lead to an increase in cost for the company. Indeed, whether they are reporting for work or not, the employees will cost money; and in the worst case scenario the increase in expenses will not be covered by the profit as employee productivity will be lowered and the final result may go as far as business failure. (Burton 2010)

### **3.4. Work – Life balance**

#### **3.4.1 Generalities**

For more than two decades, the question of this equilibrium between work and life seems to have taken a bigger importance for the workers and the companies. The reason for this evolution results from the change in workforce such as, like discussed by the OECD (2005), the higher number of working women nowadays than there used to be. (Poelmans, Odle-Dusseau, & Beham 2009, 180). Many studies have analysed the progression of some work-family conflicts and proved both the dangerous impact such interference may have on satisfaction levels and PWB (O'Discoll, Brough, & Kalliath 2009, 244), as well as the positive outcomes. Allowing employees to have a balance between both their work life and their personal life show positive results on the individual level and has benefits for the company (Day & Hartling 2017, 390.).

#### **3.4.2 Creating the balance**

Poelmans et al. (2009, 197) examine “work-life policies” as tools created by a company to support their workers’ professional and personal duties; whether they are written rules or informal agreements, WLB policies should be available to all employees. The type of initiatives that can be implemented are promoted by the company (Poelmans, Odle-Dusseau, & Beham 2009, 207) and targeted for the workers (Day & Hartling 2017, 391) meaning that those can differ on many levels. Below will be reviewed a few ideas discussed in literature as initiatives in place to promote the WLB. (Poelmans, Odle-Dusseau, & Beham 2009, 197)

##### **3.4.2.1. Flexibility and adaptability arrangements**

As the workforce evolves, so do the needs of the workers and it is frequent for companies to offer the possibility for flexible arrangements as a response to this change (Rau & Hyland 2002). According to Poelmans et al. (2009, 197), by flexible arrangements, it is understood that the organisation allow its workers to adapt their working hours to their current needs, which can impact two sides of one’s work. The first one is the time as such, it may be impacted by reducing a worker’s

hours, or by sharing responsibilities; the other aspect that can allow flexibility is space, with initiatives such as remote work, or video conferences instead of on-site meetings.

On the contrary of the flexibility policies that may change as quickly as from day to another, the adaptability arrangements impact the workers and the company for a longer period of time. For instance, the parental leave; even though there are laws to regulate one's leave, some extra leave arrangements can be offered by companies themselves to their workers and allow the employees to take some more time off in addition of the legal requirements. (Poelmans, Odle-Dusseau, & Beham 2009, 202.)

#### **3.4.2.2. Supportive arrangements**

Arrangements supporting the employee's WLB may be offered in various ways. To start, companies may give employees some help for childcare, whether it is on-site or off-site dedicated space or negotiating a discount in a childcare centre; it can also be to provide services for those who are taking care of an elderly relative. In addition, supporting employees could be conducted by offering trainings, programs, seminars, and other events, on several topics related to WLB and/or work-family issues. (Poelmans, Odle-Dusseau, & Beham 2009, 200.)

Finally, supportive arrangements can be offered as benefits. Poelmans et al. (2009, 200) discuss provisions offered by the firm including compensation such as life insurance, adding the family members in the workers' health insurance or offering the option to use relocations services for the relatives of an employee who is being transferred to another location.

### **3.5. Developing wellbeing at the workplace**

#### **3.5.1 The development process**

Improving WB at work evoke changes for one or two parties; firstly, for the individual, regarding attitudes and knowledge, secondly, possible changes for the

organization regarding the working structure and culture, and the initiatives offered. The resistance to change may prevent from seeing the desired outcomes (Dent & Goldberg 1999), but an adequate methodical approach will avoid failing and help reach objectives. Noblet and Lamontagne (2009, 470) analysed a framework (figure 6), focusing on the process to improve WB at the workplace, presenting seven interdependent steps that creates an ongoing circle. (Noblet & Lamontagne 2009, 470.)

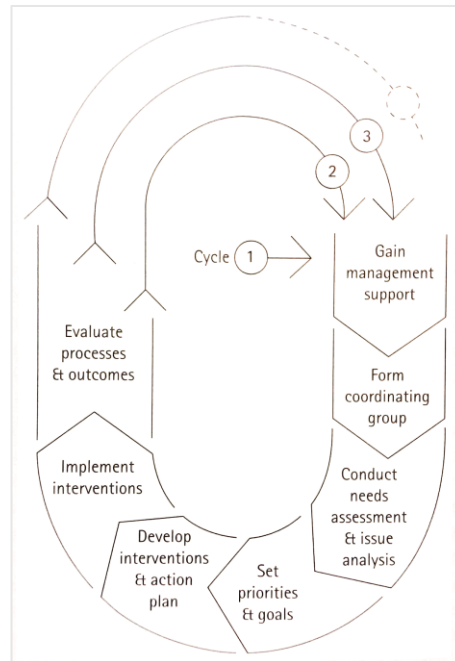


FIGURE 6: The intervention planning, implementation, and evaluation framework (Noblet & Lamontagne 2009, 470)

The seven steps of the implementation process presented in the figure (figure 6) can be grouped in three phases that are: 1. information gathering, 2. implementation, and 3. evaluation. The first phase gathers the steps one to five and has for mission to create interest and a feeling of need among the management. These first steps are crucial to demonstrate involvement from decision makers and lead the rest of the company into accepting the programmed changes. This phase also requires investigating the needs and desires for change, to help setting goals and priorities to be planned and answered in phase two. Indeed, the second phase focuses on the implementation of the initiatives identified and requires careful care as an inadequate execution could lead to losing support or momentum from involved parties. (Noblet & Lamontagne 2009, 480)

