

UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA  
SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

**THE POST-VACATION WORK EXPERIENCE OF EMPLOYEES –  
THE ROLE OF PERCEIVED VACATION DESERVINGNESS**

Ljubljana, December 2023

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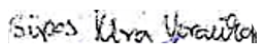
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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

**BCG** – Boston Consulting Group  
**EU** – European Union  
**H&W** – Health and Well-Being  
**HR** – Human Resources  
**OSHA** – Occupational Safety and Health Administration  
**PTO** – Paid Time Off

# 1 INTRODUCTION

"Without rest, a man cannot work; without work, the rest does not give you any benefit."  
(Abkhasian Proverb)

Fortunate are the individuals, who find passion in their work and love their job, but even more so are the ones, who can spend their leisure time according to their own desires. In today's fast-paced and highly competitive work environment, employees face increasing stress and burnout, which can have negative consequences for their mental and physical health, as well as their work performance (Kühnel & Sonnentag, 2011). When using the term burnout, it means the person's state of emotional, mental and physical exhaustion, which is caused by stress and /or long-term emotional strain, and which the individual cannot resolve in the usual way (Kollár, 2014). The notion of burnout has already been researched by many authors and among the problems still faced today is "burnout in the workplace". This includes, for example, the specifics of a given job, like overload; the characteristics of the occupation, and the specifics of an organization, such as organizational culture, organizational structure, operating rules, hiring, firing, or downsizing (Kovács, 2006). In order to address these issues, one potential solution is to take a vacation. It is important to highlight the value of work and leisure time, emphasizing the importance of finding fulfillment in both areas of life. By recognizing the importance of leisure time and the ability to use it personally meaningfully, individuals are better equipped to maintain a healthy work-life balance and achieve their goals both personally and professionally. However, the impact of vacations on employees can vary from person to person and depend on many factors, such as the duration of the vacation, the type of activities performed, and the individuals' perception of whether they deserve the vacation (De Bloom et al., 2011).

Tan and Li (2021) also talk about it in their article that among the purposes of paid leave, vacation has an important role. If employees do not use their paid days off for vacation, they miss out on the benefits of vacation in several ways, such as reducing work-related stress, recovering from work exhaustion, or maintaining workers' health and well-being (H&W - this acronym will often be used as an abbreviation in the rest of the thesis). Although these effects on employees are usually interim, the memories of the vacation can improve the well-being of employees from time to time. Even shorter vacations in a working year contribute to the preservation of H&W (De Bloom et al., 2011). Besides researchers have concluded that not going on vacation annually can lead to serious health problems and illness (Gump & Matthews, 2000). Since not only employees can benefit from better mental H&W after vacation, but it is also relevant at the organizational level, it is recommended to inform and educate managers about the benefits of vacation (Tan & Li, 2021). According to a study (Expedia, 2017) 65% of workers globally feel that the lack of vacation reduces productivity. In contrast, taking paid time off eventuates a better attitude when returning to the job, helps focus, improves productivity, and makes workers more relaxed.

All in all, as can be seen, existing research has discovered several positive effects as a result of going on a vacation (Packer, 2021), and despite this, there can be various reasons if someone still does not feel that their vacation is deserved. Numerous factors contribute to this phenomenon, and we will delve into them in subsequent discussions. For instance, financial constraints - when someone finds themselves seeking a more financially accessible option to embrace their desired vacation experience; or fear of falling behind on work or missing out on career opportunities; if someone is dedicated to their profession and values their commitment to colleagues, clients, or patients, they may have reservations about taking a well-deserved vacation in order to ensure uninterrupted support and service, and other reasons can be perceived workload, or a workaholic mindset (Smith, 2014). For this reason, it is worth investigating the connection between perceived vacation deservingness and post-vacation work experience.

The objective of this thesis is to explore and understand the role of vacation on employees on an individual level with particular emphasis on their perceived vacation deservingness. As a result of the research, we are looking for patterns of connection between the perceived worthiness of a vacation and the individual post-vacation experience.

In this thesis, we search for answers to the following research questions:

- How do employees perceive the deservingness of a vacation on an individual level?
- How do employees react to the perception of deservingness during vacation?
- How does the post-vacation experience differ among employees according to the perceived deservingness of the vacation?

The thesis is structured in the following way. First, the effects of the vacation are discussed, with both positive and negative aspects being scrutinized; encompassing impacts on both individual well-being and the dynamics within a workplace setting. After that, the primary research methodology - including steps and tools - is described and executed to provide insights and answers to the main research questions. The findings are then compared and contrasted with the existing literature to form robust and compelling conclusions and implications, which can also be useful in practice.

Overall, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of research on employee well-being and the role of vacations in promoting it. By investigating the impact of vacations on employees at an individual level, this research can provide valuable insights for organizations seeking to develop more effective vacation policies and practices that promote employee well-being and job performance.

## 2 THE ROLE OF VACATION FOR EMPLOYEES

Many songs reflect the sentiment of employees craving a vacation. The lyrics of a famous Hungarian song translate to “8 hours of work, 8 hours of rest, 8 hours of fun...” - one can say that workers try to maintain a balance between obligations and free time. It may also be argued that finding this balance is the key. The quest for recreation is therefore very important after work. Recreation comes from the Latin word "recreatio", the original meaning of which is: holiday, rest, or refreshment (Bakos, 2002). But people need not only daily recreation, but also longer-term recreation, such as a long weekend, week, weeks, or even months. These are only some of the opportunities made possible by taking a vacation.

