

## **How to Lead Millennials' Mental Wellbeing?**

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## Abstract

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<p>The purpose of this thesis was to discover what millennials think about leadership when it comes to their wellbeing at work, and how they are feeling about their wellbeing at work currently. In this research, the definition of Pew Research Center of millennials is used, which means millennials are the generation born between 1981-1996 (Dimock 2019). This topic was chosen because the importance of employees' mental wellbeing is important and needs to be emphasized due to Covid19-pandemic. Already before the pandemic, almost half of millennials had left their job due to the feeling of burnout (Deloitte 2018). This issue needs to be taken seriously in organizations as the wellbeing of employees has a straight connection on how the organization succeeds (Hesketh &amp; Cooper 2019, 124).</p> <p>In this study, the existing literature was first investigated and it is presented in a theoretical framework, chapter 2. The chapter covers the principal areas of this thesis topic, which are: wellbeing at work, leadership, and millennials. The empirical part was conducted as a quantitative research method. The online survey in Webropol was targeted for millennials who at the time were working, and living in Europe. The survey was voluntary and included 12 questions. Responses were collected in January 2022. The total number of respondents was 205. The data was analysed in Excel and the results are presented in Chapter 4.</p> <p>The results showed that millennials appreciate work-life balance and flexibility. They want to have fair, reliable manager who communicates clearly. Almost half considered their job as chaotic and only minority had not experienced any risk factors for burnout in their job. Still, most of the respondents were somewhat satisfied with their wellbeing at work. Most of millennials (80%) had changed or considered changing their job in the past six months.</p> <p>Based on the results, it was recommended that in order to enhance millennials' wellbeing, organizations and managers should put more effort on communication, and offer flexible ways to arrange the job to ensure better work-life balance.</p>
<b>Keywords</b> Wellbeing at work, leadership, millennials, mental wellbeing

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# 1 Introduction

This is a research type of bachelor's thesis for the Degree Programme in International business in the major specialization of Human Resources Management in the Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. The purpose of this thesis is to understand and bring new information about how millennials think leading affects their mental wellbeing at work. The following chapters describe the background, project objectives, scope, key concepts, and benefits of this research.

## 1.1 Background

*“If you want high performance out of this generation, you had better commit to high-maintenance management”* (Tulgan 2016, 15).

Millennials are said to be very different in the workplace, when comparing to earlier generations. Stereotypically it is said, they are lazy, tough to manage and selfish. They expect different style management to stay motivated, engaged and satisfied with their work. At the same time, especially lately there has been a lot of discussion about millennials' mental wellbeing. 77% of all professionals have experienced burnout, but when it comes to millennials, it is 84%. Almost half of millennials have left their job due to the feeling of burnout. (Deloitte 2018.) It looks like millennials feel more pressure in their work and they are increasingly feeling tired and burned out. Even students are stressed. The pandemic worsened the situation with 59% of millennial workers reporting mental health issues (The Standard 2020). Millennials appreciate companies that are interested in their well-being. For them, it is important how they are treated in the workplace. (Gallup 2016, 17.)

In 2025, millennials will represent 75% of the global workforce (Economy 2019). Millennials' mental wellbeing is a serious question for the global economy, if increasing part of the future and today's workforce is not capable of doing their job. Employees who are not being well emotionally, are less engaged, perform less productive, and are more likely to seek new employer or quit their job. 69% of employees say that organizations do not give enough attention to minimizing the risk of burnout. (Deloitte 2018). There are many things that affect employee wellbeing, and employees need to take care of their wellbeing too. Moreover, Gregersen, Vincent-Höper & Nienhaus (2016, in Batz 2018) mention leaders have a major role in decreasing employees' emotional exhaustion. In fact, it is a key element of burnout.

Leading employees' wellbeing is going to be even more important to organizations in the future, as millennials and the generation after millennials demand managers to take better care of employees' wellbeing (Mellanen & Mellanen 2020, 226). This thesis will investigate what kind of leadership millennials think, is good for their mental wellbeing at work. What are the things in leadership that do not support their mental wellbeing? This information helps organizations to keep their employees satisfied, engaged, and motivated for their work.

There are various opinions about millennials age group, but one commonly accepted, and used in this research is defined by Pew Research Center, which says millennials are born between 1981 and 1996 (Dimock 2019). Because the age range is so large, their situations in life can be very different. In this research, millennials will be divided into four groups based on their age. The aim is to find out, if there are differences on how older versus younger wave of millennials look at the leadership and its' effect on mental wellbeing at work.

## **1.2 Research question**

This research aims to understand the links between leadership and mental wellbeing at work. What supports the employee's mental wellbeing and what does not? It focusses on millennials, who are said to be "the burnout generation" (Petersen 2019). Millennials seem to feel more pressure and they are more tired in their work than earlier generations. They also prefer different leadership styles than others. The main objective is to find how leadership affects millennials' mental wellbeing at work. The purpose is to offer recommendations to managers, or HR on how to lead millennials' mental wellbeing in practice. This issue touches the whole global workforce, and the respondents of the survey are from different countries.

The research question is: How to lead millennials' mental wellbeing at work?

The research question is divided into investigative questions as follows:

IQ 1. What is millennials' current state of mental wellbeing at work?

IQ 2. What aspects in leadership increase millennials' mental wellbeing at work in their opinion?

IQ 3. What aspects in leadership decrease millennials' mental wellbeing at work in their opinion?

IQ 4. What kind of acts millennials expect from managers to support their mental wellbeing at work?

IQ 5. What recommendations can be made to managers about leading millennials' mental wellbeing at work?

Table 1 below presents the investigative questions, theoretical framework components, research methods and results chapters for each investigative question.

Table 1. Overlay matrix

Investigative Question	Theoretical Framework	Research Methods	Results (chapter)
IQ 1. What is millennials' current state of mental wellbeing at work?	Wellbeing at work, millennials' mental wellbeing	Quantitative survey	4.2
IQ 2. What aspects in leadership increase millennials' mental wellbeing at work in their opinion?	Leadership, leading wellbeing, leading millennials	Quantitative survey	4.3
IQ 3. What aspects in management decrease millennials' mental wellbeing at work in their opinion?	Leadership, leading wellbeing, leading millennials	Quantitative survey	4.4
IQ 4. What kind of acts millennials expect from managers to support their mental wellbeing at work?	Leading millennials, wellbeing at work	Quantitative survey, qualitative open questions	4.5
IQ. 5 What recommendations can be made to	Leadership, leading wellbeing	Quantitative survey	5.2

managers about leading millennials' mental wellbeing at work?			
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### 1.3 Scope

The focus is on millennials, their mental wellbeing at work, and what kind of an effect leadership has on that. Millennials were chosen because their mental wellbeing issues are topical. They also think differently about work life and leadership than earlier generations. Many things affect employee wellbeing, and employees have responsibility on their own wellbeing too. However, the focus is on leadership as it can have a major impact and is influencing on everyday life at work.

Due to millennials being a large group of people of very different ages, they are divided in smaller groups in the survey to discover what the differences within millennials are, if there are any.

### 1.4 Benefits

The thesis will give guidance on how organizations could support, lead, and improve their employees' mental wellbeing. Millennials are increasing part of the workforce, so this topic concerns many organizations. And even though the focus is on millennials' wellbeing, for sure the methods can be adapted to other employees too. Especially HR professionals and managers can benefit from this thesis. Wellbeing of employees is crucial for companies that are keen to succeed in the future.

This will benefit the field of HR, as for example in Finland burnouts of millennials have not been researched (Laine 2019). This research was not focusing to Finland only, although many responses to the research questionnaire were submitted from Finland (70%). This subject concerns the whole world, so it is important to the organizations globally.

This thesis project benefits the author by teaching how to individually plan an academic research and implement it. Researching the theory and analysing results based on the data will deepen the author's knowledge as a professional about leadership and wellbeing at work. The thesis project benefits the author's future career plans and studies.



## 1.5 Key Concepts

**Millennials** are born between 1981 and 1996. Millennials have grown up with seeing for example the 9/11 terrorist attacks, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, intense political polarization, economic recession, and rapid evolution of technology. (Dimock 2019.)

**Leadership** is a process where a leader guides and influences others to work towards a specific goal. It is the ability to get employees work with confidence and enthusiastic. Leadership is influencing and motivating employees' behaviour to achieve the vision. (Management Study Guide 2022.)

**Wellbeing at work** means safe, healthy, and pleasant work. The atmosphere, professionalism of employees and management are motivated. It affects coping at work, which leads to increased productivity and reduced sick leaves. (Kantolahti 2021.)

**Mental wellbeing** is often related to subjective wellbeing, which has two elements: hedonia and eudaimonia. Hedonia refers to feeling happiness and pleasure in life. Eudaimonia refers to meaning and purpose in life. (Nortje 2022.)

**Work-related stress** can occur when work demands, and pressures do not meet employee's ability. Little support, and little control over work can made it feel even worse. (WHO 2020.)

## 2 Leading millennials' mental wellbeing

This chapter will introduce the theory and models behind the thesis topic. The main themes are millennials, wellbeing at work, and leadership as presented in the figure 1 below.

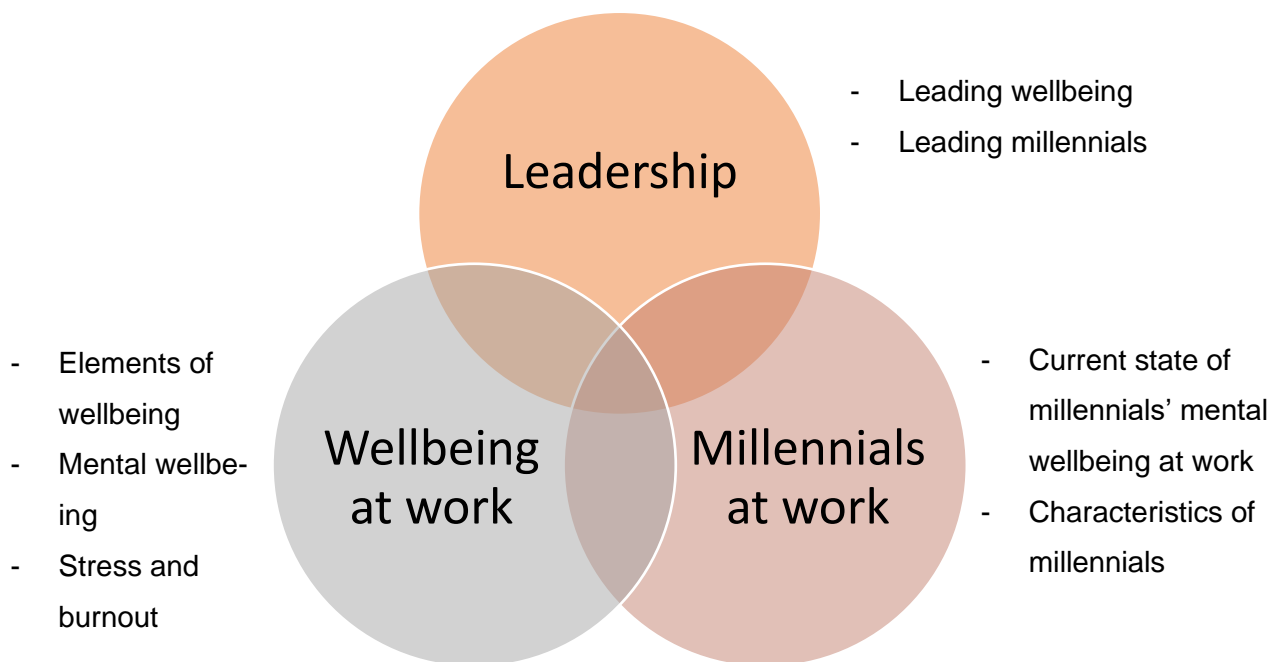


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Wellbeing at work

Wellbeing has many definitions and is widely researched topic. Wellbeing can mean a state of mind and being where subjective feelings are included, for example feeling safe and secure, comfortable, happy, fortunate, and healthy. Wellbeing is often divided into Eudaimonic and Hedonic wellbeing. Eudaimonic wellbeing refers to the purpose in life. It means the positive ways people handle life, and their own feelings and experiences from that. This can mean for example positive relationships, purposeful life, and self-approval. Hedonic wellbeing focuses on pleasure or happiness in life. Sometimes it is called subjective wellbeing. (Hesketh & Cooper 2019, 10.)

Healthy employees are important for organizations. It affects the employees' performance and again to organizations' productivity and culture. It may result to direct and indirect costs to organization, like healthcare costs but also costs in productivity, absenteeism, and engagement. (Lee 2019, 2.)

### 2.1.1 Elements of wellbeing

There are many models about wellbeing and there is not one common definition. Robertson and Cooper (2011, 3-4) define wellbeing as a sum of three main parts, which are presented in the figure 2 below: physical, social, and psychological wellbeing. Psychological wellbeing (PWB) is the most important at work if accidents and dangerous conditions are left out. Work impacts straighter on PWB than for social or physical wellbeing. PWB means the ability of individual to handle daily stress, preserve a positive attitude and sense of purpose. Physical wellbeing means taking care of having enough sleep and exercise for example. Social wellbeing refers to having a positive and supportive social network.

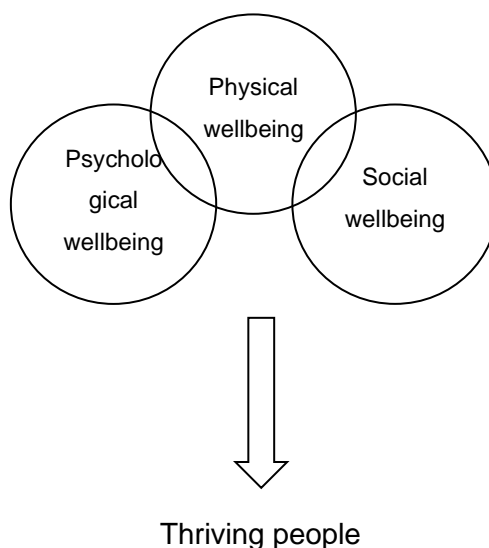


Figure 2. Three elements of wellbeing (adapted from Robertson & Cooper 2011, 4)

In addition to the model above, Hesketh and Cooper (2019, 12-14 & 80-81) have mentioned financial wellbeing as a one element of wellbeing. Stress over financial situation can affect other areas of wellbeing. For example, sometimes person needs to take any job, whether it is enjoyable or not, to survive economically. On the other hand, the work can be enjoyable, but the employee may feel the compensation is not enough. It may cause problems on psychological wellbeing, but it started from financial issue. Robertson and Cooper (2011, 12) mention that the connection between happiness and money is not linear. Money can increase happiness when people are in severe poverty, but after that the impact is not high anymore.

### 2.1.2 Factors affecting wellbeing at work

Hackman and Oldham (1974, 7-9) developed a model about the design of work called the "Job Characteristics Model". The model introduced five key job characteristics, which influence on employee psychological state, motivation, satisfaction, and work performance. These are:

- **Skill Variety:** the level and range of skills needed
- **Task Identity:** the extent of a visible outcome of the work
- **Task Significance:** the extent to how much the work influences on other people lives in the organization, or outside of it
- **Autonomy:** the extent of freedom and independence
- **Feedback from the Job Itself:** the extent of feedback the employee receives

The elements affecting psychological wellbeing (PWB) at work have been researched for a long time. For many, work is important for psychological wellbeing (PWB). Studies have shown that unemployment and lower PWB are linked to each other. Employee's PWB is mainly affected by demand, control, support, and sense of purpose and meaning. The figure 3 below introduces four main elements of workplace factors that are important for PWB. They are the work itself and its context, the work-home interface, purpose and meaning, and leadership. (Robertson & Cooper 2011, 21 & 79-81.)

