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CSR and Employee Well-Being in Sustainable Human Resource Management

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***Abstract*— This report analyses the role of corporate social responsibility in the formation and development of human capital in organizations, emphasizing employee well-being as a fundamental and mandatory stage in achieving sustainable organizational development. The analysis examines contemporary approaches through which companies integrate mental health policies, work-life balance and employee engagement within their CSR strategies. On this basis, it is argued that employee well-being, in addition to being part of corporate social responsibility, is also becoming an indispensable part of the strategic resource of the business organization for increasing productivity, innovation potential and long-term competitiveness of organizations.**

Keywords*— *Corporate social responsibility; well-being, sustainable HRM.

I. Introduction

In the extremely complex business environment in which business companies operate, with the complicated geopolitical situation and its economic consequences, the ability to form and retain a quality team is becoming increasingly important as one of the main prerequisites for the competitiveness of companies. In recent years, companies have been paying special attention and developing comprehensive strategic policies related to the management of intangible assets and, in particular, human capital. At the same time, CSR is also undergoing evolutionary development - from a concept focused mainly on external responsibility and society as a whole, the scope is expanding and now largely covers internal stakeholders. In this sense, it can be said that a transformation is being observed from social responsibility to sustainable human resources management. Despite the undeniable imposition of the concept of CSR, employee well-being, in turn, often remains only at the level of good-sounding formulations in CSR strategies, without, however, finding practical application and being truly integrated into HRM. In many organizations, employee well-being policies are linked to the broader concept of CSR, but many of them are not reflected in the daily activities of HR. This leads to a discrepancy between stated organizational priorities and actual practices. In most cases, if there is one at all, well-being is perceived as a form of complementary initiative with a non-binding nature, and it is not seen as a real mechanism for human resources management at all. As a result, there is very little interaction and integration between CSR and HRM, which weakens the ability of organizations to develop employee well-being as one of the important factors for achieving sustainable development and long-term competitiveness. In this sense, this report explores and analyses the way in which CSR integrates the concept of well-being, including the links between implemented policies and their real results. On this basis, working mechanisms for impact and a stronger connection between CSR and well-being have been identified.

II. Literature review

In the contemporary scientific literature, employee well-being is considered as one of the main elements in human resource management and at the same time as an essential component of the overall concept of corporate social responsibility. There is an increasingly clear understanding that organizations cannot achieve sustainable development without targeted policies and practices aimed at internal stakeholders, on whom they mainly rely to achieve competitiveness and sustainability. However, a number of studies question the effectiveness of existing approaches, emphasizing the discrepancy between formulated strategies and their actual implementation, as well as the need for a more in-depth study of the interrelationships through which organizational practices affect employee well-being.

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Saleh, Koburtay and Staniszewska [1] reveal that the effectiveness of work-life balance practices depends to a large extent on the coherence between formulated policies and the actual behavior of managers. When there is a discrepancy, these practices may be perceived not as a resource but as an additional requirement, which directly limits their impact on employee well-being. At this point Odame et al. [2] comment that employee well-being initiatives are often perceived as superficial when they do not reflect their real needs. In these cases, employees believe that they are used as a tool for organizational image rather than for their own benefit. This observation actually highlights the importance of trust, authenticity and active employee involvement to achieve real impact.

These observations raise the question of why such a discrepancy exists between formulated policies and actual results. According to Messersmith [3], most of the links between HR practices and employee well-being are built on limited models that focus mainly on social exchange and organizational effectiveness. In reality, such an approach significantly limits the concept of well-being to indicators such as satisfaction and engagement and does not take into account its deeper dimensions. In this sense, the author argues for the need for a reorientation towards approaches that consider well-being through the logic of autonomy, competence and social connectedness.

From this perspective, the need to analyse the mechanisms through which management practices affect employee well-being is increasingly emerging. Mou, Rasoolimanesh, and Chuah [4] believe that the relationship between corporate social responsibility and employee well-being is not direct, but is realized through intermediate mechanisms, such as the perception of organizational justice. According to scientists, this means that the effects of CSR on employees depend to a significant extent on the way in which organizational policies are transformed from strategic documents into actual management practices.