In today's world, almost everyone is entitled to enjoy some time off, with both taking weekend rests and annual vacations for granted. Paid time off (PTO) encompasses the duration when employees can take time away from work while still receiving their regular compensation. It includes various types of absences, such as sick days, vacation days, and personal days. In essence, PTO provides employees the opportunity to balance work and personal needs while ensuring they are financially supported during their time off (deskera.com, 2022). Essentially, all "vacation" time falls under the umbrella of PTO, but PTO extends beyond vacations to cover a wider range of approved absences (Stebbins, 2023). PTO serves as a broader category, encompassing various types of time off, as listed earlier. To maintain clarity and consistency, and to avoid constant word repetitions throughout the discussion, for the context of this thesis, "paid time off" and "vacation" will be utilized interchangeably, as synonyms.

In the beginning, people did not have the opportunity or the money to take a break from work. In the early 1900s, we can talk about a significant increase in social reform, further exacerbated by the effects of the First World War. During this period, some studies dealt with the effect of fatigue (it means extreme tiredness, which can result from mental or physical exertion or illness based on Oxford Languages) and this brought a new perspective to the concept of vacation. As a result, more employers began to offer some form of leave, although it was often unpaid. In an 1910 article published in the New York Times, William Howard Taft, the former President of the United States, expressed his belief that every American worker should be entitled to a vacation lasting two or three months. According to Taft, such breaks were necessary to ensure that workers could return to their jobs the following year with renewed energy and increased productivity (Przybylek, 2018). Irrespective of whether taking a vacation is considered an entitlement or not, after a vacation workers return to the job with renewed spirit.

For centuries, employers upheld the expectation of long workweeks from their employees. However, another notable shift emerged also in the early 19th century, primarily centered around one day: Sunday (Blakemore, 2023). This transformation was catalyzed by the efforts of Sabbatarians, a group of Christians, who advocated for legislation compelling the closure of post offices and subsequently other businesses on Sundays. Their argument hinged on the

interpretation of the Sixth Commandment, asserting that it mandated Christians to refrain from travel, work, or recreational activities on this sacred day. Meanwhile, Jewish workers observed their Sabbath on Saturdays, introducing a conflict in the workplace. Consequently, as the 20th century approached, some factories began to close their doors on both Saturday and Sunday to honor and accommodate the diverse religious beliefs of their workforce (Blakemore, 2023).

There was another defining figure at the beginning of the 20th century. The name Henry Ford is likely familiar to many. He was not only an American entrepreneur and inventor but a pioneer in the automotive industry. Ford's contributions were transformative, introducing innovations such as the moving assembly line method of production. This innovation not only revolutionized vehicle manufacturing, but also had a profound impact on the broader American economy (Bell, 2022). However, there is another aspect of his story that is worth knowing. In 1926, Henry Ford implemented a significant change by closing down his automotive factories for 2 days a week that had been operating seven days a week before (Gaviola, 2021). This decision marked the genesis of the five-day workweek in North America. Ford's rationale behind this transformative shift was to enhance productivity. He introduced a system where assembly line workers were paid a week's salary for working eight-hour shifts, Monday through Friday. Subsequently, in 1940, the United States made the 40-hour workweek a national mandate, coupled with a two-day weekend. Canada and various other countries also adopted this standard in due course (Gaviola, 2021). Even today, this work schedule remains the most typical model.

Interestingly, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic reignited a conversation that had been brewing for some time — the idea of transitioning to a four-day workweek. The concept is straightforward: employees would maintain a four-day workweek, receiving the same payment, benefits, and workload as a traditional five-day week (Joly et al., 2023). Portugal recently joined the ranks of countries experimenting with this approach, following the lead of nations like Belgium and the United Kingdom. Alexander de Croo, Prime Minister of Belgium says that the difference lies in compressing the work hours into fewer days, offering enhanced flexibility for individuals and companies in managing their work time. It can also be read on the World Population Review's website (2023) that apart from government-led trials of four-day workweeks, numerous private companies and local authorities have independently explored this concept. Advantages are that a four-day workweek for employees translates to reduced stress and stress-related health issues, enhanced work - life balance, enhanced an overall improvement in quality of life, and increased job satisfaction. However, specific industries or enterprises face challenges in accommodating reduced working hours, even if productivity remains consistent. For instance, a factory meeting its objectives in four days can seamlessly adopt a four-day workweek. On the other hand, certain sectors like healthcare, still need employee presence for the fifth day (World Population Review, 2023). Certain professions similarly require a constant on-call



requirement for employees, thereby greating the need for vacation time to keep workers ready to perform at their best.

When an employee is expected to remain accessible for work-related tasks at any given time, they are designated as being "on-call" (paycor.com, 2021). This arrangement is most common in professions where the nature of the work is inherently unpredictable, such as in the fields of healthcare (doctors and nurses), emergency services (firefighters), utility maintenance personnel, and IT technicians, to name a few. On-call professionals strike a harmonious work-life balance through open communication. They collaborate with superiors to accommodate personal needs, advocate for time off, and explore flexible schedules, such as alternating between on-call and fixed shifts (indeed.com, 2023). These measures ensure a more sustainable and predictable work routine. If employees are required to stay at home or within a set distance from the office during on-call hours, they should typically receive on-call pay. Likewise, if personal activities are restricted, like abstaining from alcohol or performance-impacting activities during on-call time, they usually warrant full pay. The extent of these restrictions dictates the need for compensation (paycor.com, 2021).

According to labor law, in most countries, every employee has a statutory right to annual leave: a certain number of days a year when they do not have to work (arbeitsrechte.de, 2023). This statutory right differs based on jurisdiction, however, is universally common among countries. Regardless of whether we believe we are deserving of a vacation or not, we undoubtedly have the inherent right to enjoy one. Besides, it is important to note that there are several public holidays each year when people do not have to work. The European Union refrains from establishing official public holidays for its member states. Nonetheless, the European Commission does designate public holidays for the personnel working within the institutions of the European Union (trans-business.com, n.d.).