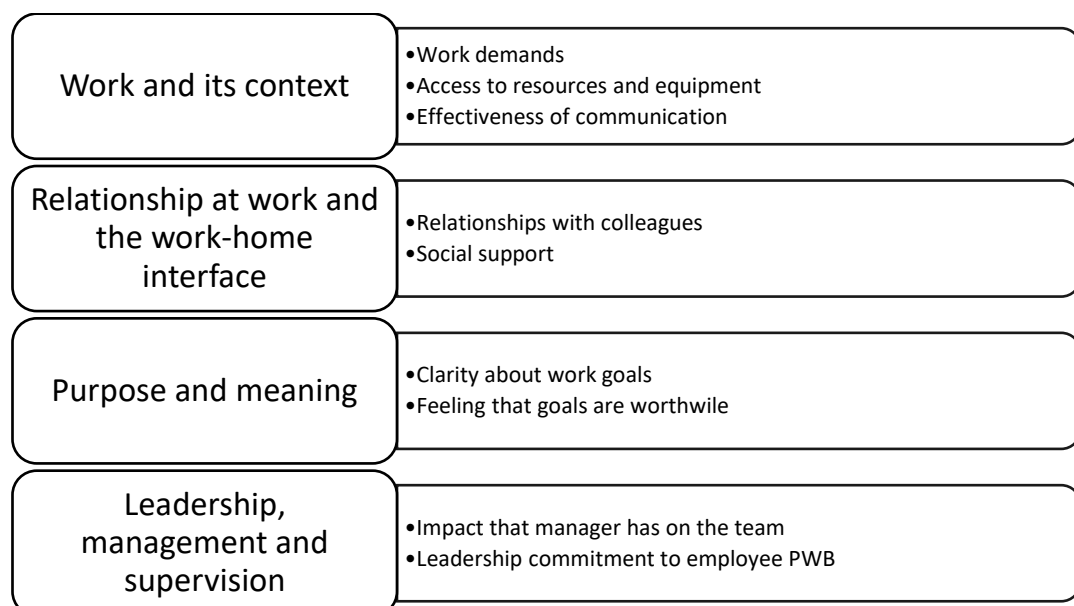


Figure 3. Workplace factors important for PWB (adapted from Robertson & Cooper 2011, 79)

Obviously, the work itself is influencing to the levels of PWB. There are varying elements which define is the work enjoyable or not, such as the purpose of the job, the degree of freedom and autonomy, and satisfaction. Sometimes, one can have a thought that low demands of a job would be a good thing, but for most people it would eventually be boring. The demand of the work makes employees feel useful, and meeting the demands provides satisfaction. But if the demand is too high over a long period, it lowers PWB. (Robertson & Cooper 2011, 78-79.)

The interaction with other people at work brings happiness for many. Usually, the work includes interaction with other people at least up to some level. The quality of these relationships has an influence on how employee feels. Positive relationships can also have an impact on how the employee copes with demands. In the other hand, in some jobs, employees need to express emotion they are not always really feeling. For example, because of the customers or patients, sometimes colleagues. It can be smiling when feeling low, or not showing anger. This can even lead to emotional exhaustion or burnout. (Robertson & Cooper 2011, 85-86.)

To be psychologically healthy, people need to feel they are useful and have a sense of purpose. Management and leadership have an extremely important role in creating this feeling to employees. (Robertson & Cooper 2011, 89.) Meaning and purpose are the foundational elements of wellbeing. Work can have so much impact to the life that it is important to have a work, where the employee can feel fulfilled and see the contribution of own work in a broader picture. This element needs to be considered, when planning a wellbeing strategy. (Hesketh & Cooper 2019, 45-47.)

A manager can have a major impact on employees' PWB as manager can affect the factors introduced above e.g., demands, control and autonomy, support, and work-life balance. Sometimes, it can be difficult for managers, if they do not have the authority to affect these factors which they know to be damaging to the employees. Good leadership can have a positive impact on employees' PWB, but also on manager's wellbeing. (Robertson & Cooper 2011, 91-92.)

Working long hours can be unhealthy, and a link between poor health and long working hours has been found. However, opportunity to have breaks, the type of work and whether the working overtime is voluntary or involuntary has on effect to the result. (Robertson & Cooper 2011, 86.) Flexibility at work has a positive influence on PWB. Flexible working arrangements enable good work-life balance and that is becoming more important all the time. Flexible working lets employees to decide when they work, where they work or both.

Flexible working should be offered to as many employees as possible in the organization. Otherwise, some employees may feel it unequal. A clear and equal policy is important. (Robertson & Cooper 2011. 87.)

Pressures at job can be divided into two categories: challenge pressures and hindrance pressures. Challenge pressures are often seen in a positive way. It provides an opportunity for growth and development. Examples of challenge pressures are workload, additional responsibility with appropriate training and support, time pressure, tight deadlines, and worthwhile goals. Hindrance pressures are barriers for growth and achievement. It can be poor work relationships, job insecurity, lack of control, unclear goals, and unrealistic deadlines. Hindrance pressures can lead to low performance, stress, burnout, and low engagement. (Robertson & Cooper 2011, 82.)

Another model from Haptivate defines these eight areas in the figure 4 below, as factors that influence employee's wellbeing. Work-life balance is not only about having the time. It means that an employees can do enjoyable things on their free time without interruptions from work. The employee also has the energy to do it. (Manners 9 November 2020.)

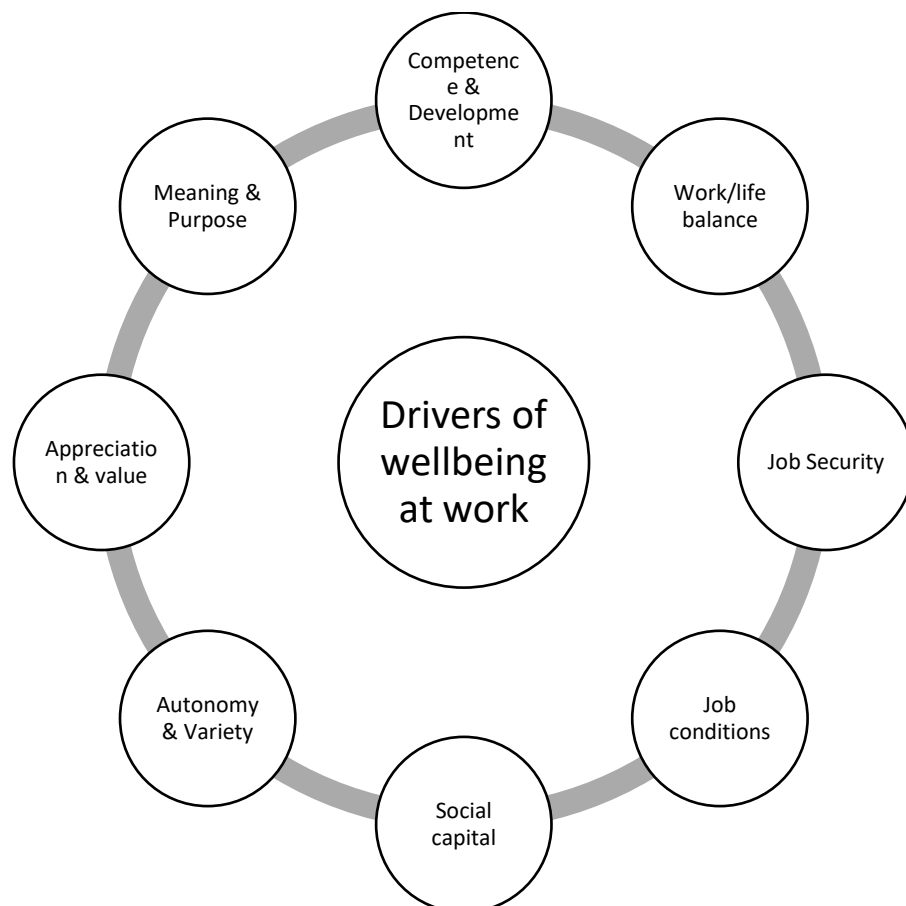


Figure 4. Drivers of wellbeing at work (adapted from Manners 9 November 2020)

Job security includes that the employee can trust the income level is stable. Without that, wellbeing decreases. Feeling insecure will decrease both mental and physical wellbeing. (Manners 9 November 2020.) It can be even as damaging to wellbeing as unemployment (Green 2020, 1). Especially young people are in danger when it comes to job insecurity. 50% of young people were more likely to report poor mental wellbeing, when they were working under zero hours contract (Pickover 2017).

In addition to physical wellbeing, job condition includes mental wellbeing nowadays too. Workload, working hours, shift work, pressure, and job resource affect job conditions. Social capital in the model refers to relationships at work. Feelings of loneliness are not healthy. Even the remote working has increased, for some employees it might be damaging. (Manners 9 November 2020.) Feeling appreciated is important for employees, and lack of appreciation is a major reason for many leaving a job (Novak 2019).

Autonomy is important for wellbeing and employees should have some control over how the workday is organised, or the pace they work. Meaning and purpose of the job will make employees more satisfied, engaged, and loyal. Employees value the opportunity to grow. (Manners 9 November 2020.) Especially millennials have strong desire for development, and 59% of them report in a study, that opportunities to learn and grow are extremely important (Gallup 2016, 26).

### 2.1.3 Seven dimension of workplace health

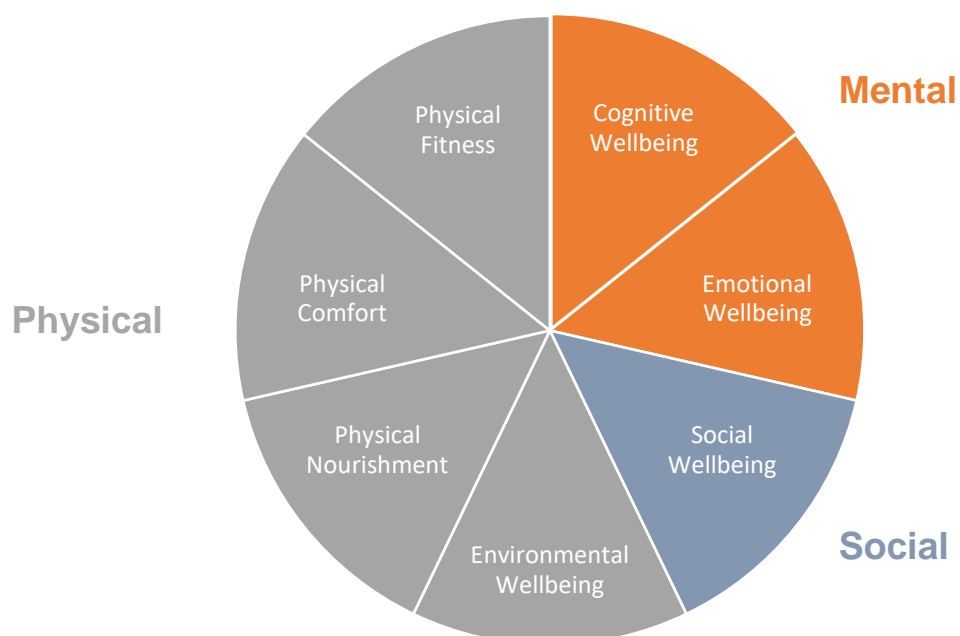


Figure 5. Seven key performance indicators of workplace health (adapted from Lee 2019, 4)

In this model presented in figure 5 above, health is divided into mental, physical, and social health. The model introduced above is called PROWELL. Workplace health can be divided into seven dimensions, which are cognitive wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, social wellbeing, environmental wellbeing, physical nourishment, physical comfort, and physical fitness. These dimensions influence in organization's culture, employee productivity, individual health and safety, company reputation, and financial savings. (Lee 2019, 4-5.)

- **Physical fitness** means the environment and its possibilities to offer physical activities. The design of the office can encourage to movement, for example stairs or active workstations.
- **Physical comfort** refers to comfort in four senses: visual, auditory, thermal, and olfactory. The main topics in this area have been for example, lighting, acoustics, and temperature and humidity.
- **Physical nourishment** is the eating habits. Workplace design experts have started to think strategies to support healthy diet at work.
- **Environmental wellbeing** addresses healthy work environment. Many rules in this area protect the employee's health. These can be for example indoor air quality, drinking water quality, and chemical control.
- **Social wellbeing** focuses on social support and connectivity in the workplace. It can have a great impact on psychological and physical health.
- **Emotional wellbeing** emphasizes environmental factors providing emotional state of happiness and satisfaction on individual level. It affects the overall quality of life.
- **Cognitive wellbeing** refers to mental capacity of thinking process and obtaining information. (Lee 2019, 6-20.)

#### 2.1.4 Mental health and wellbeing

The definitions around mental health and mental wellbeing are complex and definitions are mixed. WHO (2018) has defined mental health as a state of wellbeing where the individual is aware of his or her own abilities, can manage stress, is able to work effectively and contribute to the community. According to PROWELL model in the previous chapter, mental health includes cognitive and emotional wellbeing. However, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021) mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing. Mental health and mental wellbeing are not synonymous, but they are linked to each other. Experiencing low levels of wellbeing



for a long time can lead to a diagnosable mental health condition, for example anxiety or depression. With a mental health condition, the person may feel lower levels of mental wellbeing more often but has also long periods of good mental wellbeing. (CABA n.d.) In this paper, mental wellbeing will be widely used but some of the other terms may occur as well in some contexts.

A large part of long-term absences at work are caused by mental health issues. (CIPD 2021.) Not only absences increase the costs for employees, but also presenteeism, which is commonly associated with mental health issues at work. It occurs when an employee continues working even when experiencing symptoms, which results to lower productivity. (Black Dog Institute 2016, 3.) It has been said that presenteeism is even more costly to organizations than absenteeism. (Quintana 31 January 2019.)

Mental health still has a stigma in most organizations. The culture of silence can lead into increased sickness absences, presenteeism, and staff turnover. CIPD and Halogen Software researched employees in UK. Contrary to popular belief, employees were more likely to say their mental health problems results from work (17%) than from their personal lives (15%). However, 62% said their mental health was affected by combination of these two. (CIPD 2016, 21.)

### **2.1.5 Stress and burnout**

WHO (2020) defines work stress as an employee's response for too high demands and pressures at work. Stress occurs when the employee feels he/she is not capable to fulfil the demands. Employees are more likely to be stressed if they feel their managers and colleagues do not support them, and if they feel they do not have control over their work. Stress increases the motivation and can sometimes be beneficial. The problems start when the situation is unmanageable and that can influence to the employee's performance.

When the stress is prolonged, it can lead to a burnout. Exhaustion, cynicism, and feelings of reduced professional ability are the main elements of burnout. Stressful job does not always lead to a burnout. It depends how the stress is managed. However, some individuals have a higher risk for burnout than others. (Scott 2020.)

Karasek and Theorell (1990, 32) have found that specifically high demand and low control in a job grow the risk of employee falling physically or mentally ill. According to Mayo

Clinic (2021), these factors can increase the risk of burnout:

- **Lack of control.** When employee does not have the control over decisions that affect his/her job.
- **Unclear job expectations.** The employee feels uncomfortable due to lack of instructions and is not sure what is expected.
- **Dysfunctional workplace dynamics.** Such as bullying or micromanaging.
- **Extremes of activity.** Whether the employee feels the job is boring or chaotic, and therefore needs to make effort to stay focused.
- **Lack of social support.** Feelings of isolation can lead to increasing stress.
- **Work-life imbalance.** The work takes too much time, and the employee does not have the energy to spend time with family and friends.

In addition to these, Gallup found in a study that unfair treatment between employees can lead to a burnout. It can include for example bias, favouritism, unfair compensation or corporate policies. The same study mentions unmanageable workload, lack of communication and support from manager and unreasonable time pressures. (Wigert & Agrawal 2018.)

Employee burnout may lead to increased errors and affect organization performance. Some signs can show that an employee is experiencing burnout. These include reduced energy, lower levels of motivation, increased errors, fatigue, headaches, irritability, frustration, suspiciousness, and accomplishing less with working more hours. (Ricketts, Mathieu & Baynton 2021.)