Finally, the evaluation phase of developing WB practices at the workplace is identified as the final phase of the development process. The evaluation is the moment to assess if the goals were met and to reflect on the interventions conducted and the methods used to do so. This final analysis should give valuable information to improve both current and/or future development processes. In fact, each of the discussed steps shape and inform on the next one, and, when the final stage of the circle is approaching, it will be redirected back to the first stage of the process and the previously accomplished steps will help plan the following changes making the evaluation phase a crucial part to the success of the next cycle. (Noblet & Lamontagne 2009, 487.)

### **3.5.2 Getting the benefits**

Developing WB for employees and creating a healthy workplace tend to lead to a “win-win-win-win” situation with benefits for the individuals, the company, the community and finally the country (Kim 2012, 5). The focus here is on the benefits for the companies and the individuals, as this thesis is dealing with this scale, but it is worth mentioning that they can also benefit for the bigger parties, such as the community and the country.

#### **3.5.2.1. Improved productivity**

One of the main reasons to promote WB at the workplace and improve the workers overall WB is to enhance the individual’s productivity. It was proved that when workers enjoy a higher level of PWB, they tend to do their work better, which has positive results for their organizations who see better outcomes as a direct benefit of having employees with good PWB. (Robertson & Flint-Taylor 2009, 169.). Focusing on the win-win situation, having improved productivity is beneficial for the workers because their hedonic PWB, such as the feeling of happiness and/or of satisfaction with the work, will get better (Johnson, Robertson, & Cooper 2018, 50). On the other side, it is of course positive for the company as it will lead to improved competitiveness and economic development and prosperity (Burton 2010, 40).

### **3.5.2.2. Cost reduction**

For companies, another reason to improve their workers' WB is clearly the cost reduction; it is often wrongfully understood as more costly, but preventing issues related to low WB is actually less costly than repairing the damages done. Indeed, maintaining employees WB high will cost less for the company than problem unhealthy employees could bring such as the aforementioned presenteeism, absenteeism, or burnout. The WHO's representative, Kim (2012, 21), calculated that for every dollar invested on wellness programs for employees, the medical and absenteeism costs respectively fall by \$3,27 and \$2,73. It then becomes more profitable to invest on workplace WB for both health and productivity outcomes than handling the costs of an unhealthy workplace. (Kim 2012, 21.)

### **3.5.2.3. Employee engagement**

There is an existing link between employee engagement and positive improved outcomes regarding several aspects of one's work life such as the job satisfaction, the workers' health, or the retention. The relationship between these factors goes both ways and, for instance, while one's improved health can increase the employee loyalty, it is important to note that building employee loyalty also enhance the employees' WB. (Callan & Lawrence 2009, 416.). Indeed, as the WHO's speaker mentioned during one of his presentation, allowing employees to be part of the working community improve their health and social WB (Kim 2012, 14).

## 4 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

### 4.1. Generalities

The goal of this research is to gather real-life information given by the panel on the topic of workplace and employee WB, and analyse the answers to find plausible new insights on WB at Company X. Therefore, the use of a qualitative method is justified knowing that its purpose is to gather explanation and testimonies of the interviewee's life (Kvale 1983, 174). The means to access results of a qualitative research have widen from simple face to face talk to the inclusion of email and phone call use (Opdenakker 2006). As the office is located in France and there are no possibilities to obtain face to face talk, the panel will be submitted email interviews and the communication will only be conducted through this channel to avoid a loss of information or impact the reliability of the research.

#### 4.1.1 Advantages

Choosing a qualitative research and conducting email interviews present several advantages. Firstly, it allows freedom of speech for every participants to express their feelings and testify of their WB at work freely without the fear of being overheard by others, read by the hierarchy or simply restricted by a certain amount of space to write their answer. The information being confidential strictly between the interviewee and interviewer, the respondents were not at risk, which left space for more open discussions on the topic.

Secondly, there is a freedom of time and space as the participants will receive the questions and treat them at the time and place of convenience (Hawkins 2018, 494); this resulted in rich and high quality information. In fact, the time of reflection offered by email interviews reduces the risk of spontaneous unwanted answer (Opdenakker 2006). Undoubtedly, for the purpose of this thesis, it is necessary that the interviewee has time to reflect on the existing WB initiatives, and remember the present and past work situation to provide concrete answers that will guide this research into reaching the goals and answering the research questions.

Finally, email communication has the unique advantage to open door for follow up contacts. Back-and-forth talk offer he possibility to gain even deeper understanding of the situation and obtain further information. This possibility is crucial for this report as it leaves the door open for interviewees to send up-to-date information to the researcher in the case of new information related to the topic found after the first contact done.

## **4.2. Specifics**

### **4.2.1 Interviews**

For the research to be as reliable as possible and without discrepancies in the answer gathering process, all the interviews were managed using same mean of communication. Having done that avoided potential differences in the answers, such as the example of having video interviews which would have included indirect communication as a factor in the analysis. For the analysis of the interviews, the process was identical for all the respondents' answers.