In some companies, there is a norm that new hires cannot use their paid leave for a certain number of days when they start working (indeed.com, 2022). Before starting a job, it is recommended to inquire about this rule, especially if someone has upcoming travel plans. On the positive side, this so-called vacation freeze period approach can benefit both the new hire and the company. The new employee can swiftly acclimate to the job and company culture without a lengthy break, while the company gains insights into the new employee's progress and integration.

Figure 1 below outlines the minimum entitlement of paid vacation days in some European countries, calculated for a standard 5-day workweek.

Figure 1: Paid vacation days in European countries (2023)

Country	Days	Country	Days
Germany	20	Switzerland	20
The Netherlands	20	Italy	20*
Belgium	20	France	25
Luxembourg	26	Spain	22
Denmark	25	Portugal	22
Norway	25	United Kingdom	20
Sweden	25	Slovenia	20
Finland	24	Bulgaria	20
Poland	20 (<10 years of employment)	Greece	20 (<10 years of employment)
	26 (>10 years of employment)		24 (>10 years of employment)
Ireland	20	Croatia	20
Greece	20	Latvia	20
Romania	20	Serbia	20
Lithuania	20	North Macedonia	20
Estonia	28	Albania	20
Czech Republic	20	Montenegro	21
Austria	25		

\* Many contracts, particularly for state employees, allow for 28 days, or five weeks, of paid leave per year in Italy.

Source: Eurodev (2023).

Figure 1 shows that in most countries 20 days is the minimum entitlement, and Estonia and Luxembourg are at the top with 28 and 26 days of leave. In several European countries, employees may be entitled to additional vacation days after working for a certain number of years (in the picture for example Poland and Greece). Furthermore, European employees often enjoy time off on bank holidays and, in some cases, regional public holidays. It is worth noting that the payment regulations for such holidays vary across European countries, with some requiring employers to provide paid leave while others do not (Eurodev, 2023). This further emphasizes the non-stringent obligations of the European Union upon member countries. It is also customary for individuals working on weekends or holidays to receive a higher compensation compared to their regular weekday salary for those specific days. This practice can serve as a motivation for employees to willingly work on these particular days, helping mitigate issues related to work schedules or labor shortages during such periods.

Organizations globally offer various types of leave to their employees, including paid, partially paid, and unpaid options. While certain leaves are legally mandated or a result of collective agreements, others are provided at the employer's discretion. Having a comprehensive understanding of these leave types is crucial for organizations to ensure compliance and offer competitive benefits to their employees, while also providing support during unexpected life events (Jay, n.d.). This reflects positively on the role of perceived vacation deservingness for employees.

Figure 2 presents a compilation of both commonly encountered and less conventional types of work leave, enabling organizations to navigate and provide a positive experience for their employees during such circumstances.

*Figure 2: Types of leave*



*Source: Jay (n.d.).*

Let us present some examples in more detail. Jury duty occurs when individuals are randomly chosen from the electoral register to serve as jurors in a court case. In the United Kingdom, there is a legal obligation for employers to grant their employees time off from work for jury duty under the Employment Rights Act of 1996. However, it is important to note that the Act does not mandate employers to provide paid time off to employees fulfilling jury duty obligations (thanksben.com, n.d.).

The time off in lieu type of leave may be less well known. "In lieu" is a French phrase that translates to "instead of." In this context, it signifies the compensated time off that employees receive in place of additional pay for hours worked beyond their regular contracted working week (factorialhr.com, 2023). From the financial point of view of the workplace, this can be advantageous, since the employee does not have to be paid more than the normal wage. Furthermore, this system concurrently provides advantages to employees as well.

Providing religious leave can yield numerous advantages for both employees and employers. For employees, it allows them to observe their religious practices without apprehension of adverse effects at their workplace. This, in turn, can enhance job satisfaction, foster a sense of loyalty, and contribute to overall improved mental health and well-being. Religious leave is a form of time off that enables employees to participate in religious activities, often being unpaid, although certain employers may opt to offer it also, as a paid benefit (actiplans.com, n.d.).

Study leave is equally beneficial for employers, as it underscores the significance of fostering a skilled workforce and encouraging continuous learning and development. This academic leave also permits workers to enroll in continuing education, language courses or executive programs, not just further degree study.

Further, due to today's extreme weather conditions, it is not surprising if it becomes more and more common for workers to not be able to get to their workplace due to the weather. Fortunately, in this case, the home office can be a possible solution.

After the examples shown in the picture and analyzed in the previous sections, let's discuss the concept of a "floating holiday." A so-called floating holiday is an additional day of paid time off that employees can use throughout the year, apart from their regular vacation, sick leave, or other free days. Employers often offer this benefit to substitute for unobserved public holidays or to allow employees the flexibility to choose a day off according to their preferences. This autonomy permits workers to balance work and family commitments. This policy is especially thoughtful for individuals, who may not celebrate Christmas for example, or travel during that time, as it grants them the freedom to select a day that suits their needs to enjoy a break (Schooley, 2023). This additional day of paid time off once again presents advantages for both the employer and the employee.