### 2.1.6 Benefits to organizations

Effective wellbeing strategy always results to improvement in productivity and performance (Hesketh & Cooper 2019, 124). In the research, the wellbeing of a large Fortune 100 company's 11 700 employees was assessed. It was found that employees' wellbeing had a link with organization's performance and employee costs. Over the same period, changes in wellbeing were related to changes in the organization's result. Improved wellbeing had mainly positive outcomes like decrease in health care costs, unscheduled absences, presenteeism, and increased motivation to stay. (Sears, Shi, Coberley & Pope 2013, 403.) Another study showed that employee's relationship with their manager, psychological empowerment, innovative culture, and organizational support have a positive influence on work performance (Lee & Tan 2012).

Healthy employees are important for organizations. In a report, 60% of respondents said their productivity is affected by their mental health. (Mind Share Partners 2019, 5.)

Productivity is linked with organizations that show concern for employees' welfare.

Malcolm and Petterson found in manufacturing industry that psychological climate factors caused changes in the productivity. They found eight factors that affected productivity: supervisory support, concern for employee welfare, skill development, effort, innovation and flexibility, quality, performance feedback and formalization. The strongest relationship with productivity was with concern for employee welfare. (Robertson & Cooper 2011, 15.) Another study also says that taking care of employees' mental wellbeing has positive consequences. 86% of employees who were treated for depression reported improvement in their work performance. In addition, studies show that if the symptoms are noted early, more than 80% of individuals with depression can be treated quickly. (Goetzel & al. 2018, 325-326.)

A study lead by WHO estimates that every 1\$ spent on supporting employees' mental health, returns 4\$ to the organization in improved health and productivity (WHO 2021). In Finland, Lähtapiola, a company operating in the insurance industry, offered their employees support on mental wellbeing and had 100 000 € savings (Erkko 2021). When organization provides support for mental wellbeing, it can expect to have reduced sick absenteeism, more productive employees, and friendly environment without toxic behaviours (Gary 2021).

## **2.2 Leadership**

Leadership is often linked with wellbeing. The relationship between employee and manager can have a great impact on employee wellbeing. Therefore, investment in leaders is valuable. At a very basic level, leadership includes just three main elements: knowing yourself, knowing your stuff, and knowing your staff. (Hesketh & Cooper 2019, 35.) The interest towards leadership and its' effect on employee wellbeing has been increasing during past years (Burke & Page 2017, 269).

### **2.2.1 Leading wellbeing at organizational level**

High levels of PWB can improve performance and productivity, sickness-absence rates, and talent management. To benefit from the high levels of PWB, strategic approach is needed. It starts with the top management recognizing the importance of PWB. (Robertson & Cooper 2011, 109-110.) Mellanen & Mellanen (2020, 227) also state it is important that leading wellbeing is in the organization's strategy and values. Employers need to communicate clearly that employee wellbeing matters. Leader's behaviour is

monitored by employees, so it is important to lead with an example. (Mind n.d., 3.) Changing a culture to be more open starts from the top. Encouraging executive teams, managers, and senior employees to be open about mental wellbeing decreases the stigma around the topic. (Greenwood, Bapat & Maughan 2019.)

To prevent the employee burnout, wellbeing should be part of the organization's culture and taken seriously. It does not help, if wellbeing is just considered as a "nice-to-have" in HR. Employees will take better care of themselves and live healthier, when they have the resources to do so. A culture which promotes command-and-control, working over hours and during personal time increases the risk of burnout. (Gallup 2021.)

Awareness around mental health issues has risen among organizations. A report presented that in 2017 52% of employers thought that they have employees with mental health condition, when in 2009 it was only 21%. Also, 52% of organizations have policies and procedures to support employees who are experiencing mental health issues. On the other hand, another report shows that only half of employees knew how they can get help for their mental health. A report from USA found that 41% of employees thought their company prioritizes mental health. Mental health issues still have a stigma. Employees are afraid to talk about them with their manager or HR. Over half of employers are unwilling to employ someone experiencing mental health issues and thought it could be a risk to them. (Mind Share Partners 2019, 5-15; ShawTrust 2017, 3.)

A report recommends that organizations should train line managers and employees about mental health to raise awareness. It is recommended to include it into normal training and offer information for example about how to support someone experiencing mental health issues. Line managers should be trained more in-depth about how to offer first aid, how to support an employee and legislation issues. This training and wellbeing of employees should be monitored regularly. (Shawtrust 2017, 43-44.) Employers increasingly think this is important, but still a study in the UK says that only 24% of managers have had some training about the topic (Stevenson & Farmer 2017, 30). Managers should be focusing on their people. However, in practice managers' jobs tend to include too much administrative work. Leaders should reassure managers' role expectations and plan it so that there is time to prioritize people needs first. (Gallup 2021.)

Before managers can support their employees' wellbeing, they should take care of their own wellbeing first. Many employees suffering from burnout are managers. Organizations can offer peer support and professional guidance to managers. Giving realistic role expectations, teaching managers to identify the issues that affect their energy, checking in

regularly, and supporting helps managers to thrive on their job. (Gallup 2021; Mellanen & Mellanen 2020, 228-230.)

It is important that the organization takes into consideration that employees are different, and one model does not work for everyone. Each employee should be treated individually when it comes to wellbeing. For example, some introverted employees may find they work better alone, so different spaces to work should be provided. (Tottle 2019.)

### **2.2.2 Leading wellbeing at managerial level**

Bad management is the main reason for burnout. It can include unfair treatment, unmanageable workload, lack of role clarity, lack of communication and support from manager, and time pressures. These will lead to a situation where the employee's and the whole organization's performance will decrease. (Wigert & Agrawal 2018.)

It is important, that managers listen to work-related problems. A manager who is always willing to listen, decreases the risk of employees' burn out as they are 62% more likely to not be burned out. Employees need to feel they are cared. Listening to employees' ideas and opinions will make them feel important and perform better. It gives them feeling of having control over their work and that prevents burnout. Telling employees, how their work contributes to organization's mission, industry, or world will make the work feel purposeful. Millennials particularly expect purpose-driven work and that feeling decreases the risk of burnout. Encouraging teamwork affects wellbeing too as it creates emotional support. Employees who do the work in which they are best, are 57% less likely to burn out. Therefore strengths-based feedback is important. The best performance from team is get by identifying what the people do best, giving feedback from that and guiding them to tasks which maximise their talent. (Gallup 2021.)

### **2.2.3 Employee engagement and The Great Resignation**

Employee engagement refers to the levels of connection the employee feels emotionally and mentally towards their job, team, and organization. Engaged employees want to do more than what is expected. This benefits organization with increased employee productivity, higher employee retention, increased customer satisfaction, lower absenteeism, better employee health, and decreased workplace injuries. Employees can be divided into four groups based on their engagement level. These are highly engaged, moderately engaged, barely engaged, and disengaged. Motivating work is one of the key drivers of employee engagement. Employees want to develop on their careers and leaders and HR have an important role in finding the right opportunities for right employees. Leadership

and relationships are extremely important as employees want to work in organizations where people are put first. Employees want to commit to organizations where they feel they can contribute to organization's strategy. (Ryba 2021.)

The role of leadership, HR and managers is crucial when it comes to employee engagement. Leaders are campaigners of the organization's culture and they set the tone. HR needs to ensure smooth processes by supporting and developing managers, implementing tools and possibly choose an employee engagement partner. Managers' responsibility is to create a thriving atmosphere. This means having good relationships with employees, recognizing good job performance, and help employees to grow. (Ryba 2021.)

As a result of Covid-19 pandemic, record number of employees have left their jobs. This is called The Great Resignation. Companies need to think how to engage their employees in this situation. The pandemic has had the greatest effect on industries where customers need to come to a certain place at a certain time. These are for example restaurants, ship cruises, events, concerts, and passenger airlines. This has influenced on employees and their motivation and wellbeing too. For white-collar workers, the pandemic has offered improvements in work-life balance and flexibility. Knowledge workers have preferred working from home already before pandemic. Therefore, some employees are ready to quit their job if remote working is restricted and this is one major reason of The Great Resignation. (Chugh 2021.)

Because of the Great Resignation, Sull, Sull & Zweig (2022) analysed 1.4 million Glassdoor reviews to find out what were employees' main reasons to leave their job. Toxic culture was mentioned most often. In the analysis, it was found that toxic culture included failure to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, disrespected feeling, and unethical behaviour. Other reason were job insecurity and reorganization, high levels of innovation, failure to recognize employee performance and poor response to COVID-19. Job insecurity and reorganization usually includes layoffs, and this usually leads to heavier workloads, which can increase the willingness to find a new job. Insecure situation also drives employees to find a more secure job. Surprisingly, high level of innovation is on the list. It was found that the more employees talked about innovation, the more they tended to leave a company. Innovations demand longer working hours, faster pace, and can be more stressful so in long-term it is not sustainable for many. Failing to recognize and reward a good performance and tolerating underperformance may lead to a situation where the strongest performers leave. The analysis also found that employees who mentioned COVID-19, were more likely to quit.

### 2.2.4 Leading millennials

*“As long as organizations treat their employees as numbers, so will do the younger employees to organizations.” (Mellanen & Mellanen 2020, 73).*

The quality of management is important for all workers regardless of the generation. But what is different in millennials, is that they expect coaching from the manager. Effective coaching means that the manager understands what motivates the individual employee and enables personal and professional growth. The manager takes care about employees and supports them to succeed. Millennials want managers to focus on job clarity and priorities, ongoing feedback, opportunities to learn and grow, and accountability. Millennials are not the only generation who want to have these, but they have set pressures on organizations to answer to these needs. (Gallup 2016, 33.) When it comes to management, Mellanen & Mellanen (2020, 143) found that millennials think it is most important that the relationship with their manager is reliable. They also expect the manager to be fair and equal. Third on the list was clear communication about goals and expectations.

Great Place to Work studied millennials in US and 44% of millennials said they are having a positive experience at work. For Generation X it was 48% and Baby Boomers 50%, and for Generation Z 51%. Compared to other generations, millennials have a lack of trust in leaders. 70% of them believe there is favoritism, 67% do not believe management's actions and words are matched, and 56% do not believe the management is competent. Based on over 267 000 comments analysed, the study found that millennials see leaders as connectors. Leader connects and supports diverse teams to achieve a common goal. Leader supports employees on their long-term growth and show up in critical moments. Generation X thought leaders as role models, who are always ready to come up to solve the problems and lead business through change. Baby Boomers pictured a leader as a culture beacon, who is a strategic person. They are appreciated but distant. (Great Place to Work, 9-17.)

Millennials want that the expectations and goals are communicated clearly to them. Once they feel they know what is expected, 72% of them are engaged. Managers should agree together with employees the expectation, considering the individual's strengths.

Millennials can easily feel lost or take too much at once, so it is important that the manager guides to define short- and long-term priorities. 67% of millennials say they are engaged, when the manager helps them with establishing priorities, adjusting the workload, and heading them to right direction. (Gallup 2016, 34-35.)

Millennials are more engaged when communication and feedback is ongoing. However, they are not asking it. Only 15% of millennials say they regularly ask for feedback. Regular meetings with manager provide higher performance. Beside on that, the employees feel someone is caring them and their development. Employees who meet their manager at least once a week are the most engaged. This does not always have to mean face-to-face meetings. Managers who use different ways to communicate, have the most engaging employees. (Gallup 2016, 35-37.) Employees who have a manager who listens to their problems related to work, are 62% less likely to feel burned out (Pendell 2018). Millennials want to be recognized of their good job performance. 79% of them believe they would be more loyal to their employee if their job performance was recognized more. (daVinci Payments 2019.)

When employees have autonomy and flexibility, they are 43% less likely to experience high levels of burnout (Pendell 2018). Millennials value flexibility over when or where to work. If remote work is denied due to lack of trust, millennials can see it as absurd and old-fashioned thinking. Some of them have denied a job offer or moved to a new job if remote job was not allowed. (Mellanen & Mellanen 2020, 236-237.)

### **2.3 Millennial generation**

There are many stereotypes about millennials. Always when talking about generations, it is generalizing and does not mean every individual would act in the same way. However, there are some characteristics that define the millennial generation. Gallup (2016, 58-62) researched millennials and found that millennials are the most diverse generation, highly educated, optimistic about their financial standing, but underemployed and earning less than other generations.

Millennials have seen lot of uncertainty in their lives. Maybe not more than earlier generations, but technology has increased the awareness of global crises. Examples of the crises, that millennials have experienced are WTC terrorist attack, financial crisis 2008, recession and climate change. Their confidence to authorities is lower as they have seen organizations' collective redundancies. High education does not guarantee a job that would fill their needs. As a result, they are more interested in entrepreneurship than previous generations. (Mellanen & Mellanen 2020, 71-74.)



### 2.3.1 Millennials in the workplace

Great Place to Work analysed employee surveys and found top 5 things millennials value in employers. Compared to other generations, millennials put a higher value in equity, transparency, flexibility, and purpose. They are not afraid to leave the organization if their demands are not fulfilled. (Hastwell 16 July 2021.) Mellanen & Mellanen (2020, 119) have interviewed and researched millennials, and they found three most important things for millennials when it comes to employee experience. They are trust and togetherness, work-life balance, and personal growth.

Gallup (2016, 18- 19) found that majority (55%) of millennials are not engaged to their job. They have not passion or energy to their job. At the same time, millennials would like to connect with their work. They aim for purpose in job and would not like to switch jobs, but they feel they do not have a reason to stay. Another study asked millennials how long they expect to stay with the same employer, and over half answered 3-5 years. It also found that millennials have 15-16 different employers during their career (Adam Kingl 30 December 2015, 6-8min.) According to another survey, it is 4x more likely that millennial changes a job compared to Boomers, and 11x more than Gen X. If millennials think their compensation is not fair or they do not experience meaning in what they do, they are 3-4 times more likely to leave. (Hastwell 16 July 2021.)

The research found that millennials value work-life balance, as it was the number one reason why they would select and stay in a company. (Leading With Nice 14 October 2021, 7min). A study in Finland confirms this, as 87% of millennials thought work-life balance is important or necessary. Millennials value flexibility and avoid strict schedules. In the interviews millennials told they have left a job or refused from job offer if remote work was not allowed. (Mellanen & Mellanen 2020, 235-237.) Kultalahti (2015, 167) also highlights flexibility. In her research, millennials told that organising their own work was motivating for them. Millennials appreciate flexible employers and want to be flexible too if their employer is. 77% believe flexibility would increase their productivity in the workplace (Bentley University 2014). A Gallup study found that millennials are interested in companies that enable a better life overall. Work-life balance and personal wellbeing is very important for 57% of millennials. The percentage was the same with Gen X, which is the previous generation before millennials. It was very important for 49% of Baby Boomers. (Gallup 2016, 31.)

Millennials look for development opportunities in a job. 87% of them think “professional or career growth and development opportunities” are important, when 69% of non-millennials

think the same. Development opportunities are in top three factors when it comes to retaining millennials. (Adkins & Rigoni 2016.) It is so important that millennials are ready to change to another job, as the lack of development opportunities was the third popular reason why millennials would leave a job in the next two years (Deloitte 2019, 14). YIT and The NextGen Project (2021, 26) researched 1 100 millennials in Finland, Scandinavia, and The Baltics. 16 of them were interviewed, and over half of them did not like the idea of a career where they would climb little by little upwards. Millennials do not want to think their career too far. Instead, they prefer to think what they want to learn now. 45% of the respondents thought workplaces are 50% or more responsible for their career development.

Millennials value employers who address issues of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB). In a survey, millennials mentioned “gender equity” and “male counterpart” more than any other generation. (Hastwell 16 July 2021.) In Deloitte Global Millennial Survey, millennials say they are vocal about discrimination in the workplace. More than one in five said they have brought up the issue with HR or senior manager. (Deloitte 2021, 32.)