### **4.2.2 Schedule**

The initial time frame for this research was about a week, as it seemed like giving a longer time for answer could be counterproductive; indeed, email could be lost, forgotten, or left unanswered. However, the schedule was spread in time as the respondents' working hours were limited to two workdays a week not allowing this time frame to be realistic. Thanks to the communication channel chosen, reminders were sent out and the answers were gathered within three weeks, offering enough time for the result analysis.

### **4.2.3 Respondents**

The research gathered the answers of four volunteers working at Company X office. The reasons for having only a few numbers of respondents resides in the

fact that the rest of the employees' schedule did not offer sufficient time to participate in the research. Nevertheless, the research gathered the answers of a little less than twenty percent of the total amount of employees working in the office.

This research did not require background information from the respondents, as a result no demographic questions were requested. Whether it is their gender, age or position, the information did not matter as the main point was to find which initiatives would be appreciated by employees, regardless of their demographics. In addition, the anonymity of the respondents was crucial for this research to allow an open discussion and freedom of speech; having to give personal details could have led to less open-hearted answers and more restriction. To avoid breach in confidentiality and have the best answers possible, demographics did not appear in the data collection process.

#### **4.3. Limit of the research**

The research was conducted with four respondents out of twenty-two workers in total; with a research sample of a little less than twenty percent of the office employees it is necessary to mention that the results do not reflect the opinion of all employees but only a section of it. It is recommended that the initiatives found to be interesting in the result analysis would be submitted to the rest of the workers to have the complete vision of the sentiments and thoughts regarding the initiatives. This is important because, as mentioned by Day and Hartling (2017, 391), the individuals' opinion is a must when it comes to the implementation of WB initiatives, e.g. regarding the WLB.

This thesis was conducted during a worldwide pandemic affecting all sectors of work and creating high uncertainty for people. The company for which this research was conducted operates in France and in the tourism industry; both the sector and the country were highly touched by the Covid-19 pandemic reducing the respondents' working hours, and affecting their working environment (e.g. home office, part-time on-site hours). Because of this, it is crucial to note that the answers might have been triggered by the pandemic and might not be as relevant in normal times.

## 5 DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis phase will interpret one or several questions in different sections and will be dealt in the order given to the interviewees. However, one question must be discussed at first before detailing the rest of the answers; the reason being that its focus was to discover if there had been a recent change in people's opinions regarding their WB at work. The question was:

*Has your vision/feeling about the workplace wellbeing changed recently?*

The objective of this question was to discover if something had changed the workers' opinion on WB at their workplace and if this could have triggered the answers to go towards a specific direction. The answers given demonstrated that, for the majority of the respondents, something had changed the way they feel about WB at work. The given reasons are worth mentioning here and were: the Covid-19 pandemic and the new ways of working it involves, being a new parent or a parent to-be, and aging which leads to a different and new opinion on the topic.

Because some of the respondents showed in their answers a path that supported their new viewpoint on the topic of WB, it was essential to comprehend this before deepening the answers analysis. Indeed, as recent events changed the perception of WB, it explains the direction spotted in the answers. WLB proved to be highly important for new parents or parents to-be; the physical working environment was a point of interest for some workers; and, the impact of Covid-19 on workers lead to answers concentrating more on three aspects being the physical WB, the working environment and the WLB.

### 5.1. The general opinion wellbeing

To answer the main research question and discover new WB initiatives to implement, it is important to start by the first phase of the implementation process, which is the information gathering phase (Noblet & Lamontagne 2009, 470). Discussing the general opinion on WB and people's thoughts on the current WB in

place allow an easier understanding of the priorities and the needs in the office. There were five questions dedicated for the information gathering stage.

*Do you like your job and is it a profession you feel useful in?*

The question provided interesting information on people's feelings of purpose and usefulness that was discovered in the theoretical framework to be crucial for employees to maintain a high WB at work (see 3.2.2.1). All the respondents were positive regarding their work and they all agreed that they feel useful. But, while the respondents were all positive, some mentioned that due to the current times, and the fact that the working hours have been reduced, a loss of this feeling of usefulness is starting to show.

The reflexion here is on the eudemonic PWB. The positive results prove that this side of WB is well taken care of at the moment and that workers' PWB is high. But it is essential to keep it that way to avoid seeing a loss of the feeling of purpose among the employees which could result in damages done to WB, especially mental and physical damages (Martino 2017).

*Are you able to finalise your tasks and projects easily?*

*Do you think that the tasks and projects given are clearly explained?*

Once again the respondents gave valuable information regarding their PWB, especially on unclear tasks or projects that may seem pointless impact the eudemonic WB (Johnson, Robertson, & Cooper 2018, 7.) and may trigger work related stress which negatively impact employees' life and can lead to extreme outcome such as burnout (Burton 2010, 6). In this research, all the respondents answered positively, and informed that their tasks and projects given by the hierarchy were very clearly explained and detailed; however, some answers explained that the given tasks are not finalized easily opening the way to neglecting the PWB.

The conclusion of these two question is clearly diagnosed by looking at the answers; the employees are satisfied with the given recommendations and based on the comments it is easy to say that autonomy and purpose is well-managed by the hierarchy supporting PWB.

*Do you think that wellbeing at work is important? Why?*

In their answers, all the employees interviewed agreed that WB at work is crucial and it is essential for all to come to work feeling happy rather than feeling “obliged” to go. The reasons given to justify the high importance of workplace WB were varied. The majority of the people mentioned that, as they spend a lot of time at their workplace, the WB and how well they feel within their working environment is crucial to maintain a healthy life. Many also discussed the point that an unhealthy workplace would drag both their professional and personal life down, impacting aspects such as the stress level, the motivation, and the productivity along with their daily routines and feeling of happiness.