There are slight differences to consider when analyzing vacation deservingness for employees, who are a part of a work council or work union. Works councils are representative bodies for employees within a workplace and are legally established entities in many European countries (Oxford Reference, n.d.). Large EU-based multinational corporations must comply, establishing European works councils. Elected from employees, works councillors follow national procedures, often with trade unions nominating and supporting them. Workers who are employed in companies that have a work council or work union may have an advantage in terms of being well-informed about their vacation benefits and the process for asserting their rights (Goerke & Jeworrek, 2021). Goerke and Jeworrek (2021) suggest that the presence of work councils and unions can have a favorable outcome on employees' vacations, because a greater number of these vacation days are actually utilized. This is favorable both on an organizational and individual level due to the benefits associated with a vacation.

## **2.1 Beneficial effects of a vacation**

When people think of taking time off, they often imagine traveling to new destinations or simply taking a break from their everyday routine to spend time with loved ones or enjoy some relaxing, solitary moments at home. Although there is a wide range of individuals' willingness and desires to travel - from those who do not feel like venturing beyond their everyday surroundings to those who actively seek extraordinary travel experiences, and there are other individuals who do not take vacations at all (Crouch, 2013). The vacation experience can be affected if employees have to go on "forced" leave (Albuero Albuero and Associates Law Offices.com, 2022), or if they take these days at a time that is not the most suitable for them. The employer has the authority to dictate the timing of your leave (tuc.org.uk, 2022). The key point is that employees usually have the freedom to negotiate and allocate their vacation time in a manner that aligns with their personal preferences and needs.

Previous studies have shown that vacations are in connection with greater life satisfaction, better mood, lower health complaints, and lower debility - physical weakness after vacation. Notwithstanding, these positive vacation effects mostly appeared to be short-term and quickly faded away after returning to work (De Bloom et al., 2012). The phrase "short-term" can encompass even the very first day of resuming work.

All in all, vacations have many advantages, as they obtain a positive impact both on our emotional and mental well-being, leaving us feeling more relaxed, balanced and calm; moreover, they also play a crucial role in maintaining physical well-being and they help us escape and recover from the monotonous everyday routine.

## **2.2 Relative importance of health and well-being to employees**

It can be challenging to find an all-encompassing definition for employee H&W. This is largely due to the fact that a definition of employee H&W involves many factors. Those factors are often difficult to pinpoint. Be that as it may, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) places significant emphasis on health and well-being. Within the European Union (EU), these concepts are subject to diverse interpretations, highlighting the need for more standardized assessments within work environments. In the context of the EU's perspective on well-being, the following definition has been proposed: "Well-being at work means safe, healthy, and productive work in a well-led organization by competent workers and work communities who see their job as meaningful and rewarding and see work as a factor that supports their life management" (OSHA, 2022). According to Marinaki's (2020) article, employee H&W can be interpreted as the overall mental, physical, emotional, and economic health of workers, which is influenced by various components, such as the relationships with co-workers, the employees' decisions, and the tools and resources they have access to. In addition, it is also moderately impacted by other variables, like age,

working hours, education level, and household income (Zheng et al., 2015). "A good work-life balance comes back to view the employee as a whole person and not just as a worker" (Baier et al., 2023, p. 40). This is instrumental for the success of both employers and employees.

On a daily basis, it is usually the responsibility of line managers to manage the multitude of organizational factors that affect the well-being of employees in the workplace. Common reasons contributing to work-related stress and dissatisfaction encompass: prolonged work hours and shift schedules, diminished control or job security, insufficient job satisfaction resulting in feelings of boredom or isolation, apprehension about violence, bullying or harassment, strained interpersonal dynamics with colleagues, unfavorable working conditions and inappropriate style of management (Unison, 2023). However, managers often face the challenge of delivering results within short deadlines. Therefore, organizations must pay more attention to their operational demands towards their managers and have efficient feedback systems to determine whether it is achievable to harmonize these demands while also considering the well-being of employees. In order for the employees to do their work with enthusiasm, commitment, and satisfaction, the management must create a good workplace culture and atmosphere. It is the liability of the executives, human resources managers and line managers / supervisors to create the appropriate work conditions in order to achieve the set goals (Vértes, 2019). Those executives, human resources managers and line managers vest a role crucial for the company. The corollary is that the success of the company depends on the workers, who are able to contact human resources for support.

The human resources (HR) department is responsible for different functions that are vital for the success of a company. These encompass recruiting and hiring, handling compensation and benefits, addressing work-related issues, establishing policies for a positive working environment, and promoting employee well-being and productivity. Creating a positive and supportive working environment is essential for employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention, which ultimately benefits both the employees and the organization as a whole (Kenton, 2023). On the positive side, employers are increasingly placing more responsibility on managers to support H&W. However, this expectation is not always met with adequate investment in the skills and capabilities of managers. They should be able to recognize the importance of H&W in the workplace, identify early signs of health-related issues, possess the competence and confidence to hold sensitive conversations, direct employees to appropriate sources of help, and actively encourage and motivate employees (CIPD, 2020). The Human resources department is in many ways the backbone of the company.

Based on the Mercer company's Global Talent Trends 2023 pulse survey among HR managers, Figure 3 shows the latest HR priorities.