There are many stereotypes about millennials, like they want to have a relaxed and fun place as an office. The results of Gallup’s study say the opposite, where millennials said that an informal work environment is least important at work for them. Only 15% considered this as an important factor. Similarly, only 18% thought “fun place to work” is extremely important. It was found that Baby Boomers appreciate these the most. Millennials prefer employers who want to invest in their career development and wellbeing. (Gallup 2016, 33.)

### **2.3.2 Millennials’ mental wellbeing**

Compared to older generations, millennials are more likely to say they always or often feel burned out at work. Gallup studied 7 500 US employees and found that 28% of millennials feel often burned out. In older generations 21% felt burned out. In addition, 45% of millennials said they feel burned out sometimes. (Pendell 2018.) Millennials are not afraid to act if they are not feeling good at their job, as already half of millennials have left their job for mental health reasons (Mind Share Partners 2019, 5). Compared to baby boomers, millennials were 3.5 times more likely to think their mental health condition has been affected by work or workplace environment. (Mind Share Partners 2019, 18).

Especially after the pandemic, millennials mental wellbeing worsened. Research found that the youngest workers were affected the most. 83% of millennials answered that the pandemic has had a negative impact on their mental wellbeing, when for baby boomers the number was only 62%. Part of the reason may be overwork. Setting boundaries may be more difficult for younger workers. It was found that millennials struggled more with setting boundaries to their work than their older colleagues. They also worked more hours than before pandemic. Only 31% of baby boomers reported more working hours. Disconnecting from work was also more difficult to younger workers. (Oracle 2021, 5.)

A study analysed over 40 000 American, Canadian, and British college students and found that perfectionism has increased. It says recent generations of young people are more demanding of others and themselves. Researchers suggest this could affect the rising mental health issue. (Curran & Hill 2019, 410-420.)

In Harvard Business Review's study Millennials were 63% more likely than older generations to know how to find help for mental health issues in their organization (Greenwood, Bapat & Maughan 2019). Mental health issues do not have a strong stigma for millennials, as a report says they are 40% more likely to know someone with a mental health condition compared to older generations. They are also more comfortable about discussing these issues. (Mind Share Partners 2019, 18.) 58% of millennials believe it is very or extremely important that the company they are working for, is interested in supporting mental health issues (Mind Share Partners 2019, 11).

### 3 Research Methods

In this chapter the research approach and research design, population and sampling methods, data collection and analysis methods are introduced, followed by the assessment of reliability and validity of the research.

#### 3.1 Research Method & Design

This research was done by examining the existing information, such as articles, books, and previous studies followed by a quantitative survey. The quantitative survey was conducted with Webropol, including two qualitative questions. Quantitative research means that the data found from phenomenon, problem or issue is presented in numbers. It can provide information for example on how many people are having the same problem. (Inyang 2017, 19.) This data is analysed in the next chapter. Figure 6 presents the research design.

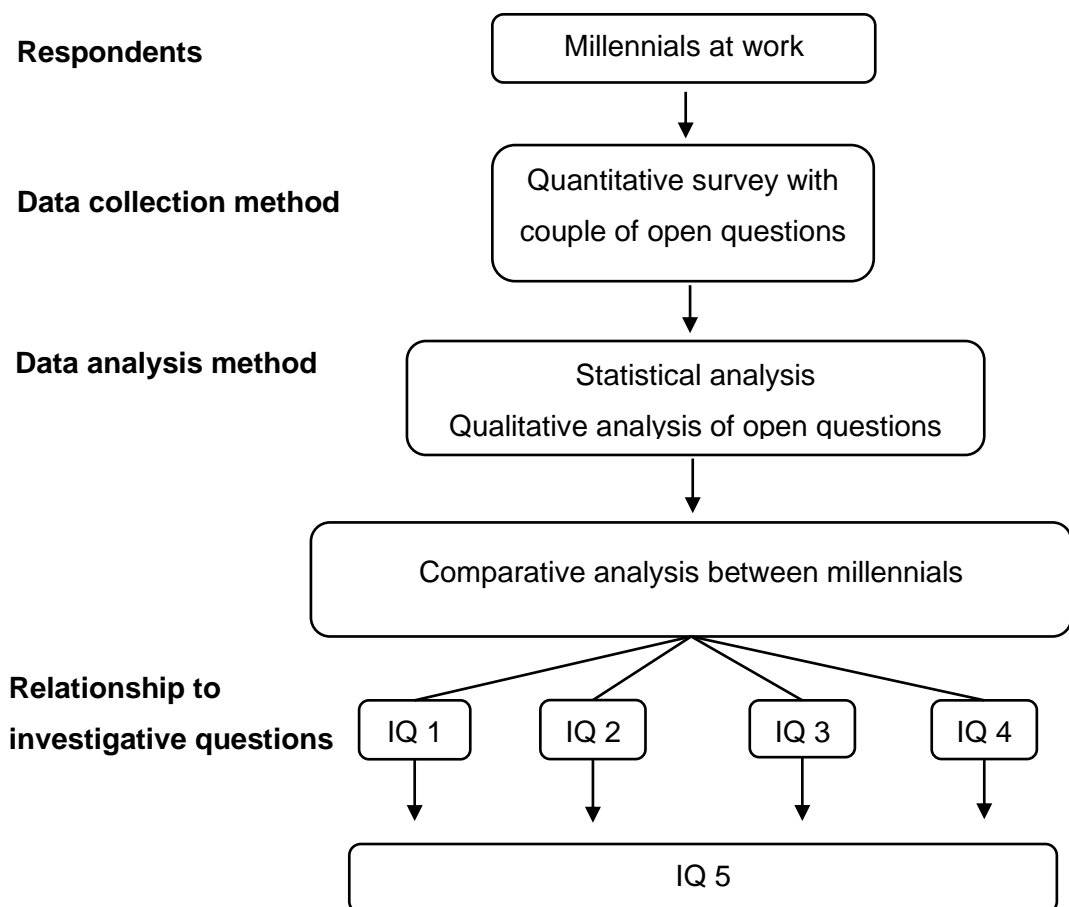


Figure 6. Research design

A mono-method quantitative research method, combined with qualitative elements was chosen to this survey. The method is called mono-method, when the data is collected

once (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 166). In the author's opinion it is the most suitable research method when the number of respondents needs to be high in order to see if there are correlations or differences within the answers. The questionnaire is more reliable, when the respondents can answer on their own words to a few qualitative questions.

When the aim is to find answers to questions like how much, how often, and why, quantitative research is suitable. It gives a general view of relationships and differences between variables. The purpose is to explain, compare, and forecast issues, experiences, and phenomena. (Vilkka 2021, 23.) It suits for this kind of topic, as the purpose is to understand and explain what aspects in leadership affect millennials' mental wellbeing. The variables in this topic are leadership and millennials' mental wellbeing, and the aim is to investigate the relationship between them.

Questionnaire is common data collection method within survey strategy. It is an efficient way to receive answers from a large population, as the respondents answer to the same questions. The questions need to be carefully chosen in order to collect the exact data that the researcher is trying to find, and it can be challenging at times. In descriptive research, the questionnaire helps to identify the variability in phenomena. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 439.)

### **3.2 Population and Sample**

The population of the research were millennials born between 1981 and 1996, living in Europe and who were currently working or having previous experience from working in an organization. As the population was large and the situation in their life situation differs, they were divided into four age groups to discover if there were differences in their opinions. The respondents' country of residence was limited to Europe, so that the answers could be comparable.

The data was collected through a questionnaire survey. Webropol was used as a tool for that. Sampling method used in the research was self-selection sampling. Self-sampling is a non-probability sampling method and is a volunteer sampling technique. It occurs when the survey is distributed through media and individuals are asked to answer to the survey. Data is collected from those who answer. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 303.)

### 3.3 Data Collection

The data was collected by Webropol survey which was open from 10<sup>th</sup> January 2022 to 23<sup>th</sup> January 2022. The survey got lot of interest and just in two days there were 205 respondents all together. The survey reached 667 people.

The survey was distributed mainly through social media. Different Facebook groups, WhatsApp groups, and the author's personal social media (Linkedin, Instagram) were used. Also, a Finnish influencer shared the survey on Instagram. It was instructed clearly, that in order to answer the survey, respondent needs to be born 1981-1996, live in Europe and having experience of working in an organization. The respondents were told that the survey concerns the links between millennials' wellbeing at work and leadership.

Quantitative questions concentrated on the aspects that millennials appreciate in an employer and in a manager. They were asked to rate how well their current manager meets their expectations and needs. Millennials were asked if they have changed or considered changing their job during the past six months, how they are feeling at work and what risk factors of burnout they have experienced in their job. In qualitative questions, millennials were asked to tell what kind of leadership increases and decreases their wellbeing at work.

### 3.4 Reliability, Validity and Relevance

Reliability means that if the research is conducted again, the results should be similar. Otherwise, it would be unreliable. Reliability can be impacted by several reasons. It can depend on the respondents' mood when answering or question wording. (Inyang 2017, 8.) The reliability of this research was ensured by writing out the questions as clear as possible. The author enquired a few people to assess whether the questions are understandable. The survey was planned to be intentionally short so that the respondents would answer the whole survey. It included eight questions about the topic and four questions about the demographic information in the end of survey.

Validity refers on how well the research managed to measure the objectives it was planned to measure. The questions should be in line with the objectives of the research. (Inyang 2017, 8.) This was ensured by planning the process precisely and comparing the questions to the topic.

The data needs to be relevant, or otherwise time and resources are wasted. The relevance of questions should be considered, and what information is needed. Questions

about gender or age should not be asked if it is not needed. If there is more efficient way to get the answers from respondents, that should be utilized and not to waste their time. (Clippinger 2018, 22.) The questions were planned according to the scope of research and investigative questions.

## 4 Data and Results

This chapter presents and analyses the data gathered from the quantitative survey.

### 4.1 Background data

The respondents were millennials born between 1981-1996, employed, and living in Europe. The survey gathered many answers quickly, there were 205 respondents altogether. The survey reached 667 people, so the response rate was 31%. The answers were collected just in only two days. The author had planned to keep the survey open for at least two weeks, but that was unnecessary. This implies that the topic has been interesting for many. During the pandemic, there has been increasing amount of discussion about well-being at work

89.3% of the respondents were female and only 8.3% male. 2.4% preferred not to answer to the question about gender. The survey was distributed on social media: Facebook groups, Instagram accounts, the author's personal LinkedIn and Instagram profile, and Whatsapp groups. There were couple of social media groups where the number of women may have been higher than men. This could have influenced on the high level of female respondents but should not be the main reason for that. The difference in the number of answers between men and women is however drastic. Therefore, it needs to be considered that the findings concerning men might be biased.

Table 1. Gender

Female	89.3%
Male	8.3%
Prefer not to answer	2.4%

Most of the respondents were born between 1993-1996 (40%), but there were answers from all age groups. The younger millennials were more active in participating the survey. The figure 7 below presents the percentages of respondents' age.



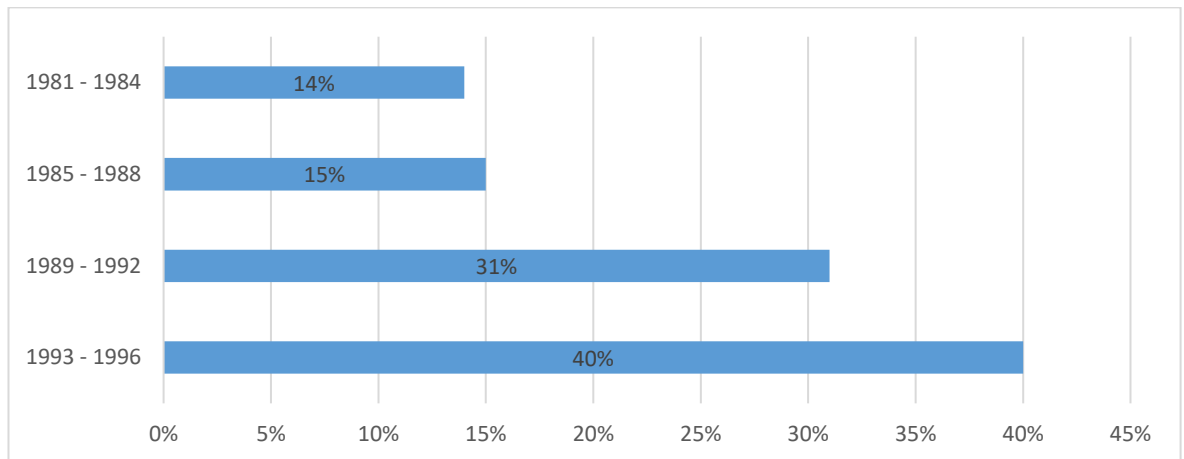


Figure 7. The age of respondents

70% of respondents were living in Finland, and 30% somewhere else in Europe. There were respondents from 23 countries in Europe, Sweden being the second most mentioned (3.9%), and third United Kingdom and Spain (2.9%). Over half of the respondents (53%) worked in an organization with more than 250 employees. 11% were working in an organization with less than 10 employees.

#### 4.2 Millennials' mental wellbeing at work

In the survey, millennials were asked if they had experienced any of the specific aspects listed in the questionnaire at their work. Specific factors were risk factors for burnout. Only 15% answered that they have not experienced any of them in their job. Almost half of the respondents answered that their job is chaotic. The second and third popular answers were "the expectations are unclear" and "lack of communication and support from manager". The figure 8 below presents these answers.

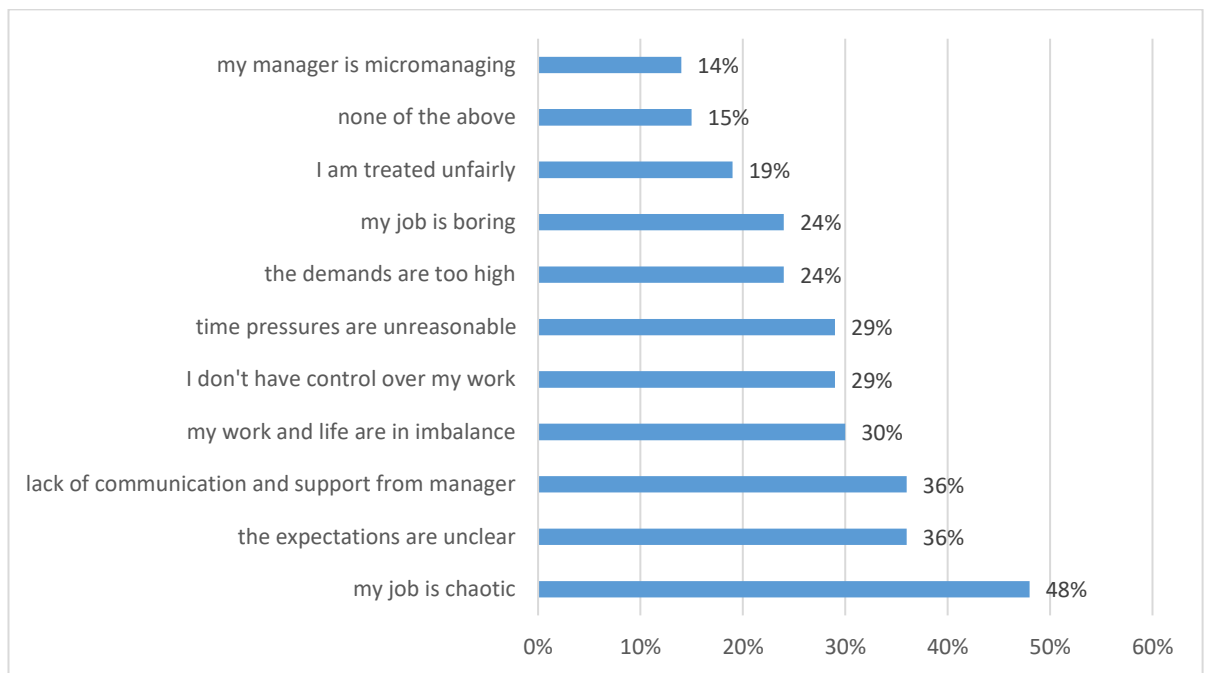


Figure 8. Millennials' experiences regarding risk factors for burnout in their job

The older the millennials were the more they had answered that they have not experienced any of the listed risk factors in their job. From the oldest millennials 29% said that they have not experienced any of the risk factors, when only 9% of the youngest millennials were of the same opinion. The figure 9 below presents the differences between the age groups in this same question.