In addition to the perception of justice, a number of studies identify other organizational factors that mediate this relationship. Dutta, Poyil, and Vedak [5] prove that organizational support is a significant link between management practices and employee well-being, enhancing the effect of commitment and flexible working arrangements on their results.

Giovanis, Özdamar and Ozdamar [6] comment that the effects on employee well-being depend heavily on the availability of organizational resources such as managerial support, autonomy and work-life balance. This observation also highlights the role and importance of the actual implementation of management practices.

Along with the favourable opportunities, the scientific literature also outlines a number of negative processes that can undermine employee well-being. Kanwal et al. [7] draw attention to the fact that unfavourable organizational conditions can form a perception of injustice, which in turn leads to behavioural reactions such as silence and ultimately has a negative impact on employee well-being.

In addition to organizational factors, individual psychological perceptions also play a significant role. Diao et al. [8] emphasize that the impact of management practices on employee well-being is realized through various mechanisms, such as a sense of meaning in work, which emphasizes the role of subjective perception in the formation of well-being.

Xerri and Rafferty [9] conclude that employee well-being is influenced not only by formal management practices, but also by the accumulation of internal psychological resources, such as psychological capital. According to scientists, it is this capital that plays a key role in dealing with uncertainty and changes in the organizational environment.

At the same time, well-being is not formed solely through formal policies and structures. Charki et al. [10] state that employee well-being is formed initially through formal organizational practices, but subsequently - also through informal interactions, such as knowledge sharing and social support within the organizational environment.

The modern organizational environment further complicates these processes, especially in the context of increased digitalization. Recent discourse also confirm that artificial intelligence is rapidly transforming complex operational systems, suggesting that similar changes in work organization increasingly affect employee well-being and managerial practices [21]. Pham and Pham [11] comment that employee well-being is extremely influenced by emerging factors related to technological changes. They believe that organizational support should be considered as a tool for mitigating the negative effects on employees. In this sense, well-being can be commented on as a strategic opportunity for organizations in conditions of dynamic digital transformation [20]. A similar conclusion is reached by Nguyen et al. [12], who also believe that employee well-being is also formed in the context of interaction with new technological solutions. According to them, the organizational environment and employee perceptions are extremely important for achieving positive psychological outcomes. In turn, Mansuroğlu and Smith [13] state that the digitalization of the work environment is associated with new sources of stress, such as overload and blurring of the boundaries between work and personal life. This in turn has a very negative impact on employee well-being and places additional demands on organizational practices. According to Angelova [14,15], the use of artificial intelligence in Human Resource Management creates both opportunities for increasing objectivity, but also risks related to perceptions of fairness and protection of employee rights, which requires a balanced approach between technological solutions and human judgment.

A study by Sedaghati et al. [16] proves that digital forms of support can contribute to improving the emotional well-being of employees by reducing barriers to access to help and complementing traditional organizational mechanisms. Ultimately, the accumulated empirical evidence allows employee well-being to be considered on the one hand as an outcome, but on the other hand – as a factor with direct significance for organizational results.

The idea that well-being has the potential to become a strategic value for the organization is also shared by Gao and Gu [17], who studied the relationship between leadership behaviour and employee creativity. They concluded that leadership behaviour oriented towards others (stewardship) has a positive effect on employee well-being, which in turn leads to higher creativity. Therefore, well-being has a direct role in organizational results and from this point of view can be commented on as a strategic element [19]. Poonam and Sengupta [18] believe that employee well-being has a direct positive relationship with their performance, which confirms its role as a factor of real importance for organizational effectiveness.

As a result of the analysis of the scientific literature, we can conclude that employee well-being is not an automatic result of the implementation of corporate policies. Rather, it is perceived as a complex process due to the interaction between organizational practices, individual perceptions and the specific characteristics of the internal and external environment. The presence of intermediate mechanisms, such as perception of justice, organizational support and meaning in work, emphasizes the need for deeper integration between CSR and human resource management. From this perspective, employee well-being is established as part of the strategic development of HRM, which has a direct impact on organizational efficiency and competitiveness.