Knowing that the workers care about workplace WB and evolving in a healthy working environment demonstrate positive feelings towards improving their WB, and lead into thinking that there might not be any resistance to change. In addition, as people show care for their WB, the first step to implementing new initiatives (see 3.5.1) is accomplished and support is gained inside the organisation.

*Are you satisfied of your wellbeing at work?*

This main goal of this question was to analyse the overall satisfaction and the amount of changes needed. The results showed that all respondents were positively satisfied; but, while it appears that people are happy with their WB at Company X, the majority of the people detailed that some factors related to the current times and the restrictions in place are affecting their satisfaction of workplace WB. However, it was clearly mentioned by the respondents that the change in feelings was entirely due to the current times, and several mentioned that back to normal times the high satisfaction rate will return.

To conclude this introduction section, the aforementioned answers demonstrates that WB is an important factor for the workers, and people or overall satisfied even though improvements could be done. It appears that the support from peers and management is clear and thanks to these information, the respondents were prepared to answer more specific questions regarding the WB initiatives in their office.

## 5.2. Wellbeing at Company X

Knowing that WB can either make someone happy or ill (Johnson, Robertson, & Cooper 2018, 3) it is crucial to know what the respondents thought of their company's support on their WB. WB already matters for Company X and it felt important to ask about the current WB initiatives in the office and people's opinion regarding the actions in place in their office. Several questions are grouped in this part focusing on WB at Company X office.

*Do you think your firm support your wellbeing?*

All the respondents felt that their firm was supportive when it comes to their WB, but it is the justifications to this question that are the interesting point of analysis. One of the most popular answer among the respondents was the availability of the higher management, the second was the flexibility offered to the workers and the actions in place regarding various aspect of WB at work.

To deepen the data analysis, it is interesting to focus on the meaning of the answers. First, in term of social WB, the respondents felt that the firm well supported and promoted social WB; proving that everything in place, such as events with colleagues, celebrations or team-building activities, definitely work towards profiting both company and employee. Secondly, in term of feeling of community, the respondents explained that this feeling is strong and they feel like they belong in the company; making Company X allocated budget a great investment on their employee whose WB is supported and promoted. As a final result, and as explained by Burton (2010, 40) the company's competitiveness is guided towards expansion and prosperity.

*Could you give some examples or initiatives in place at the moment in your office that support your wellbeing?*

The actions in place were known by the respondents and many cited the above mentioned practices meant to support social WB along with other initiatives improving their working environment. In addition, it is worth mentioning that because

the question focused on initiatives happening right now, the respondents' mentioned a change in the initiatives in place. As mentioned in the first question analysed in this part five, recent events have impacted the workers and the company, and Company X implemented solutions to counter the negative impact the Covid-19 may have had on the workers. As a result, new initiatives entered the working culture such as online events rather than on-site happenings, flexibility in time and space, and finally managers' availability.

Overall, the respondents were satisfied by what is in place and the reactivity of the firm to do its best to maintain the workplace WB high. It is clear that the support from the hierarchy mentioned as a crucial step of the development process (see 3.5.1) is present and well-spread among the management.

*Your company has initiatives currently in motion meant to support an improve wellbeing at work ...*

The aim of this question was to analyse the respondents' view and opinion of the already implemented initiatives. To start, assessing whether the initiatives were known or not was important because it revealed what people see as WB initiatives in their working environment. The results demonstrated that all knew what the actions supporting their WB were and detailed numerous activities and events that improve their workplace WB. To continue, respondents were asked their opinion on the initiatives and showed interest and high satisfaction; whether it is creating cohesion, being flexible or available, the respondents were happy about what is offered.

Finally, this question also aimed at discovering if potential changes could help improving people's WB and to the last sub question: *Is there something you would change?* several ideas were presented by the respondents. It seemed like physical WB in the workplace could be improved, and the interviewees mentioned the possibility to have some active breaks, and/or a short sport session as a line of improvement. Overall, the answers prove it is undeniable how much Company X is doing in offering a healthy workplace for the workers, and the WB initiatives in motions are appreciated by the respondents. However, some additional ideas emerging from the workers themselves might be good to consider remembering

that the workers should be involved in the process as they are the ones for whom the initiatives are implemented and each individual is different and all have various WB needs (Day & Hartling 2017, 391).

### **5.3. Burnout**

The cruciality to discuss the topic of a burnout resides in the fact that this syndrome can have consequences even after it passes such as lower productivity (Pervez & Halbesleben 2017, 101.), which could have affected the need of workplace WB for those who suffered from a burnout.

*Have you ever suffered from a burnout?*

So, knowing if employees have suffered from a burnout and analysing what were the factors leading to the burnout would have helped diagnosing if some answers in the interview could have been triggered by one or several consequences of a previous burnout and lead the research to new discoveries on WB practices needed for some at the office. However, the respondents all disclosed that they never encountered a burnout since they enter the professional life concluding that specific actions to counter the damages of a burnout are not needed for now.

### **5.4. Employee loyalty**

The topic of employee loyalty is important in the context of WB because it is the way the hierarchy treats its employees that will result in employees having the feeling of being an integral part of the company, or not (Vinerean 2015, 76), so the deduction is that the better the employees are treated and the more loyal they will be.