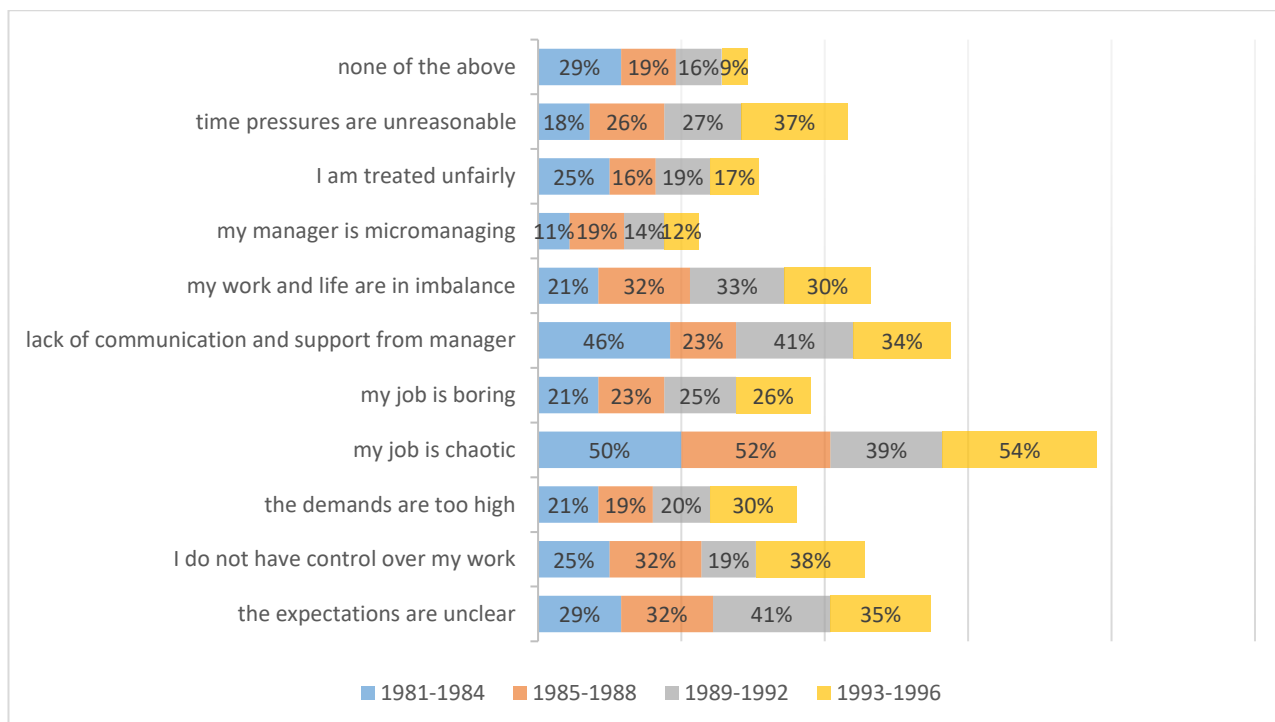


Figure 9. Millennials' experiences in their job – Age group differences

The younger the millennials were, the more they thought there are unreasonable time pressures. The two of the youngest millennial age groups also thought that the expectations are unclear more than older millennials. The youngest millennials felt that they do not have control over their work more than others. The age also impacted on how fairly millennials felt they were treated. The oldest millennials answered the most that they are treated unfairly, and there is lack of communication and support from their manager.

Compared to men, women were more likely to say that the expectations are unclear, their work and life are in imbalance and time pressures are unreasonable. Men in the other hand experienced more unfair treatment, chaos, as well as lack of communication and support from their manager. Women were experiencing these risk factors more, as only 14% of them said they have not experienced any of them. In comparison, from men 35% said they have not experienced any. Figure 10 below represents these results.

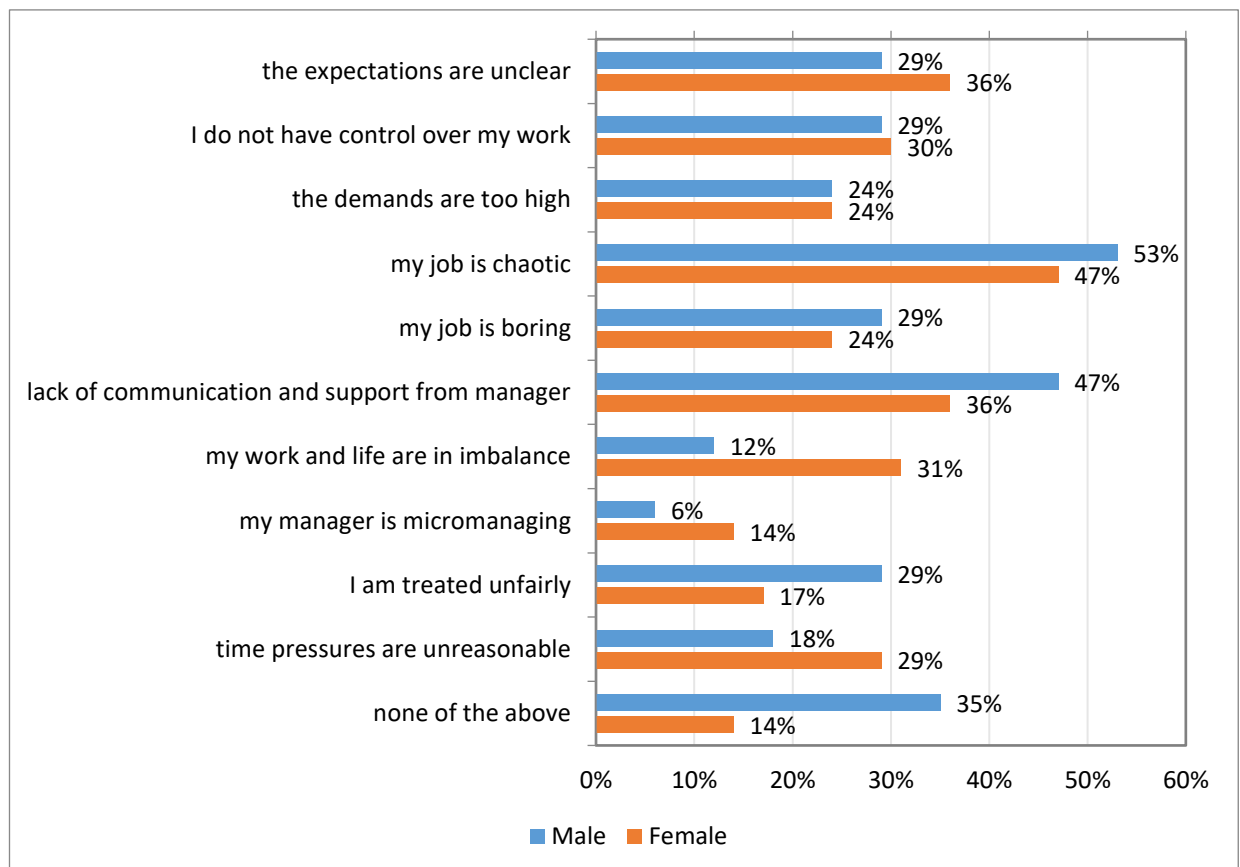


Figure 10. Millennials' experiences in their job – Gender difference

Respondents were also asked to assess their current state of wellbeing at work. Over half were somewhat or very satisfied (56%) with their current wellbeing at work. Most of millennials were somewhat satisfied. Still, almost half were "somewhat unsatisfied" or "very

unsatisfied” (44%). The figure 11 below presents how millennials rated their wellbeing at work.

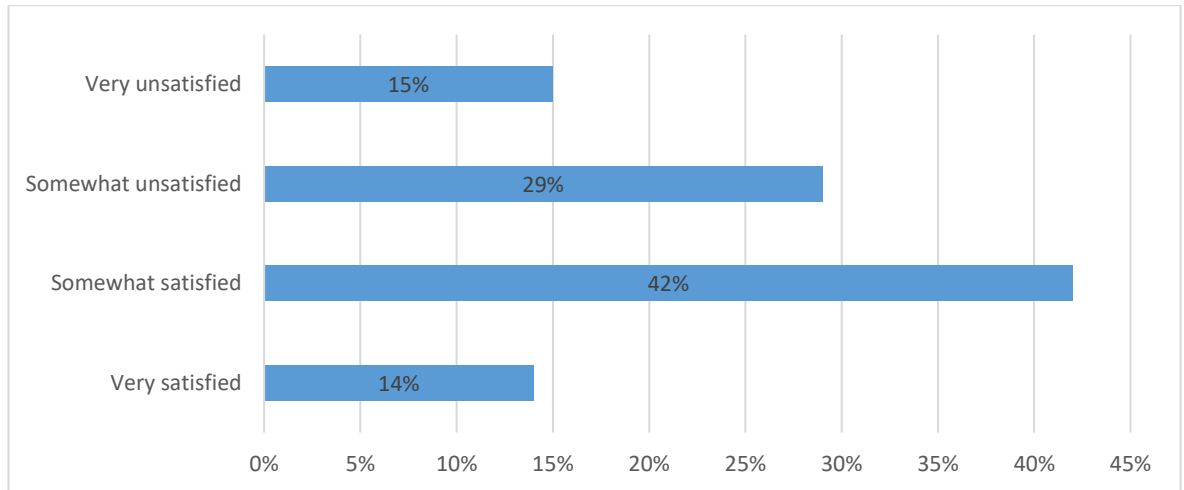


Figure 11. Millennials' wellbeing at work

The oldest millennials had the highest response rate on “very unsatisfied” (25%), but also on “very satisfied” (21%). The youngest millennials felt the least that they are “very satisfied” when comparing to others. On the other hand, they were the ones who were the most “somewhat satisfied”. The second oldest millennials were the most unsatisfied, 48% answered they are somewhat or very unsatisfied. However, this was not a major difference comparing to other age groups. From all the age groups, over half were satisfied to some extent, the percentages varied between 52-58%. The figure 12 below presents the differences between ages.

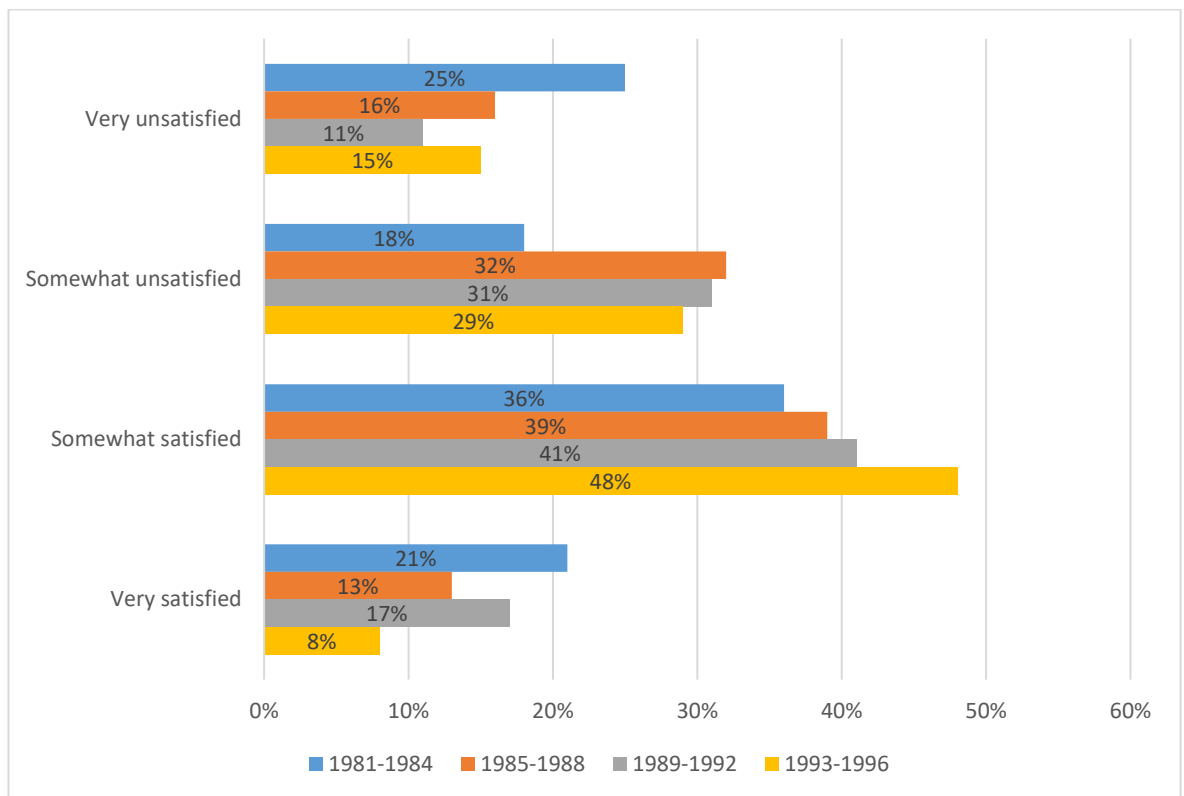


Figure 12. Millennials' wellbeing at work – Age group differences

According to this research, men were more satisfied with their wellbeing at work. 76% of men were somewhat or very satisfied, when from women the same figure was 56%. Overall, men were more satisfied and less unsatisfied with their wellbeing at work compared to women. The differences can be seen below in the figure 13.

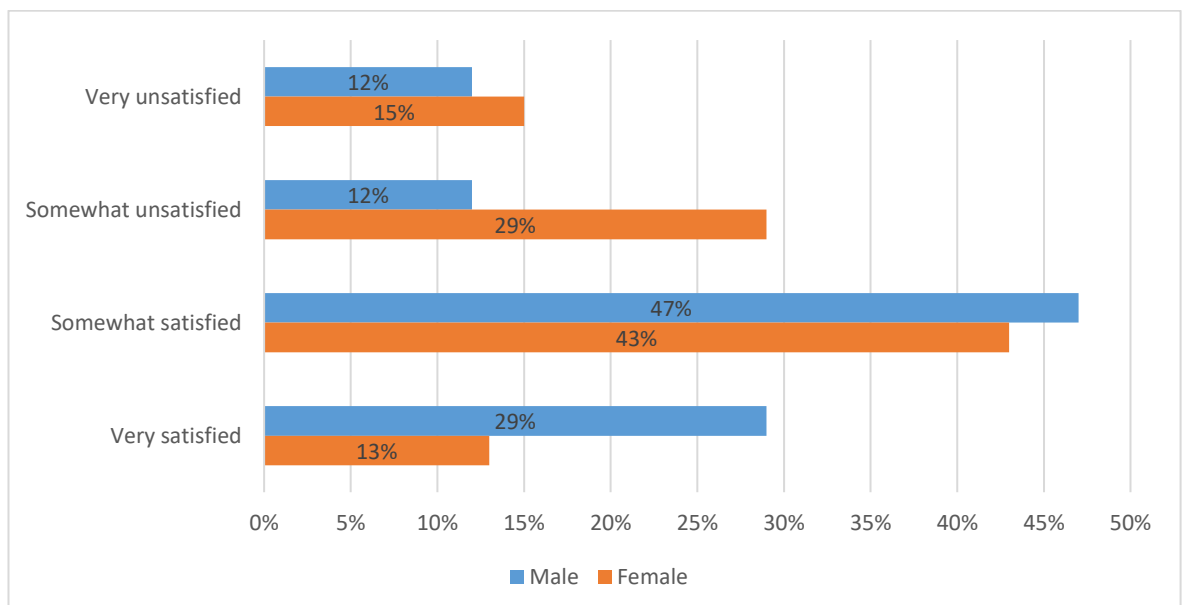


Figure 13. Gender differences in millennials' wellbeing at work

### 4.3 Millennials' views on leadership that increases their wellbeing at organizational level

In the survey, respondents were asked to assess how important certain factors in a job were for their wellbeing at work. As it can be seen from the Figure 14 below, work-life balance, flexibility, and feeling of appreciation were the most important elements. 77.6% said work-life balance is "very important". Flat hierarchy and informal work environment were the least important aspects.