III. Methodology

The main objective of this report is to examine the extent to which organizations integrate employee well-being practices within the broader concept of CSR, and how this impacts organizational performance.

To achieve this objective, the following two hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Organizations that have formal CSR policies are more likely to implement employee well-being practices.

H2: Higher levels of actual implementation of employee well-being practices are positively related to perceived organizational performance.

To test the hypotheses defined above, we conducted a a survey using purposive sampling. The survey was distributed online and sent to 95 pre-selected business organizations. The purpose of this pre-selection was to ensure that at least from public information, these organizations had some policies and/ or initiatives related to CSR and ESG, and to ensure the inclusion of organizations from different economic sectors. At the same time, additional requirements for business companies were to develop part of their activities in Bulgaria, to have no less than 10 employees. It is important to emphasize that the questionnaire was not anonymous, but we required a clear indication of the name of the business organization itself and the position of the respondent, and for this goal the potential respondents were duly informed, including for what purpose this data was collected. The logical framework of the preliminary selection was to achieve expertise, as well as to comply with our preliminary requirements, which were that one organization should be represented by only one questionnaire.

The survey was conducted during the period February - March 2026, with the longer period for online questionnaire of information gathering being associated with more efforts by the team to reach representatives of companies from the target sample. 53 organizations participated in the final sample of the survey - i.e. we received this number completed questionnaires.

The questionnaire included 5 main blocks of questions, grouped as follows: Block 1: Organization profile and respondent profile; Block 2: CSR internal orientation; Block 3: Employee well-being practices; Block 4 - Actual implementation of CSR and well-being practices; Block 5 - Perceived effects of the implementation of CSR and well-being practices.

The collected data were processed through descriptive statistics and comparative analysis, allowing for a summary of the characteristics of the sample and the degree of implementation of the practices under consideration. To test the formulated hypotheses, a correlation analysis was applied, aimed at establishing the relationships between the level of integration of employee well-being practices and perceived organizational outcomes.

IV. Results

As can be seen from Table 1, the structure of the organizations participating in the study is relatively balanced, especially in terms of size. Medium-sized organizations have the largest representation (nearly 40%), followed by small ones, with a share of 34%, and large ones are the least represented – with a share of about 26%. In terms of the economic sector in which they operate, the largest share is held by companies from the service sector (32.1%), followed by ICT (20.8%), Manufacturing (18.9%), Trade (17.0%). In terms of whether there is an HRM unit or department within the business organization, 73.6% state that their organization has a separate such internal structure and only 26.4% answer negatively. This result is actually logical, considering the size of the surveyed organizations and the purposeful lack of micro-firms in this sample. The focus of the present study, related to the presence of a CSR policy, is interesting – about half (45.3%) state that the organization they represent has a developed formal CSR policy. On the other hand, a relatively high percentage – 32.1% state that they have only partially formalized such a policy, and the rest (22.6%) comment that such a policy is informal or they are not aware of its existence at all. When analyzing the answers, the profile of the respondents themselves must also be considered: nearly 40% of them are representatives of the middle management level, followed by HR experts or HR managers (nearly 36%), with the smallest share being representatives of the top management or direct owners of the surveyed companies. The resulting profile, both at the organizational level and at the personal level, will allow the collected information to be reliable and valid.

Table 1. Profile of participating organisations

Characteristic	Category	Number of organizations	Share (%)
Company size	Small (10 – 49 employees)	18	34.0
	Medium (50 – 249 employees)	21	39.6
	Large (250 + employees)	14	26.4
Sector	Services	17	32.1
	ICT	11	20.8
	Manufacturing	10	18.9
	Trade	9	17.0
	Other	6	11.3
HR function	Yes	39	73.6
	No	14	26.4
CSR policies	Formalized	24	45.3
	Partially formalized	17	32.1
	Informal / none	12	22.6
Respondent position	HR specialists/ HR managers	19	35.8
	Middle management	21	39.6
	Senior management / owners	13	24.5

Further analysis of the results shows some differences between organizations according to the sector in which they operate. There is a tendency for companies in the service and information technology sectors to report a higher level of implementation of practices related to employee well-being. To explore potential sector differences, average implementation scores for employee well-being practices were calculated for each sector (Table 2).