Figure 3: HR priorities in 2022-2023

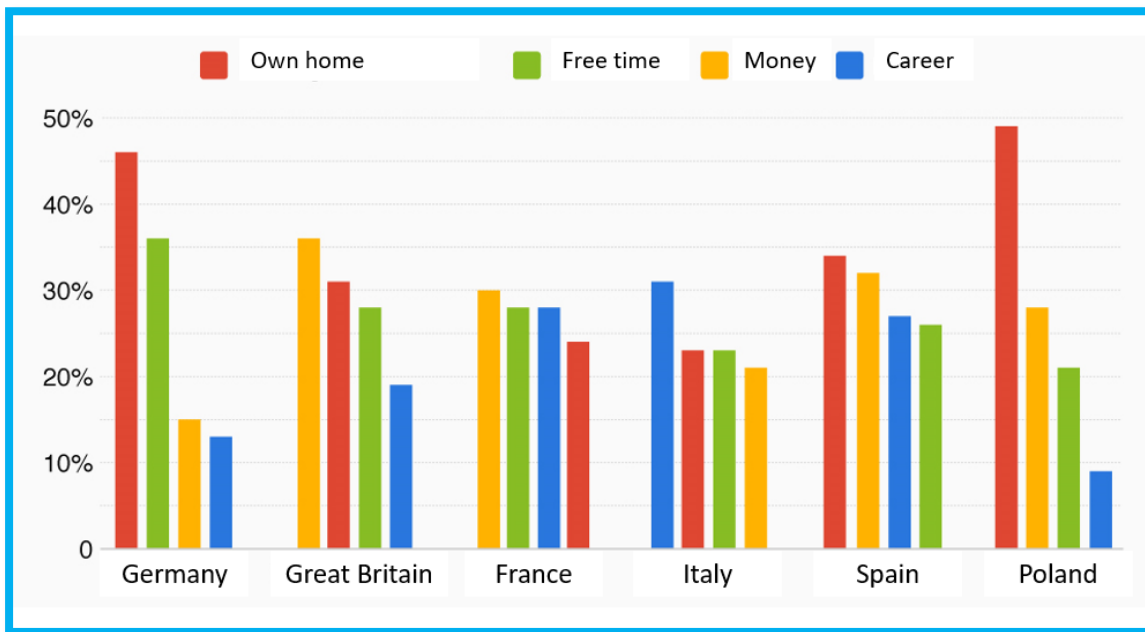


Source: Mercer (2023).

Key findings of the report's list reveal that organizations are focusing on enhancing the employee experience, aligning talent strategies with skills, rethinking compensation practices, reimagining employer branding, and investing in total well-being. They are prioritizing workforce planning, and redesigning work for agility. These efforts aim to attract and retain key talent, foster employee development, and create a positive work environment that values and supports diversity, flexibility, and overall well-being (mercer.com, 2023). These are a mere enumeration of the goals of human resources.

In March 2016, a survey by an opinion research institute - Dalia asked 10,000 Europeans from 28 countries about their priorities in life. The evaluation of the largest European countries showed that although the respondents relatively agreed that family and health are most important, the survey resulted in major differences between the countries when comparing the priorities of money, career and leisure time, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Priorities in life - European survey (2016)



Source: Nier (2016).

A closer look at these categories shows that while for Germans their home and their free time are by far the most important thing, for Poles it is also their own home, but the second priority is money. In Great Britain, it is the other way around, money precedes own home. Also in France, money is the top priority, as the graphic shows. For Italians, career is the most important thing, but as an interesting fact, money is only listed last (Nier, 2016). This underscores how citizens of each country privilege different factors. There were no identical results.

An interesting question also arises as to what primarily motivates employees to work. While many would assume that it is predominantly the salary, a survey conducted by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and Profession.hu in 2018 before the COVID-19 pandemic, titled Decoding Global Talent, challenges this notion. The survey was carried out in 197 countries with the opinions of 400,000 respondents. As a caveat, there were 12,000 employees from Hungary who participated in that survey and indicated that a healthy work-life balance was the top priority. This suggests how the emphasis might not only be on vacation deservingness, but also the intricate ties to the workplace. The reasoning thereto is that the survey results had positive relationships with colleagues and recognition of their work as the second and third most voted outcome respectively. Survey respondents indicated that salary is not as important of a factor when considered with the motivation for workers to work a certain job (Strack et al., 2018).



Taking a look at the 2018 Decoding Global Talent survey's global results, showed that when it comes to job preferences, having good relationships with colleagues, achieving a healthy work-life balance, and cultivating positive relationships with superiors were cited as the top three priorities, with financial stability of employer and financial compensations only coming later on the list (Strack et al., 2018). Detailed information can be seen in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Top 10 global work preferences in 2018



Source: Adapted from Strack et al. (2018).

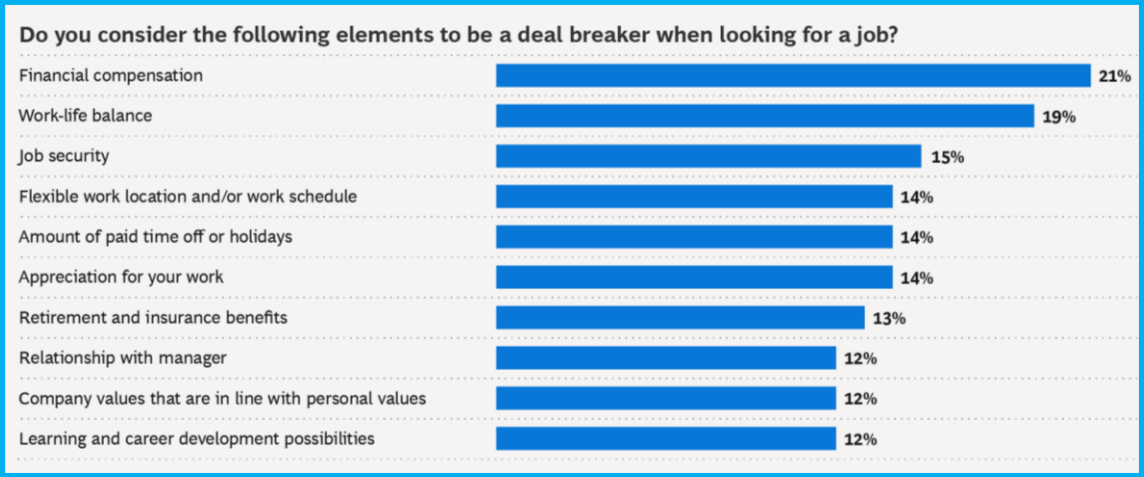
This figure suggests that people's emotional well-being and fulfillment are highly valued in the workplace. Furthermore, job satisfaction is often linked to the personal validation one receives from their colleagues or superiors, especially when it comes to recognizing their ideas, problem-solving skills, or project management abilities. Such recognition holds great significance in many cultures around the world. Moreover, labor migration is much higher among employees who receive only a salary, but not spiritual motivation, than among organizations where spiritual motivation is emphasized (Schwartz, 2008, p. 197). There are many factors that influence emotional well-being and the company plays a role in the happiness of its employees.