*"Allowing work from home/hybrid working when it's possible"*

*"Allowing us to decide freely whether we wish to work remotely from home or be present at the office"*

*"Understanding that not everyone's priority is work, there needs to be a balance between work and free time. Respect of free time"*

*"Understanding that employees have a life outside the office too."*

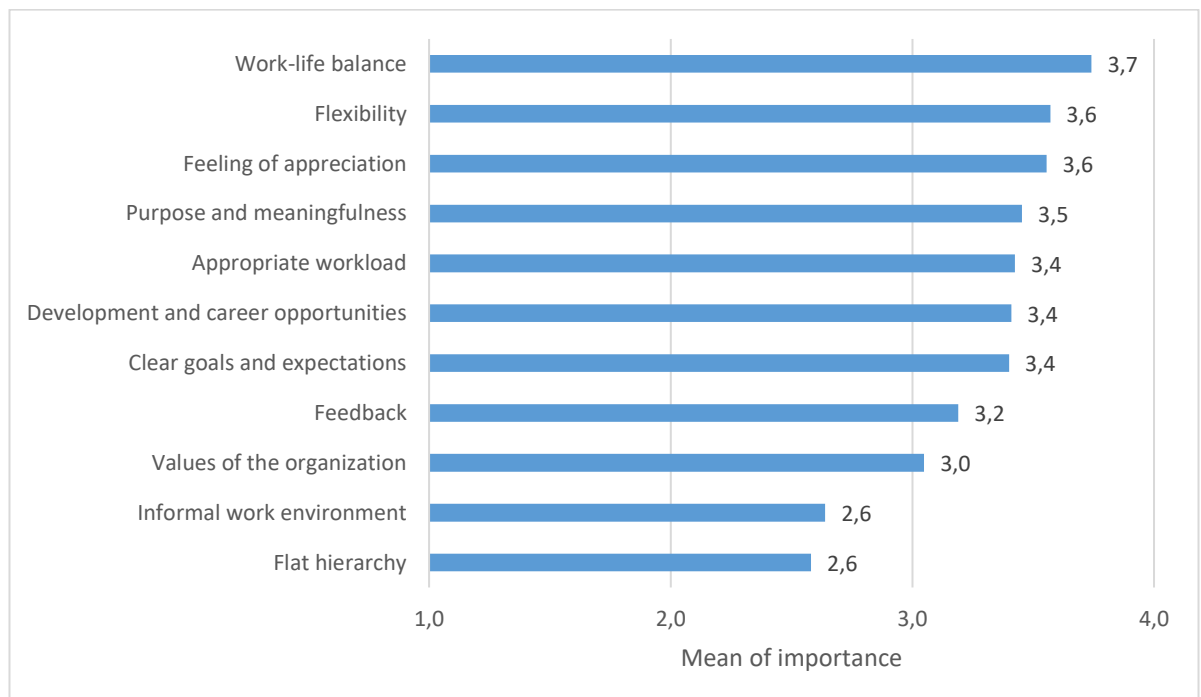


Figure 14. Millennials' opinion about important elements in a job

*“The idea that in the beginning years of the career you must be willing to proof yourself and sacrifice work-life balance to grow professionally” (To the question, what would decrease your wellbeing at work)*

There were not significant differences between older and younger millennials in this question. All age groups thought that work-life balance is the most important. For the two older age groups, work-life balance was a bit more important, than for younger millennials. The younger the millennials were, the more important the feeling of appreciation, appropriate workload, feedback, informal work environment, and purpose and meaningfulness were. Development and career opportunities were also more important for younger millennials than for the oldest millennials. Only 28.6% of the oldest millennials said it is very important. The second youngest millennials had the highest percent on this: 67.2%. From the youngest age group 54.9% answered it is very important.

*“Really helping to grow professionally. Clear communication. Helping when needed but gives responsibility to work by myself. “*

*“Leadership that supports my career growth. Giving chance to attend on projects and giving me tasks that support it practically.”*

Flat hierarchy and informal work environment were the least important things for millennials, but still, over half of the respondents considered them as important or very important (54% informal work environment and 54% flat hierarchy). There was a difference on how important younger and older millennials consider it. For the two younger millennials group it was more important, than for older. Figure 15 below demonstrates these differences between millennials' age groups.

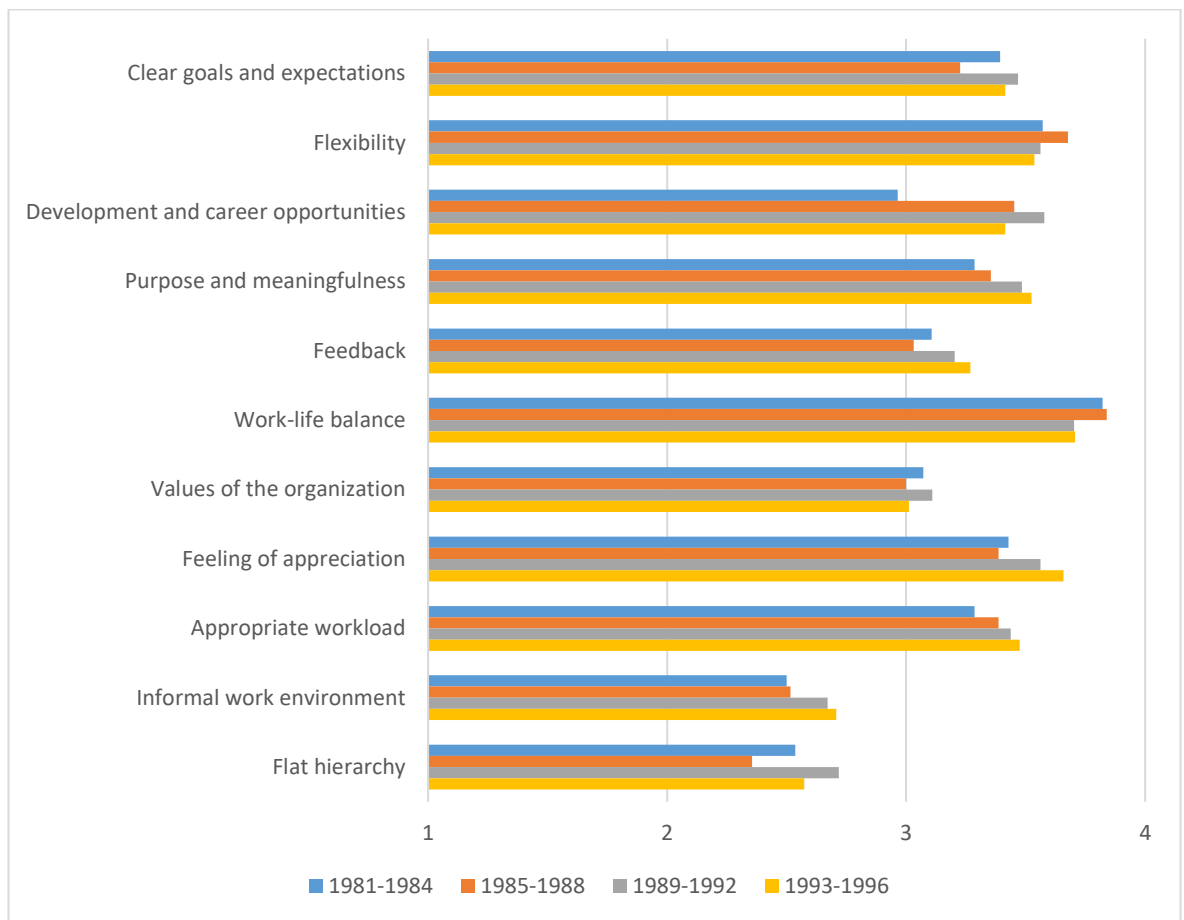


Figure 15. Millennials' opinion about important elements in a job – Age group differences

79.8% of women answered work-life balance is very important, when from men 52.9% were of the same opinion. Other than that, women also appreciated more feedback, values of the organization, feeling of appreciation, appropriate workload, and flat hierarchy than men. From women 54.6% said flat hierarchy is important or very important, when at the same time 35.3% from men agreed so. Also from men, 29.4% said it is "not at all important". For men, flexibility and development and career opportunities were more important than for women. The figure 16 shows these differences.

*"men's world" attitude, not giving same opportunities to women and men."*

*"Current leadership with old men handling employees like secretaries"*

*"Flexibility and treating as a human is super important"*



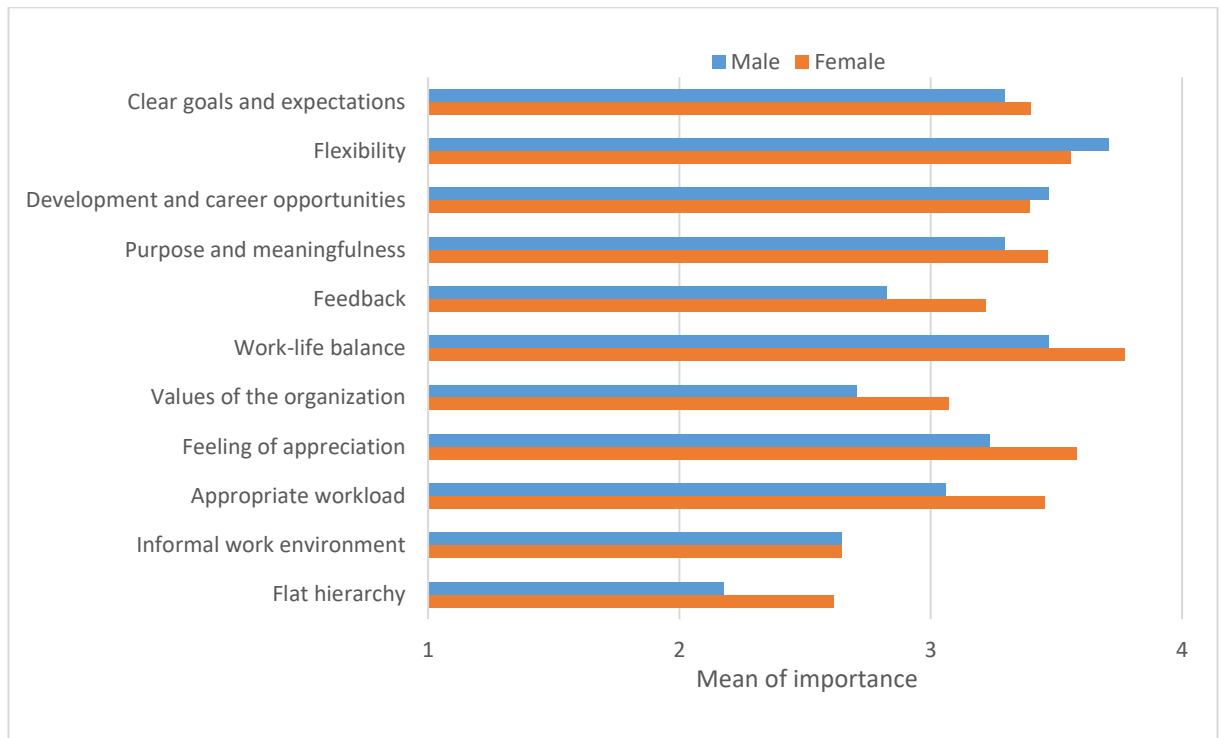


Figure 16. Millennials' opinion about important elements in a job – gender difference

#### 4.4 Millennials' views on leadership that increases their wellbeing at managerial level

*"Fair, reliable, appreciated"*

When asked, which characteristics are the most important for a manager, millennials preferred fairness and equality, clear communication, and reliability the most. It was also important that the manager takes care of employees' wellbeing and recognizes good job performance. These findings are presented in the figure 17 below.

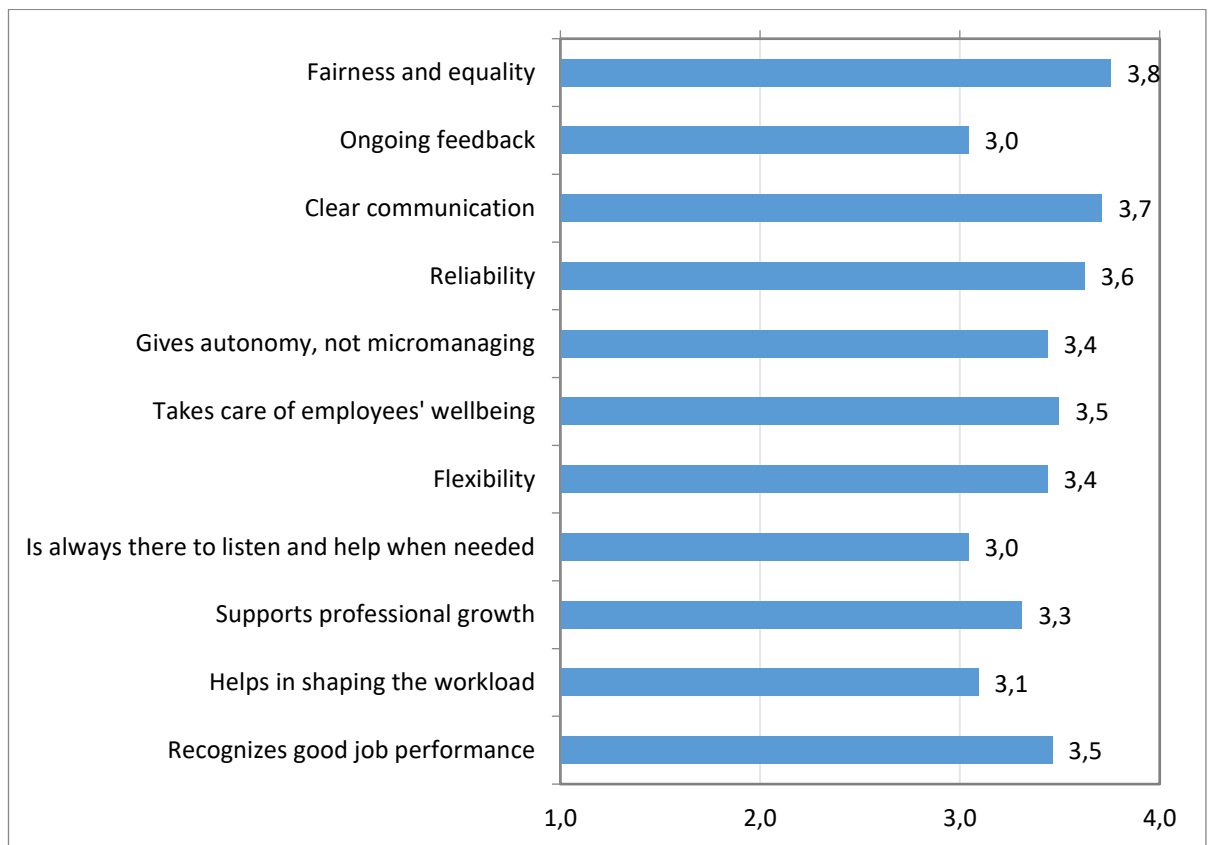


Figure 17. Millennials' opinion about important characteristics in a manager

The least important things for millennials were “ongoing feedback” and “is always there to listen and help when needed”. However, feedback was mentioned many times in the open questions.