*Do you think you are a loyal employee: to your company? To your manager?*

*What would make you a more loyal employee to your company?*

The questions aimed at discovering if people felt loyal to their company and to their hierarchy, with no surprises the answers were positives and proves Viner-ean's (2015, 76) conclusion that because employees are treated well, for instance thanks to the WB initiatives in place, it creates a feeling of being part of the organization and the respondents feel loyal to both their company and their manager.

However, it is worth mentioning that, for some respondents, in the eventuality of new thoughts regarding their work or the wish to move to new horizons, they will choose for their own good without guilt. Open-hearted discussions with the hierarchy to discuss the possibilities of leaving proves the open-mindedness of the respondents and demonstrate again a high degree of loyalty to the manager who will receive this information. Finally, when it comes to measures that could be implemented to make the workers more loyal employee, the few information gathered presented that having more transparency in the decision making process at the higher hierarchy level would be appreciated.

### **5.5. Improving wellbeing at work**

The core of this research is to discover if new initiatives could be found within the research sample to improve the WB of the workers at Company X. In order to get insights on the people's wishes and expectations, it was crucial to question directly what could improve their workplace WB and analyse the individual's opinions regarding certain points found to be interesting in the theoretical framework. For this purpose, several questions were presented to the respondents.

*What could improve your wellbeing? Would you have ideas that would make your workplace a better one for you?*

The results of these questions presented three lines of actions focusing on 1. the working environment, 2. The physical and social WB, and 3. The work and life balance.

Firstly, the working environment was mentioned by several respondents as a point that could be modified to improve their WB. The respondents' answers discussed the possibility to improve their WB thanks to diverse actions, more or less complicated to implement. Having the opportunity to have more green plants around the office space, the wish to have more developed facilities with, for instance, the possibility to have a dedicated room for showers and changing, rose as a point of development. So, even though the working environment is widely felt to be well-developed and healthy, several interviewees mentioned the wish to have something more, and specifically linked to their own wishes and/or needs.

Secondly, the respondents pinpointed ideas to improve their physical WB at work. Simple points like having active breaks or the chance to work close to a gym or a swimming hall raised interest amongst the interviewees. While the office space cannot change place easily, it is possible to imagine letting the employee the choice of their workspace some days in the week/month to allow such freedom to go from one's workplace to activity place more easily. Focusing now on the social WB, it feels to be a strong force of Company X and on-site events were highly appreciated; the line of answers to improve social WB lead the respondents into mentioning that in the pandemic time, having the events online participates to improving their WB at work.

Finally, the work life balance appeared as a popular topic in the answers to this question, even though the respondents mentioned that such initiatives are already in motion to some extent. The answers focused on the wish to have a stronger flexibility to improve the overall WB and of course the WLB aspect. Few respondents mentioned that having the possibility to work from home or adapt their working hours depending on the current needs would be welcomed to improve the WLB. So, while the existing initiatives are doing their work well to support workplace WB, the interviewees honestly feel it is important to have more actions targeted to certain aspects of their WB.

*What do you think about the following points to improve your work life?*

Discussing several aspects and the opinions of each respondents was helpful to analyse how welcomed the initiatives meant to support and improve one's WB

were. The ideas presented in the question were having more breaks, adapted working hours, more social events or bringing a pet to work; and the respondents informed that many of these points were already initiated at Company X. Because the mentioned ideas were already implemented, the answers did not bring any further information, the answers simply detailed that the office social WB is well taken care of and that some points do not seem to be a priority, for instance bringing a pet, while others were happily welcomed such as the adapted working hours, even if some improvements could still be done.

*What do you think about the option to work remotely?*

The respondents mentioned the idea and the possibility of working remotely in several parts of the research, but this question focused on the various effects that working remotely could have on one's professional life. It is interesting to analyse how the remote work could impact the workers as this could be an initiative to implement at Company X. The sub-questions analysed how working remotely could affect: the stress level, the work and life balance, the ease of work, and the working culture. The results identified two opposite camps: the pro-remote work and the pro-office work.

Regarding the stress, a couple of interviewees mentioned that it would feel to be more intense since the employee is alone and/or because the colleagues can be harder to communicate with, creating high uncertainty leading to stress. On the other side, working remotely felt for others to be a stress reliever as home is more comfortable and relaxed and there is no transportation time to the office, for some respondents it is a chance to be more productive.

Working remotely was for most the respondent a great way to improve the WLB, for instance because teleworking annuls the home-office transportation time, allowing more freedom. In addition, the flexibility allowed by the remote work felt to be interesting for several respondents; it is notable that newly parents or parents-to-be surely appreciate the relaxed environment better. However, the pro-office work respondents expressed that WLB also involves being with the colleagues, and whether they live close by or far away from the office, they would enjoy going

to the workplace, in their case, working remotely would not allow a complete balance between work and life.

The ease of work was not seen as something positive for the respondents. In fact, it is the other way around and, while some people mentioned that their work would not be affected if it was in the office or remotely, many of the respondents mentioned that working remotely would make their work harder, especially in case of team work as the communication could be impacted by the telework.

Finally, the respondents expressed the high importance to work on the working culture and the feeling of belonging to the community while having remote work. Several interviewees pinpointed the difficulty to feel part of the team while working outside the office because being with the colleagues helps in creating a working community and culture. Working remotely could impact the working culture negatively if no steps are taken to keep it up, but the conclusion is that the respondents would appreciate the telework as long as it fits their needs and is happening occasionally and by personal wish not obligation.