This year, the Boston Consulting Group also conducted a comprehensive survey, in collaboration with Profession.hu among others, to gather insights on the attitudes and preferences of employees towards job search and employment. The survey, which involved the participation of more than 90,000 individuals from 160 countries, also explored how employees evaluate their own position in the labor market. Interestingly, the results revealed that a healthy work-life balance is the primary expectation of employees in the long run when it comes to a specific job. However, in the context of making a decision on a certain

contract, salary takes the top spot in terms of importance (profession.hu, 2023). It may be surprising, however, that work-life balance is a close second.

Figure 6 presents the answers of The Network proprietary web survey and analysis of 90,547 respondents from the year 2022.

Figure 6: Responding to a job offer



Source: Baier et al. (2023).

BCG's survey stands as the largest of its kind, aiming to delve into the recruitment preferences of job seekers worldwide. As can be seen in Figure 6, financial compensation now takes the lead in the list of priorities, whereas it did not even make the top three in the 2018 global rankings. Once again, work-life balance secures the second spot, indicating its enduring significance as a determining factor for individuals seeking a new workplace in the future. Getting the third position on the podium, job security has seemingly gained increased importance since the 2018 report. The impact of the pandemic and rapid technological advancements, which led to job losses, likely contributed to this shift in priorities. The shift in priorities towards a flexible workplace and work schedule, as well as the significance of paid leave or vacation, can be attributed to the transformative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The widespread adoption of remote work and the need for greater work-life integration prompted individuals to value flexibility and time off in order to maintain a healthy work-life balance (Baier et al., 2023). It seems plausible that the pandemic served as a catalyst for reevaluating traditional work norms and emphasizing the importance of flexibility and personal well-being in the workplace. Conclusions can be drawn from the preference lists for company management and human resources management in order to see how they can make their company appealing to the workforce to be attracted (Nyitrai, et al., 2019). The relationship between employers and employees is a symbiotic one.

Fortunately, companies are increasingly focusing on enhancing employee well-being through the implementation of various strategies, but while many HR professionals believe

that their organization's well-being programs are reasonably effective, there remains ample room for improvement. According to a survey conducted in the first quarter of 2022 called "The State of Learner Experience, Engagement and Solutions 2022," 44% of respondents expressed that the programs promoting employee well-being were effective to a moderate degree. Only 22% indicated that these programs were highly effective. The survey gathered insights from 246 participants, encompassing a diverse range of employers, both in terms of industry and workforce size, spanning from small businesses to large enterprises (hrweb.at, 2023). Though perhaps a greater sample may be needed, the survey indicated interesting results.

In the long term, fostering a work culture that aligns with both the unique aspirations of employees and the collective goals of the company is vital. Quoting the lines of Schwartz: "You cannot find a better guarantee for a long, happy and healthy life than enjoyable work." (Schwartz, 2008, p. 49).

### **2.3 Vacation effects on employee health and well-being**

During periods of high work-related stress, employees' health and well-being may decline, and to reimburse them for these adverse effects, taking a vacation becomes necessary. According to a study on the progression of H&W during vacations, there was a notable increase in these aspects shortly after the beginning of the holiday, with the top occurring at a later day during the vacation. The apex of emotional well-being among holidaymakers is experienced during the "central period" of their vacation, which refers to the middle 70% duration of the vacation period, and it is usually the 8th day (Nawijn, 2010). This discovery supports an earlier research that suggests it takes some time to relax after a stressful work period and adapt to the vacation atmosphere. Another important finding of the research is that the specific activity that vacationers undertake during their break may not be a very relevant factor, as long as they find the activity enjoyable (De Bloom et al., 2012). Research by Lounsbury and Hoopes (1986) also showed that job and life satisfaction increased among those who enjoyed their vacation, while Etzion et al. (1994) found that a positive vacation experience provided greater relief from stress and burnout (Westman & Eden, 1997). Similarly, Westman and Eden (1997) highlighted that enjoying and being satisfied with one's vacation experience is crucial for increased well-being and stress reduction.

This conclusion aligns with the observation that having control or the freedom to choose the activity to engage in is highly linked to improvements in well-being throughout the vacation period (De Bloom et al., 2012). Sometimes, unfortunately, finances can be a problem, as a person cannot afford to spend his/her free time doing what he/she really wants to do. Furthermore, a greater amount of work-related tasks during vacation was found to be linked with reduced levels of H&W upon coming back to work (De Bloom et al., 2011). Workers, who could disconnect more effectively from their job duties while on vacation, experienced

significant health advantages both during their time off and even after. Not to mention that failing to take annual vacations can lead to health issues, while vacations can prevent demoralization (- to demoralize entails eroding confidence or morale, leading to feelings of discouragement, anger, bitterness, diminished motivation, and a decline in trust (jumpstart-hr.com, 2020)), and foster psychological resilience (De Bloom et al., 2011, 2012).