Table 2. Sector differences in employee well-being implementation

Sector	Main implementation score
Services	4.1
ICT	4.3
Manufacturing	3.8
Trade	3.5
Other	3.7

A possible explanation for this is the higher dependence of these organizations on human capital, as well as the increased competition for attracting and retaining qualified personnel. On the other hand, in manufacturing enterprises and organizations in the field of trade, such practices appear to be less developed or more limitedly integrated. Although the current analysis does not aim to conduct a detailed sectoral comparison, the observed differences outline an interesting direction for future research.

The next step in the analysis is to test the first hypothesis, examining the relationship between the presence of formalized CSR policies and the implementation of employee well-being practices.

In order to reach a reasoned conclusion regarding the first hypothesis, the respondents were asked the following several questions, which are now considered in the analysis. First, there is the closed question "Does your organization have formalized CSR policies?", with the possible answers to this question being "Yes – formalized"; "Partially formalized" and "Informal / none". Subsequently, the respondents were asked to respond on a 5-point Likert scale to the following statements:

- Our organization actively supports employees' mental well-being
- Work-life balance is encouraged and supported
- Flexible work arrangements are implemented in practice
- Employee engagement initiatives are regularly applied
- Managers actively support employee well-being
- There are effective channels for employee feedback

Based on the statements, we calculated the average value, with the range between 1.0 – 2.5 – being low; 2.6 – 3.7 is average, and between 3.8 and 5.0 is high. That is, the degree of implementation of practices related to employee well-being was measured by an aggregate indicator formed on the basis of the respondents' answers to several statements, rated on a five-point Likert scale. On this basis, the organizations were classified into three groups – with a low, medium and high level of implementation of the considered practices. As a result, the data are presented in Table. 3.

Table 3. CSR policies and implementation of employee well-being practices

CSR policies	Low implementa-tion	Medium Implementa-tion	High implementa-tion
Formalized (24)	3	8	13
Partially formalized (17)	5	9	3
Informal / none (12)	7	4	1

The data presented in Table 3 show a clear difference between business organizations, depending on the degree of formalization of CSR policies. Organizations with formalized CSR policies have the highest share of actual implementation of employee well-being practices, with more than half of them falling into the group with a high level of implementation. This can be interpreted as an indication that the formalization of policies creates clearer conditions and leads in practice to a commitment on the part of management for their subsequent practical implementation. That is, once they are written, adopted and announced, management, in turn, has a much greater commitment to implement them in practice.

In contrast, organizations without formalized or informal CSR policies have low levels of implementation of such practices, which suggests that in the absence of a structured policy, initiatives related to employee well-being remain rather episodic and without systematicity. In the group with partially formalized policies, an intermediate position is observed, with medium levels of implementation dominating. This fact can be explained by the incomplete integration of these policies into management practices.

The observed trend confirms that the degree of formalization of CSR policies is related first of all to their presence, and subsequently - to the commitment and depth of their actual implementation. In this sense, it can be assumed that formalized CSR policies function more as a mechanism for transforming strategic intentions into specific management actions aimed at employee well-being. On this basis, hypothesis H1 can be confirmed.

Based on the results obtained, it can be concluded that the presence of formalized CSR policies is a significantly important factor for the actual implementation of practices aimed at employee well-being. Organizations with a higher degree of formalization demonstrate significantly more active and systematic implementation of such practices, which allows hypothesis H1 to be confirmed.

To explore Hypothesis 2, which focuses on the relationship between the extent of implementation of well-being practices and perceived organizational outcomes. The extent of perceived organizational outcomes was measured by aggregating respondents' responses to several statements related to engagement, employee retention, productivity, and organizational environment (Table 4). The statements were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree, 5 – strongly agree).