*If it was an option, when and where would you choose to work remotely?*

This was meant to identify what schedule the respondents would choose and if a dedicated workspace seemed to be chosen by several respondents. Well, for many persons in the panel, working from home would be an ideal solution when having children and a family to take care of. The majority of the interviewees answered that when having sick children or when an appointment requires a parent to be home, the flexibility to work remotely would be highly valued and work as a stress reliever. The schedule was omitted by the respondents as this is usually set with the managers.

To conclude this section, it is clear that Company X appears to have developed well-working WB practices for their employees and the respondents are positively reacting what is in place. However, there is room for improvement and the workers have many ideas on how to improve even more their WB at work, whether it focused on their WLB, physical WB, social WB or simply the working environment and improving the office they work in daily.

## 5.6. Well-being abroad

Discussing this topic emanated from talking with the company about the fact that France sometimes feels to be being behind other countries in terms of WB at work, or that the measures in place could be improved by copying those in place in other countries. So, the question reflected on other countries' WB practices and the respondents' knowledge of other countries idea of workplace WB.

*Have you ever envied other countries for their measures regarding wellbeing for workers? If yes, which countries and which measures?*

It came as a surprise that the majority of the respondents mentioned the same countries in their answers. For many, the Nordic countries are a model to follow when it comes to workplace WB and initiatives to improve the WB for employees. The reasons for choosing the Nordic countries were rather similar for all the interviewees and various aspects of work such as parental leave, remote work, more flexibility and trust along with a better WLB were discussed. This clearly goes in line with everything that was analysed and discovered before and a line of improvement is easily deductible from the respondents' answers.

In addition, other countries' measure such as the "after lunch" break giving freedom in the day to the Spanish workers, or occasional remote work agreed in the working contract and offered by some companies in Czech Republic were discussed by several.

It is important to mention that most of the respondents agreed that these options would be feasible only with the approval of the manager and if the field of work allows such freedom. If those methods were to be implemented some respondents answered that they would choose to start the day earlier to finish earlier to spend more family time during the afternoon. Once again, the WLB and the option for elaborate flexibility are reported as initiatives to develop.

## **6 CONCLUSIONS**

### **6.1. Development ideas**

The development ideas were identified thanks to the respondents' answers analysed above and correspond to potential fit between literature findings and the empirical research results. The ideas were separated in several sections, each corresponding to a specific aspect of WB appearing as a point to be improved by the research sample. The selected aspects of WB presented below will uncover one or several initiatives that could be implemented to improve employees' WB referring to information disclosed in the theoretical research. The expectations were set on improving the physical WB, the working environment and the WLB; each topic will present initiatives to improve WB at the workplace.

#### **6.1.1 Physical wellbeing**

It appeared that the need to improve physical WB raised amongst the panel in order to enjoy a higher level of WB at work. For this purpose, one idea is interesting to implement at Company X office in Bordeaux and emanated from several respondents in the empirical research.

##### **6.1.1.1. After lunch break**

Based on the conducted research and the literature outcome, it is possible to say that the employees at Company X would appreciate having a break after lunch. Rokho Kim (2012, 17) expresses the need for companies to provide their employees with a relaxation moment during their workday.

Allowing the employee to have a break after lunch gives a chance for all to preserve their physical WB. Indeed, having a pause during the workday can have several benefits, for example Fallowfield (2016) expresses that workers need to have the energy to do their job, so a time for a nap, physical activity, mindfulness practices, or anything the worker feel needed to regain energy, could be used to

prevent a lack of motivation in the afternoon and allow the employees to “hit the reset button” (Fallowfield 2016). The allocated time for this break could vary depending on the employee’s needs and wishes and/or the needs of the company.

### **6.1.2 Working environment**

The working environment represents everything that surrounds the worker, from the physical environment to everything else around supposedly organising one’s WB at work (UMEA University 2019). And, based on the research two points were raised and appear to be a match for Company X workers in Bordeaux office. However, it is important to remember that both the below mentioned ideas should be discussed with the rest of the team to avoid seeing a loss of WB in those who disagree with these ideas.

#### **6.1.2.1. Improving the office space**

It appeared that the workspace at Company X office in Bordeaux could be improved to increase employees’ WB satisfaction. Both simple and more difficult changes were mentioned. Firstly, it would be interesting to install more green plants in the office as it was mentioned by the respondents to feel more homey and more comfortable to be surrounded by element linked to nature. Adding simple things to the office space to positively impact the WB corresponds to what Helen Barlett (2018) expresses as good way to improve WB at work.

In addition, and if it is possible, bigger changes could be implemented in the office space. For example, if the after break idea is implemented and workers chose to spend this time outside the office, there might be the need to shower or change afterwards; which is why a shower or changing room(s) would be seen as a valuable asset amongst the workers. In addition, it could also differentiate the office from any other and attract more employees while developing more loyalty amongst those already employed knowing that this feature and freedom may not exist in other French businesses.

### **6.1.2.2. Online team events**

Because the working environment represents everything around the worker (UMEA University 2019), one's colleagues are also considered part of it. In times like the actual worldwide pandemic, it is important to maintain employees' social WB high by keeping the events running and simply adapt them rather than cancelling anything. The empirical research demonstrated the need for the employees to feel like they belong to the company and the wish to have some special time with co-workers. For this purpose, it is interesting to have the social event conducted online, such as having video-event; this will maintain, and could increase, the workers' social WB and the feeling of community.