The results of the research show that employee well-being mainly improves during vacation, but after it, the positive effects diminish quite quickly. Studies present that vacations' beneficial impacts on health and well-being usually begin to diminish only within three days after arriving home. To balance the temporary and yet favorable impact of vacations on H&W, it may be beneficial to schedule multiple short vacation periods throughout the year, as a practical solution for maintaining these benefits over time (De Bloom et al., 2011). Research studies by Halberg, Engeli, and Hamburger (1965) and Frankenhaeuser et al. (1989) indicate that taking just a single day off from work can have positive effects on well-being. These studies show that individuals experience improved relaxation, mood, and reduced physiological stress markers on their days off compared to days spent at work. Therefore, even short respites of one day can bring relief and improve overall well-being (Westman & Eden, 1997). This is also supported by the finding that the duration of the vacation does not significantly impact the strength of the positive effects (De Bloom et al., 2012). On the one hand, overall H&W may return to baseline levels quickly after vacation, but the memories and positive experiences associated with vacation can temporarily enhance well-being. According to Torres, Wei and Hua (2017), people exhibit a propensity to predominantly remember positive events, which consequently introduces the potential for different types of memory biases when recollecting a vacation experience.

In the present-day era of advanced technology and social media, reminiscing about vacations has become effortless. With numerous photos and videos captured during the trip and shared online, one can easily look back and relive those memories at any time. To determine the ideal length and frequency of vacations for maximum relief, further research is needed. This research would help optimize vacation length and provide guidance for individuals seeking to maximize the benefits of time off.

It is important to remember that workers are not only workers, but also hold significant roles in their personal lives, including being a parent, a spouse, a friend, and more. Durko and Petrick (2016) revealed the emerging recognition within the tourism field that vacations can serve as a valuable resource to strengthen relationships and family bonds. In the context of the American workforce, their study highlighted a concerning trend where career demands and economic uncertainties often hinder the utilization of allotted vacation days, contributing to stress and a lack of family time. Based on the research traveling is identified as a valuable tool to strengthen family bonds, enhance communication within relationships, and potentially reduce the likelihood of divorce (Durko & Petrick, 2016). Hence, it is valuable to plan our vacations to coincide with quality time spent with loved ones.

## 2.4 Recovery from work

In essence, recovery refers to the process of unwinding and alleviating the pressure caused by work-related stressors, which enables workers to return to their pre-stress levels and even enhances their performance (Smyth et al., 2020). Smyth et al.'s study says, that while inadequate recovery can result in health deterioration, workers, who recover sufficiently, can prevent the transition from an acute to a chronic load reaction and refill themselves both mentally and physically.

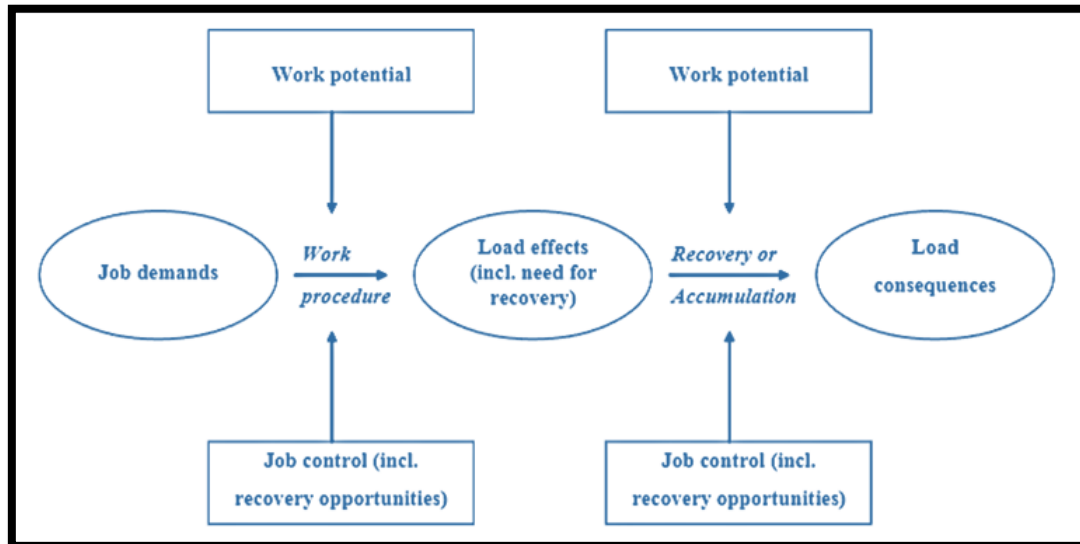
One of the reasons companies started to take time off from work more seriously is related to the advancing academia in the field. Researchers progressively began to point out the negative impacts of fatigue in the workplace. Fatigue is a condition characterized by "a feeling of weariness, tiredness or lack of energy" (National Library of Medicine, n.d.). In the context of the workplace, it is often linked to nonstandard work schedules that interfere with or shorten periods of sleep, such as night shifts, early morning shifts, or extended working hours. According to a study conducted by the World Health Organization, in collaboration with the International Labour Organization, there was a 42% rise in deaths attributed to heart disease due to extended working hours between the years 2000 and 2016. Additionally, deaths from stroke increased by 19% during the same period (Chapell, 2021).

Based on Directive 2003/88/EC (European Parliament & Council, 2003), fortunately, stringent regulations prioritize worker safety, health, and hygiene, emphasizing that these objectives should not be compromised for purely economic considerations. Ensuring adequate rest periods, expressed in measurable units of time like days, hours, or fractions, is essential for all workers. This includes stipulating minimum daily, weekly, and annual rest intervals, along with appropriate breaks. Moreover, the International Labour Organisation's guidelines on working time, encompassing night work, must be considered. It is important, because research has illuminated the heightened sensitivity of the human body to environmental disruptions and challenging work arrangements during the night, for example.