Table 4. Indicators for perceived organizational performance

Element	Statements
Employee engagement	Employees in our organization demonstrate a high level of engagement in their work. Employees are willing to go beyond their formal job responsibilities.
Employee retention	Employee turnover in our organization is relatively low. The organization is successful in retaining key talent.
Productivity and efficiency	Employees demonstrate high levels of productivity in their daily work. Work processes are carried out efficiently and with minimal disruptions.
Organizational climate	The working environment in the organization is positive and supportive. There is a high level of trust between employees and management.
Innovation and development	Employees actively contribute ideas for improvement and innovation. The organization encourages creativity and experimentation.
Overall performance	Overall, our organization performs effectively in achieving its objectives.

To test the relationship between the implementation of employee well-being practices and organizational performance, a correlation analysis was conducted. The results obtained show a moderately strong positive relationship between the two variables ($r = 0.62$).

This means that organizations that implement practices aimed at employee well-being to a higher extent also report better organizational performance. The relationship is strong enough to assume that such practices are not only social in nature, but also create real added value for organizations.

Based on the results obtained, a positive relationship can be established between the level of implementation of practices related to employee well-being and perceived organizational performance. The observed relationship shows that organizations with a higher level of implementation of such practices report better results. This allows us to assume that hypothesis H2 is confirmed.

The results of the study show that employee well-being practices can hardly be considered as complementary or peripheral initiatives. On the contrary, they are gradually becoming part of the toolkit of modern human resource management. In practical terms, organizations should focus their efforts on measures that have a direct impact on the daily experience of employees – maintaining a balance between work and personal life, active feedback mechanisms, flexible forms of work organization and support for mental well-being. The findings indicate that some practices may play a more noticeable role than others. Support for mental well-being, flexibility in work arrangements and opportunities for regular feedback seem particularly relevant, as they shape employees' perceptions of support and contribute to stronger engagement. The real effect of such policies depends not so much on their formal presence, but on the degree to which they become part of organizational practice.

Along with the results obtained, it is necessary to consider some limitations of the present study. First of all, the sample used is relatively limited in size and was formed through purposeful selection, which places certain limitations on the possibility of a broader generalization of the results. In addition, the study is mainly aimed at organizations where there are at least indications of the presence of initiatives or policies related to corporate social responsibility. This does not allow for a clearer comparison with organizations where such practices are absent. Additionally, some of the analyzed indicators are based on subjective assessments of the respondents, and not on objective organizational indicators such as turnover, absences, financial results or other measurable indicators. Future studies could expand the scope of the analysis through larger samples, inclusion of control groups and use of additional objective indicators.

V. Conclusion

This report aimed to examine the extent to which organizations integrate employee well-being practices within a more general and targeted policy related to corporate social responsibility, as well as to assess their impact on organizational performance. In the context of the ever-increasing role and importance of intangible resources in achieving sustainable development, this issue is becoming increasingly relevant and the management of modern business organizations is "forced" to pay more and more attention.

The results of the study allow us to draw several main conclusions. First of all, we can comment that there is a clear relationship between the presence of formalized CSR policies and the degree of implementation of employee well-being practices. Organizations that have clearly defined policies demonstrate a significantly higher level of commitment to their implementation and, therefore, the actual implementation of such practices.

Secondly, the results show a positive relationship between the degree of implementation of employee well-being practices and perceived organizational performance. This leads to the conclusion that organizations that invest purposefully in the well-being of their employees report better results in terms of engagement, productivity and overall effectiveness.

The results obtained allow for a slightly broader interpretation of the role of employee well-being in the overall policy of modern organizations. The data show that employee well-being has the potential to become a real management tool through which organizations can influence their results.

At the same time, it should be noted that the opportunities for implementing such practices are not the same in different organizations. Small enterprises often have limited resources and can therefore rely on more flexible and low-budget solutions, such as feedback, working time organization or informal support mechanisms. Medium-sized enterprises have the opportunity to gradually integrate such initiatives into more structured human resource management policies. In large organizations, there are already prerequisites for building more comprehensive systems, including specialized employee support programs and integrating well-being indicators into the broader organizational strategy.

In recent years, a clear transformation has been observed - from the perception of CSR as an externally oriented activity to something much more complex and equally focused on internal stakeholders - in particular human resource management. This places employee well-being in the position of a strategic tool that is able to support the sustainable development of the company and contribute to increasing its competitiveness and long-term effectiveness.

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