*“Although I am extremely happy with my current situation and the leadership at our company, I would like to have a bit more regular feedback. Otherwise everything is rather great.”*

*“More communication, more constantly feedback on work performance.”*

When comparing age groups, it was clear that younger millennials expect more support from their manager. The younger the millennials were, the more important “helps in shaping the workload”, “ongoing feedback”, and “supports professional growth” was. Differences between ages are presented below in the figure 18.

*“I need more guidance in structuring my work. I feel left alone in my tasks. Being recognized from good work performance or well noted critical feedback would make me feel appreciate and trust towards my manager. This would improve my well being a lot.”*

*“More flexibility. My current job is an expert job where we advice the clients, and as a recent graduate I would appreciate more conversation and support in my work and less working alone. However, also my manager has too high workload in my view, and therefore he is hard to get a hold of.”*

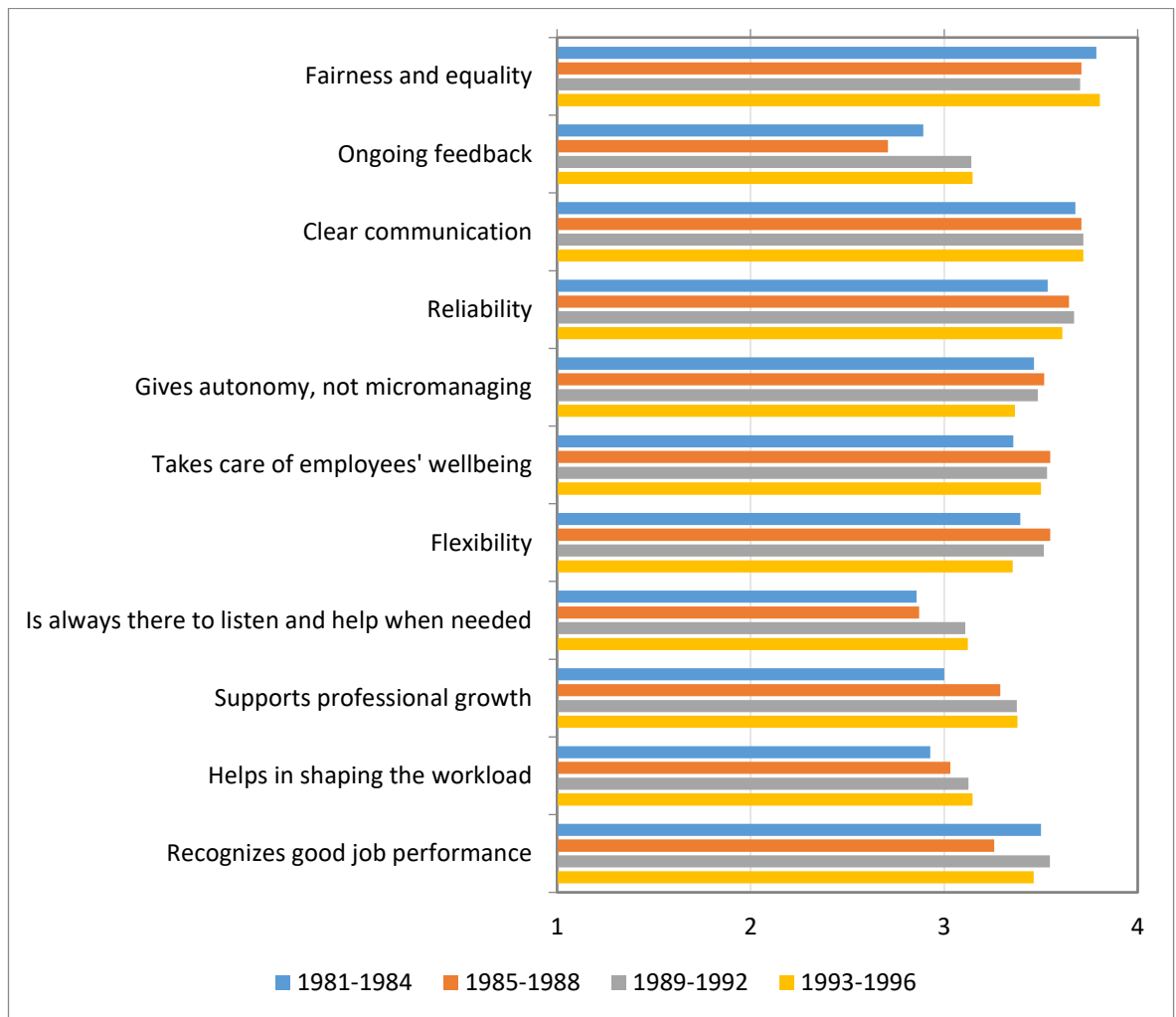


Figure 18. Millennials' opinion about important elements in a manager – age group differences

Women seek more support from their manager, as it was more important for them than for men that manager is always there to listen and help, helps in shaping the workload, takes care of employees' wellbeing and supports professional growth. Men appreciated a bit more fairness and equality, flexibility, and recognizing good job performance. Figure 19 below shows the differences between women and men.

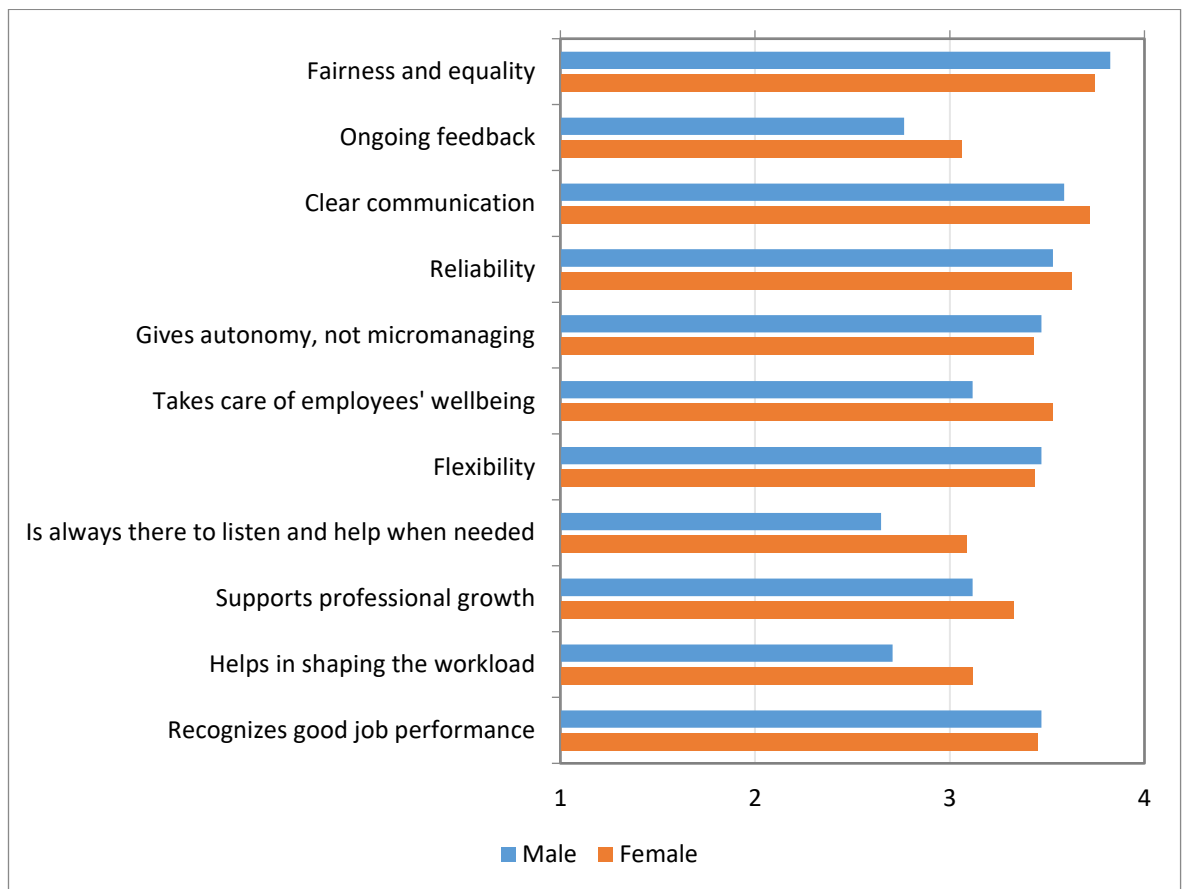


Figure 19. Millennials' opinion about important elements in a manager – gender differences

In a scale 0-10, the average answer on “How well do you think your current manager fills the most important behaviours to you?” was 5.6. The answer did not differ much between women and men. Women were slightly more satisfied (5.7) than men (5.5). Also, between age the answers were quite similar varying between 5.1-5.8. Millennials who were working in a small organization with under 10 employees, were the most satisfied with their manager (6.4). The more there were employees, the more unsatisfied millennials were. In organizations with more than 250 employees, the average answer was 5.3.

#### 4.5 Millennials' views on leadership that decreases their wellbeing

The Great Resignation has been a topic last year in the US (Chugh 2021). It looks like many millennials in Europe are also ready to move to another job. In the survey, they were asked if they have changed their job or considered changing their job during the past six months. Only 20% of all respondents answered “No”. There were not any big differences between the age groups. Women were a little bit more likely to say they have changed or considered changing a job. From women 18% said they have changed a job, and from men 12%, and 20% of women had not considered changing their job, when from

men 29% had not. The figure 20 below presents the millennials' willingness to change their job.

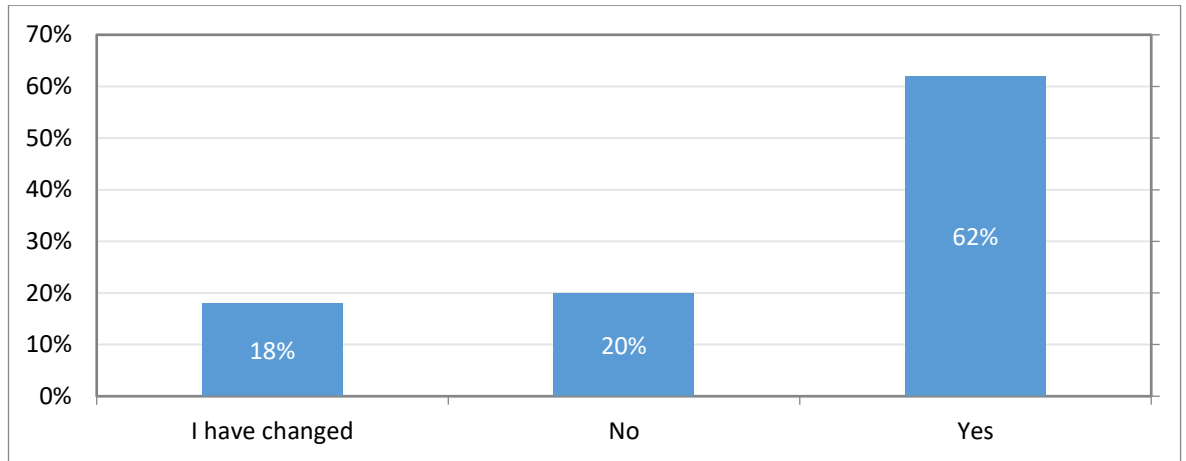


Figure 20. Millennials' considerations to change their job in the past six months

The younger had been the most active in changing their job. From both the second youngest, and youngest millennials, 19% answered they have changed their job during the past six months. The second oldest millennials were most willing to change their job, as 74% of them answered they have considered changing their job. It can be found from the figure 21 below.

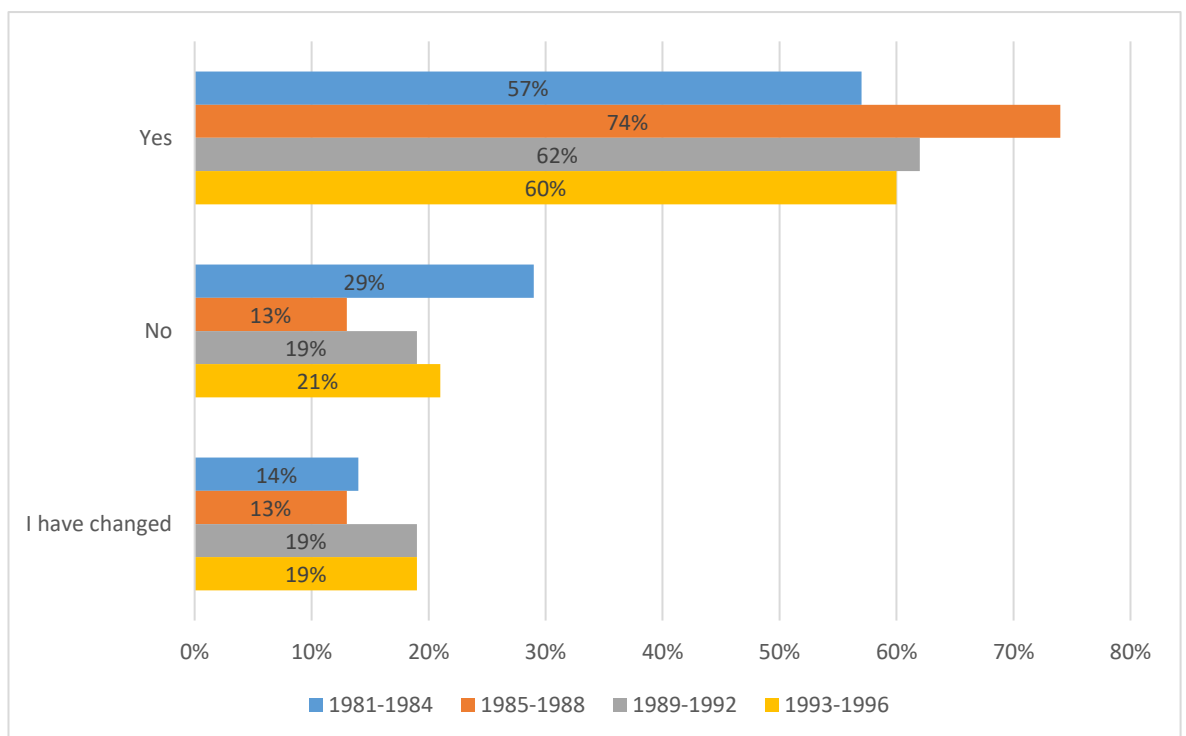


Figure 21. Millennials' considerations to change their job in the past six months – age group difference

In the end of survey, there was an open question about “What kind of leadership would decrease your wellbeing at work?”. The word micromanaging repeated in many answers. Out of 104 answers, 43 included the word micromanaging. Flexibility was also seen as an important element and limiting that would decrease millennials’ wellbeing at work. This is supported by the earlier finding where millennials answered flexibility at work is very important for them.

*“Micromanaging. Inflexibility. Not understanding my life situation, if something really bad happened in private life. Setting unrealistic goals with lack of budget or personnel.”*

*“Micromanaging and impeding on work autonomy.”*

*“Micromanaging mostly or mistrust towards employees”*

*“Micromanagement- been there and got a burnout and was depressed, never again”*

What also emerged in the answers, was unclear expectations, goals, and communication. Clear communication was one of the most important elements in a manager for millennials, and this was repeated in the open answers too. No communication at all, or too much communication were both seen as a decreasing factor for wellbeing at work.

*“Lack of communication would be catastrophic”*

*“No consistent expectations and ways of working”*

*“Unfair, not supporting, no clear goals”*

The relationship with manager was also mentioned couple of times and seen important. Distant manager who does not have time for employees was not preferred. Equality and fairness are expected.