### **6.1.3 Work-life balance**

As discussed in the theoretical framework, the WLB is almost entirely dependent from the individual's needs and thoughts on the topic, so it is crucial to review every employees' opinion before making decision on their WLB. Because the balance does not mean equality of time spend in both area, the individual is the key to creating the better balance. (Day & Hartling 2017, 391).

#### **6.1.3.1. Flexible and adapted working hours**

The first point raised in the empirical research regarding the WLB is the possibility to be flexible and to adapt the working hours to fits the individual current needs. Now, this seemed to be already in motion at Company X office, but the opinions differed on the topic as to know whether it is well-developed or could be improved which is why it is mentioned here as a development idea.

The opinions expressed that they are still restrictions as there has to be a certain number of workers on-site; and, while this is a non-negotiable fact as it is what keeps the company afloat, things can be done to improve this point. An idea to develop this idea better could be to discuss, privately or openly, everyone's needs regarding their hours, whether it is childcare hours needed, an appointment outside the office, or someone's PWB suffering. Creating such discussions would raise the most urgent and the secondary needs for adapted working hours

and, if conducted openly with the rest of the team, could reinforce cohesion as the team's spirit has proved to be high in the office and the practical research revealed the wish for employees to respect the other team members schedules.

### **6.1.3.2. Develop teleworking**

The topic of remote work was highly discussed in the research done for Company X and emanated from the theoretical framework as a good initiative to implement providing that it is the company's and workers' wishes. Knowing the negative aspects of unhappy workers, and the absenteeism/presenteeism it can lead to (Johns 2009, 8.), it is interesting to develop the remote work at Company X office in Bordeaux for the future times.

The research identified two distinct opinions, those who wish to work remotely and those who wish to work at the office. Based on that, it is possible to improve WB at work by creating guidelines allowing employees to choose to work a certain number of days remotely. For instance, it could be interesting for the office to provide its workers with the option to work 50/50 from the office and outside; this would create a sense of freedom, trust and increase the balance between work duties and life responsibilities.

However, it is essential to present the idea of having remote work as a possibility rather than an obligation. The main point in doing so is that there seem to be two opposite sides within the respondents, and maybe within the rest of the team, and for those who consider home office as a negative point for their work, it is crucial to provide the freedom of choice. In addition, allowing this to be implemented will allow future parents, amongst other people, to release stress and create their schedule in advance. For instance, a new parent who needs to be at home on a Thursday will tend to take a day off work, but if he/she has instead the option to choose to work from home, it will most likely be a better decision and a benefit for both parties.

## 6.2. Conclusions

The importance of WB is non-negotiable for both the company and the workers, and the link between the employees' health and their company's overall performance is clearly highlighted and undeniable (Cartwright & Cooper 2009, 1). Referring to part of the secondary question *why is workplace WB vital for companies and individuals?*, it is easy to conclude that having an unhealthy workplace and employees with low WB may lead to financial and workforce loss for the company, creating severe issues for any organisations (Kim 2012, 6). In addition, working in an environment suppressing people's health and with hierarchy reluctant to promote WB will negatively impact the individual personal and professional life. And it is because the importance of WB at work is crucial for both parties that initiatives to support and promote workplace WB must be implemented.

Answering to the final research question *Which initiatives aiming to promote and improve employees WB can be found in literature?*, lead to a thorough literature review which demonstrated that there are many ideas that can lead to a healthier workforce and a healthy working environment. Based on the empirical research and thanks to a cross-analysis with the literary findings a couple of initiatives were chosen as a line of improvement aiming at promoting and improving the WB at work for Company X office in Bordeaux referring to the main research question.

The initiatives meant to enhance the employees' life and WB at work are seen to mainly affect the physical WB, the social WB, the working environment, and the WLB. It is initiatives such as developing the remote work, adding features to the office space, or simply implementing online event to create a sense of community for everyone regardless of their working space, that could be implemented at Company X office in Bordeaux, France.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Interview question template in French

1(3)

*This document is the version sent to the respondents*

- 1. Aimez-vous votre travail ? Est-ce une profession ou vous vous sentez utile ?**
- 2. Parvenez-vous à finaliser vos tâches et projets facilement ?**
- 3. Pensez-vous que les projets et tâches données sont claires ?**
  - Oui → *question suivante*
  - Non → qu'est-ce qui pourrait rendre les consignes plus claires ?
- 4. Pensez-vous que le bien-être au travail est important ? Pourquoi ?**
- 5. Etes-vous satisfait de votre bien-être au travail ?**
- 6. Pensez-vous que votre entreprise supporte votre bien-être ?**
  - Merci de justifier votre réponse
- 7. Pouvez-vous me donner des exemples de pratiques en place en ce moment dans votre entreprise qui, selon vous, supporte votre bien-être ?**
- 8. Votre entreprise à des pratiques mises en place censées supporter et améliorer le bien-être au travail,**
  - Savez-vous quelles sont ces pratiques ? (si non, les réponses sont en bas de page pour vous aider à répondre aux questions suivantes<sup>1</sup>)
  - Que pensez-vous de ces pratiques ?
  - Supportent-elles réellement votre bien-être ?
  - Y-a-t-il quelque chose que vous changeriez ?
- 9. Avez-vous déjà fait face à un burnout ?**
  - Non → *question suivante*
  - Oui →
    - Pensez-vous que cela a pu être lié à un manque de clarté dans votre travail ? (Tâches, consignes, supervision, etc.)
    - Pendant ce moment, étiez-vous en contact régulier avec vos collègues ?