*“Hard to contact, unfair, not available.”*

*“Distant and lacking empathy”*

*“E.g. saying that Health and break excersise application is useless and steals time from real work.”*

*“The current approach, of not having any sort of “relationship” with the employees, no feedback, inhumane answers to all questions and issues that i approach my manager with.”*

*“Putting down, making me feel I’m worth nothing. I’m just a number, not a person.”*

#### **4.6 Millennials’ expectations for managers on how to support their wellbeing at work**

93.2% millennials said it is important or very important that a manager takes care of employees’ wellbeing, so they really expect acts to support their wellbeing. Reliability, fairness, and equality were among the most important elements in a manager for millennials. The need for clear communication and goals, feedback, and support came up in many answers, as well as flexible work which allows better work-life balance.

*“-Having clear goals. If the goals and expectation are unclear or differ between different managerial levels (own manager, their manager etc) it creates confusion and takes the concentration out of the work itself and puts it to the hassle that happens when no-one knows what to do. -Consistent and continuous feedback”*

*“More communication, more constantly feedback on work performance.”*

*“Clearer areas of responsibilities and expectations. Clear time management and making sure there is enough work force”*

## **5 Conclusions**

This chapter will present the key findings of the research. The results for investigative questions are introduced first. Based on the results, recommendations are given for organizations. After that, reliability, validity, and relevance are assessed, further research ideas suggested and last the author's reflection on learning.

### **5.1 Key Findings**

#### **5.1.1 The respondents**

The respondents were mainly women (89.3%). The number of men respondents was surprisingly low. Probably the distribution of the survey reached more women. A reason for this could also be females' higher interest in answering a survey, and especially when it is about wellbeing. Women are twice more likely than men to experience mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety. This risk is even higher for working women. Women can feel they need to work more than men to develop their careers, and at the same time they often take more care of children caregiving. Especially after the pandemic the situation has gone even worse. (Adams-Mason 2022.) Usually, when people have strong opinions about the topic, they take part to the survey. If women are feeling worse, they might have felt they finally have a chance to tell this in this survey.

As the response rate of men was so low, it was considered that their answers were biased to some extent. It is difficult to assess whether the differences between genders were due to different opinions or just because of low response rate of men. For this reason, only answers with significant differences were presented and analysed.

#### **5.1.2 Millennials' mental wellbeing at work**

The first investigative question about millennial's mental wellbeing at work showed that only 15% of respondents answered not having experienced any of the risk factors for burnout at their job. This result supports the perception of millennials as a burnout generation. 84% of millennials have experienced a burnout (Deloitte 2018). Another study found that the mental wellbeing of youngest workers was affected the most. 83% of millennials said the pandemic has had negative impact on their wellbeing. (Oracle 2021, 5.) Based on the results, it seems that many millennials have a feeling of lack of communication and chaos, and they think the expectations are not clear.



Women were more likely to experience the risk factors for burnout than men. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, women may be in a higher risk for depression or anxiety. Women were also less satisfied with their wellbeing at work, and more likely to change their job. Studies show that women have a higher risk to get stressed and burn out at work than men. Specialists say there is not one reason for that, but it is generally agreed that societal structures, workplace inequalities and gender norms play a major role. (Cox 2021.)

Positive result was that over half of the respondents were somewhat or very satisfied with their wellbeing at work. Although only a little less than half were somewhat or very unsatisfied (44%). Interesting finding about wellbeing was that the oldest millennials had the highest response rate on “very unsatisfied” (25%) when they were asked to rate their wellbeing at work. At the same time in another question, 29% of the oldest millennials told that they have not experienced any of the factors linked to burnout in their job. It is unclear, what causes their unsatisfied feeling then. The younger millennials were experiencing more feeling of chaos, unclear expectations, and pressures, but they were more satisfied. Many of the younger millennials are in the beginning of their careers, which can explain why they feel more pressure. They are not that experienced in shaping their workload yet. The older millennials have more experience from working and know better how to cope with stress. Probably the pandemic has affected younger millennials’ feelings too. Starting their careers remotely can be stressful.

### **5.1.3 Millennials’ views on leadership that increases their wellbeing at work**

The second investigative question was about millennials’ thoughts on how leadership could increase their wellbeing. According to the answers it was discovered that millennials appreciate work-life balance, flexibility and clear communication and expectations in their job. In the open question, there were many answers about flexible working conditions which allows better work-life balance. As it was presented in the chapter two, it has been found that millennials appreciate work-life balance and flexibility so much that they might even leave a job or refuse from a job offer if they feel they do not have enough of them. (Mellanen & Mellanen 2020, 235-27). A study by Gallup said that millennials are interested in companies that enables them a better life overall. (Gallup 2016, 31). The results of the survey support these previous findings.

Work-life balance was more important for women than men. Women still take more care of the housework and childcare, so that could be a reason why they also appreciate work-life balance more than men. Women also appreciated more flat hierarchy. For men,

flexibility and development and career opportunities were more important than for women. The author thought women could feel hierarchies more as a barrier for their careers. This could explain why they consider it more important.

The younger the millennials were, the more important the feeling of appreciation, appropriate workload, feedback, informal work environment, and purpose and meaningfulness were. Development and career opportunities were also more important for younger millennials than for the oldest millennials. This is probably because younger millennials are in the beginning in their careers, so they require more support and need to know if they are doing their job right. Furthermore, older millennials have already reached some of their career goals, so development and career opportunities are not that important for them anymore. The older the millennials were, the more they appreciated work-life balance. This result might be depended on their life situation. Probably the older millennials appreciate more work-life balance if they have children and families. In addition, people's values often change over time. The career development may be more important at a younger age. At older age, the importance of work-life balance most probably increases.

According to the survey analysis, millennials require to be treated fairly by their managers, demand clear communication, and want to have a reliable manager. These results are in line with Mellanen & Mellanen findings too. They found that millennials think it is most important that the relationship with their manager is reliable. They also expect their manager to be fair and equal. Third on their list was clear communication about goals and expectations. (Mellanen & Mellanen 2020, 143.) These factors were in different order in this survey's results, but the same three elements got the most answers. The least important characteristics for millennials in a manager were "ongoing feedback" and "is always there to listen and help when needed". This is contradictory, when according to previous studies millennials want to have lot of feedback. However, feedback was mentioned many times in the open questions. According to a Gallup study mentioned earlier, millennials do not ask for feedback. Only 15% of millennials say they regularly ask for feedback. (Gallup 2016, 35-37.) Maybe feedback is so self-evident to millennials that they do not ask for it, and for this reason also in the survey they thought other elements in a manager are more important. The author was thinking if millennials linked the manager's readiness to help and listen to micromanaging as it was not that important. In the open questions, micromanaging was mentioned many times as a factor decreasing wellbeing at work. Sometimes a colleague can provide feedback too, and they can know even better than a manager. This could also affect to the results.

#### **5.1.4 Millennials' views on leadership that decreases their wellbeing at work**

Third investigative question was about millennials' opinions on how leadership could decrease their wellbeing at work. In many answers, unclearness in communication or goals, unfair or mean treating, and micromanaging were mentioned as elements that millennials dislike. It also seems that millennials wish to have a supportive manager. Distant manager who is hard to contact would decrease their wellbeing. High hierarchy would also lower their wellbeing at work.

Millennials were not that satisfied with their managers and 18% had changed their job during the past six months or had considered to change their job (62%). One of the most interesting results in the survey was about engagement and how likely millennials would like to change their job. It was alarming that only 20% answered that they have not thought about changing their job. As it is generally known, millennials do not tend to stay in the same company as long as previous generations. It is four times more likely that millennial changes a job compared to previous generations. (Hastwell 16 July 2021.) However, this result is so dramatic that it tells that they are not engaged into their job. Millennials said in the survey that the expectations are unclear, and they feel lack of communication. The author thought this could be one reason for millennials willingness to change their job, as millennials wish that the expectations and goals are communicated clearly to them. Once they feel they know what is expected, 72% of them are engaged. (Gallup 2016, 34-35.)

#### **5.1.5 Millennials' expectations for managers on how to support their mental wellbeing at work**

Millennials expect clear communication, goals, roles and responsibilities in order to be satisfied with their mental wellbeing at work. They expect to have reliable and fair management. In addition, especially younger millennials expect support from their manager more than older millennials. They wish that manager takes care of employees' wellbeing, supports their professional growth, and gives more feedback. They appreciate development and career opportunities more than older millennials. This could probably be due to their short experience from professional careers. A Gallup study (2016, 33) said millennials prefer employers who want to invest in their career development and wellbeing. The older millennials are currently in their forties and have already reached some of their career goals, so it is not perhaps as important for them anymore.

## 5.2 Recommendations

The answers indicate that managers should focus more on communication. According to millennials' answers, it should be clear and continuous. Millennials are also looking for clear expectations, goals, roles, and responsibilities. Communication is important, as it affects millennials' engagement. Especially younger millennials wished to have more feedback and support from their manager. It was important, that the manager is easy to approach and responses in due course. It is recommended, that managers meet their employees regularly and are available for them. Managers should listen employees with empathy and give regular feedback for them. As purpose and meaningfulness were important for millennials, the organization's strategy should be communicated clearly, so that the employees understand how their input contributes to the implementation of strategy.

In the survey results, it was relatively important for millennials, that their manager cares about their wellbeing. At the same time, many millennials had experienced risk factors for burnout in their job. Organizations should give more value to the wellbeing of employees in their strategies.

According to answers, millennials valued work-life balance highly. Furthermore, flexibility was one of the key elements for millennials, when it came to their wellbeing. Allowing them to choose where and when to do their work makes them more satisfied. Managers should focus more on what millennials get done, instead of how they get their work done. Productivity should be considered more important than working hours.

It is also recommended that the manager discusses with each employee in order to find out what their unique expectations from a manager are.

## 5.3 Reliability, Validity and Relevance

The low score of male answers has influenced to the reliability of this survey. Therefore, their answers were only analysed if there were significant differences compared to women. This issue could have been minimized by distributing the survey on platforms, where it could have reached more men. The survey could have been advertised more in order to get more answers from men, and then do the analysis for example from randomly chosen 100 men and 100 women.

The author received feedback from respondents that the survey was clear and simple. There were also many respondents who answered the survey in the first two days. These facts indicate that the questionnaire was short and easy enough for respondents to fill in.

The self-sampling method leads to a situation where usually individuals who have strong opinions about the topic, answer to the survey (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 303). It was acknowledged that the data is biased to some extent. The high number of answers in the first two days could indicate that the topic was interesting for many, and they were keen to express their opinion. This is also supported by the fact that majority of the respondents were women, and according to studies women are not as satisfied at work as men (Cox 2021).

#### **5.4 Further Research**

According to the survey results, only 15% of millennials had not experienced any of the risk factors for burnout. The numbers are alarming, so that should be researched more. The further research could focus on what causes their feelings.

It could be beneficial to research, how the opinions differ based on educational level and position. Even though in this research respondents from different countries were taken into the survey, the response rate was so low that it was not valuable to compare the results based on the residence country of the respondents. Wider research with more respondents from different countries would be interesting. Further research could extend the research to other generations too. It would be interesting to know how different their opinions are compared to millennials and are there any differences on how they see leadership and their wellbeing at work.

It would be fruitful to research the millennials' engagement to an organization more and discover what is the core reason, why they are leaving an employer as it was discovered that they are moving actively at the moment. Is there something specific at this period of time or is it continuous.

#### **5.5 Reflection on Learning**

The author read Atte Mellanen's and Karoliina Mellanen's book about millennials and got an idea about the thesis topic. It was certain that millennials are part of the topic. The author is a millennial herself and finds it interesting, why millennials are misunderstood at work many times. Wellbeing at work became part of the topic later. It was chosen because during Covid-19 there have been numerous news about mental wellbeing. Remote working has its' pros and cons. According to some studies and articles, millennials seemed to be more tired than others, so it was an interesting topic to start looking at. After the topic was decided, it was easier to plan the overall process. In the beginning the

author felt many times she did not know what she is doing, or she should do. The most important thing was to start from somewhere. Piece by piece the process was going forward.

Working full time and writing thesis was not an easy task to combine, but in the other hand a tight schedule gave the pressure to complete the thesis. During the thesis project, the author learned about academic writing and project management, which will benefit the possible future studies. Time management is surely one of the key learnings too. The author learned that it is important to make a plan before starting the work itself. The plan made it clearer, what theories should be included in the work. After the plan was done, it was easier to start writing. It also gave time frames for the project. Some phases took more time than planned, but others took less. So, all in all, the project was accomplished in the planned time. The topic was interesting for the author and that helped to keep the schedule on time.

One of the key learnings was that many millennials have experienced some of the risk factors for burnout at their work. According to this survey, only 15% had not experienced any. The author did not expect this high numbers. This is an issue which will cause many problems in organizations if it is not taken seriously. The research brought acknowledge to the author about the importance of communication. Communication can have a great impact even to the wellbeing of employees, so it should never be underestimated. The author thinks communication is one of the crucial elements in successful leadership. The author is interested about communication, so it could be interesting to continue studies around the topics of communication and wellbeing at work in the future. Employee engagement interests the author too, and due to the dramatic survey results about engagement, it would be interesting to look at that more in depth.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. The survey

## Millennials' thoughts about leadership and wellbeing at work

Mandatory fields are marked with an asterisk (\*) and must be filled in to complete the form.

This is a survey about the links between leadership and millennials' wellbeing at work. The aim is to find what kind of leadership millennials appreciate, when it comes to their wellbeing. The survey is part of bachelor's thesis for the Degree Programme in International Business in the major specialization of Human Resources Management in the Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences.

The survey will take around 5-10 minutes to complete. All answers are anonymous and the data will be removed after it has been analysed.

For further information or feedback, please contact: [tiina.vaittinen@myy.haaga-helia.fi](mailto:tiina.vaittinen@myy.haaga-helia.fi)

Your answer is truly appreciated, thank you!

### How important are these to your wellbeing at work? \*

	Not at all im- portant	Somewhat im- portant	Impor- tant	Very impor- tant
Clear goals and expectations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Flexibility	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Development and career opportuni- ties	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Purpose and meaningfulness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feedback	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Work-life balance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Values of the organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Not at all im- portant	Somewhat im- portant	Impor- tant	Very impor- tant
Feeling of appreciation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Appropriate workload	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Informal work environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Flat hierarchy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## 2. How important are these behaviors for a manager? \*

	Not at all im- portant	Somewhat im- portant	Impor- tant	Very impor- tant
Fairness and equality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ongoing feedback	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clear communication	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reliability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gives autonomy, not micromanaging	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Takes care of employees' wellbeing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Flexibility	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is always there to listen and help when needed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Supports professional growth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helps in shaping the workload	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recognizes good job performance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



**3. How well do you think your current manager fills the most important behaviors to you? \***

Not at all

Completely



**4. Have you considered changing your job during past 6 months? \***

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I have changed

**5. In your current job, do you think \***

- ☐ the expectations are unclear?
- ☐ you don't have control over your work?
- ☐ the demands are too high?
- ☐ your job is chaotic?
- ☐ your job is boring?
- ☐ there is lack of communication and support from manager?
- ☐ your work and life are in imbalance?
- ☐ your manager is micromanaging?
- ☐ you are treated unfairly?
- ☐ time pressures are unreasonable?
- ☐ none of the above

**6. How satisfied are you with your wellbeing at work at the moment? \***

- ☐ Very unsatisfied
- ☐ Somewhat unsatisfied
- ☐ Somewhat satisfied

☒ Very satisfied

**7. What kind of leadership would improve your wellbeing at work?**

**8. What kind of leadership would decrease your wellbeing at work?**

**9. Gender \***

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

**10. Year of birth \***

- ☐ 1981 - 1984
- ☐ 1985 - 1988
- ☐ 1989 - 1992
- ☐ 1993 - 1996

**11. Where do you live? \***

**12. How many employees are there in the organization you are working? \***

- ☐ <10
- ☐ 10-49
- ☐ 50-249
- ☐ >250