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<sup>1</sup> Evènement entre collègues, anniversaires célébrés, fruits frais et snacks au bureau, parmi d'autre.

- Pensez-vous qu'un manque de support concernant votre bien-être au sein de votre entreprise peut en être une cause ?

**10. Votre vision/sentiments concernant le bien-être au travail a-t-il changé récemment ?**

- Merci de justifier votre réponse.

**11. Pensez-vous être un employé loyal**

- à votre entreprise ?
- à votre manager ?

**12. Qu'est-ce qui vous rendra plus loyal ? (Dans le cas où vous avez répondu non à la question 11)**

**13. Qu'est-ce qui pourra améliorer votre bien-être au bureau ? Auriez-vous des idées qui feront de votre environnement de travail un endroit meilleur à vos yeux ?** Merci de justifier avec 2-3 idées si possible.

**14. Que pensez-vous des points suivants pour améliorer votre vie au travail ?**

- Plus de pauses ?
- Des heures de travail aménagées ?
- Plus d'évènement avec vos collègues ?
- Amenez votre animal de compagnie au travail ?
- Autre chose, merci de le mentionner dans votre réponse.

**15. Que pensez-vous du fait de travailler à distance ?**

- Par rapport à votre stress
- Par rapport à votre équilibre vie professionnelle / vie personnelle
- Par rapport à votre travail, serait-ce plus facile ? ou plus compliqué ?
- Par rapport à la culture de l'entreprise

→ S'il est possible de travailler à distance, **quand** est-ce que cela vous avantagerait (*ex : enfant malade, école fermée, vous êtes malade et ne voulez pas aller au bureau mais pensez être capable de travailler depuis la maison, pendant un voyage, etc.*) et quel serait votre **endroit de choix** pour travailler ? (*Bureau à la maison, café, espace de coworking, depuis l'étranger, etc.*)

**16. Avez-vous déjà envié d'autres pays pour leurs mesures concernant le bien-être des employés ? Si oui, quels pays et quelles mesures ?**

- Que pensez-vous de ce modèle ?

- Est-ce quelque chose qui vous paraît intéressant et faisable ?
- Si cela était en place dans votre structure, quel serait votre planning personnel ?

*Exemple : en Finlande, les journées durent 8h mais il est possible avec l'accord de son employeur de choisir ses horaires de travail et de les adapter à ses envies/besoins ; c'est quelque chose d'intéressant pour moi et si je pouvais-je travaillerais par exemple de 7h à 15h, de 9h à 17h, ou de 10h à 18h, etc.*

## Appendix 2. Interview question template in English

1(3)

*This document is the translated version of the interview questions sent to the respondents.*

- 1. Do you like your job? Is it a profession you feel useful in?**
- 2. Are you able to finalise your tasks and projects easily?**
- 3. Do you think that the tasks and projects given are clearly explained?**
  - Yes → next question
  - No → What could make it clearer?
- 4. Do you think that wellbeing at work is important? Why?**
- 5. Are you satisfied of your wellbeing at work?**
- 6. Do you think your firm support your wellbeing?**
  - Please, justify your answer
- 7. Could you give me some examples or initiatives in place at the moment in your office that, in your opinion, support your wellbeing?**
- 8. Your company has initiatives currently in motion meant to support and improve wellbeing at work:**
  - Do you know what are those initiatives? (if not, the answers are below to allow you to answer the next questions)
  - What do you think of these initiatives?
  - Do they really support your wellbeing?
  - Is there something you would change?
- 9. Have you ever suffered from a burnout?**
  - No → next question
  - Yes →
    - Do you think it can be linked to a lack of clarity in your work? (tasks, orders, supervision, etc.)
    - During this time, were you still in regular contact with your colleagues?
    - Do you think that a lack of wellbeing inside your workplace could have been the cause?

**10. Has your vision/feeling about the workplace wellbeing changed recently?** Please, justify your answer

**11. Do you think you are a loyal employee?**

- To your company?
- To your manager?

**12. What would make you a more loyal employee to your company?** (if you answered no to question 11)

**13. What could improve your wellbeing? Would you have ideas that would make your workplace a better one for you?** Give 2-3 ideas

**14. What do you think about the following points to improve your work life?**

- More breaks?
- Adapted working hours?
- More events with your colleagues?
- Bring your pet to work?
- Anything else, thanks for mentioning it here.

**15. What do you think about the option to work remotely?**

- Regarding your stress?
- Regarding your work/life balance?
- Regarding your work, would it be easier? Harder?
- Regarding the company culture?

→ If this was an option, **when** would you chose to work remotely? (reasons could be anything, e.g. kid is sick, school is closed, when I don't feel well enough to go to work yet well enough to work from home, etc.) and what would be **your place of work** (e.g. home office, coffee, coworking space, from abroad, etc.) ?

**16. Have you ever envied other countries for their measures regarding wellbeing for workers? If yes, which countries and which measures?**

- What do you think of the model?
- Would it be something interesting and feasible for you?
- If this would be in place in your company, what would be your schedule like?

*Example: in Finland, work days last for 8h but with the approval of the manager, it is possible to adapt the working hours to the wishes / needs; it is something interesting for me because if I could I would work from 7h to 15h, from 9h to 17h, 10h to 18h, etc.*