In 2021, the average working week in the European Union was 36.4 hours, although there were variations across EU member states. For instance, the Netherlands had the shortest average working week at 32.2 hours, while Greece had the longest at 40.1 hours. Among different occupations, skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers had the longest average working weeks in the EU in 2021, with an average of 42.9 hours. In 2022, the average number of actual weekly hours of work in the main job across the European Union was 36.2 hours (Eurostat, 2023). In the United States, almost 30% of the workforce has a work schedule that deviates from regular daytime hours. Moreover, a quarter of employees report working over 40 hours a week. Fatigue can have a significant impact on the safety and health of workers across all industries, regardless of the type of their job. The consequences of high levels of fatigue are severe and should not be ignored in the workplace (NIOSH, 2023). While it is true that the younger generation can handle heavy workloads and less sleep, on the other hand, in the long run, this can lead to serious health problems.

The Effort-Recovery Model by Meijman (1989) offers a framework for understanding the necessity of recovery after the workday. Figure 7 depicts an adapted representation of this model, providing a visual tool to explore the underlying dynamics.

*Figure 7: Effort-Recovery Model*



*Source: Veldhoven (2008).*

The Effort-Recovery Model explores the relationship between job demands and the resulting effects on individuals' well-being. Job demands can lead to various emotional, cognitive, and behavioral symptoms, collectively known as load effects, which can be alleviated when work ceases. These symptoms are what we commonly refer to as short-term fatigue at work. However, the extent to which job demands translate into load effects is influenced by other job characteristics, particularly job control. Additionally, the individual worker's characteristics, referred to as work potential, also play a role in this dynamic process. Work potential encompasses various personal factors. Notably, Meijman (1989) highlights the significance of job control characteristics that offer opportunities for recovery, such as work breaks, holidays, and flexible work schedules. The term "work strategy" underscores the model's emphasis on the dynamic nature of work performance, which is shaped by the interplay between situational and personal factors (Veldhoven, 2008).

It is also important to know that short breaks from work (like evenings, ordinary weekends, which frequently involve housework, cooking, or grocery shopping) are often inadequate for employees to fully recover. For instance, when they experience signs of fatigue and exhaustion; or as a result of increasingly blurred lines between work and personal life; furthermore overtime or long hours of work, and last, but not least, sustained physiological activation due to preoccupation with work. Vacations are the most extended periods of time when employees are away from work, and as such, they can offer a more potent opportunity

for respite compared to shorter breaks (De Bloom et al., 2012). Hence, taking a vacation can be a more effective way to recharge than just having those few free hours a day and weekends, and two main reasons explain why. First, it provides a "passive" mechanism where one can disengage from his / her job and daily responsibilities by spending an extended period in distinct and more pleasant surroundings. Secondly, it offers an "active" mechanism where you can engage in enjoyable and possibly recovering actions that you may not have time for during a normal work week, for instance, hobbies and spending time with family (De Bloom et al., 2009).

Sonnentag, Cheng and Parker (2022) discuss two approaches to studying recovery: the activity approach and the experience approach. The activity approach focuses on the activities people engage in during non-work time, which can promote well-being and recovery. The experience approach, on the other hand, examines the psychological states individuals experience during their nonwork time, such as detachment, relaxation, mastery, and control. Social interactions influence these experiences. Profiles of activities and experiences show that a combination of physical, social, and creative / cultural pursuits is associated with higher levels of well-being. Overall, both approaches provide valuable insights into understanding and promoting recovery processes during non-work time.

## **2.5 Potential disadvantages of a vacation**

In exploring the intricate balance between positive and negative aspects of life, it is often believed that even in the depth of darkness, a ray of light can be found. After having witnessed the multitude of benefits vacation can bestow, we delve into the realm of potential disadvantages. Ultimately, the exploration of both positive and negative dimensions enriches the narrative of the vacation experience, enabling a more comprehensive and balanced perspective on the transformative potential these breaks hold.

Just imagine if someone loves his / her work, looks at it as a beloved hobby rather than an obligation and he / she lives for this work. In this case, how tempting does paid vacation sound? As an example, one interesting phenomenon that researchers are investigating is workaholism, which is traditionally defined as an addiction to work and is characterized by excessive work, an obsession with working without any external incentives, such as material gain, paid vacation, or monetary reward (Makhdoom et al., 2022). Here, self-worth is directly connected to the workplace. Later, this can lead to burnout and has a negative effect on the quality of life.

### 2.5.1 Vacation guilt

Guilt, characterized by self-criticism and accompanied by emotions of uncertainty, inadequacy, and anxiety, plays a crucial role in self-evaluation. It serves as a valuable mechanism, compelling individuals to introspect on their missteps and contemplate ways to prevent similar negative consequences in the future (Tan & Li, 2021).

Paradoxically, vacations can also add stress to our work lives. It is common to experience a sense of overwhelming pressure to complete all tasks before we can truly relax and take time off (hive.com, 2022). Tan and Li's (2021) research confirmed the hypothesis that for instance feelings of guilt are negatively related to an employee's intention to use paid days off for a vacation. Vacation guilt can be caused by many things, from worrying about missing out on something important at work; fear that the chances of promotion will decrease, that we will let our colleagues down, or that we will not take responsibility for our work. Furthermore, we may feel that we are the only ones who can perform our own tasks, so, if we go on vacation, there is no one to replace us at work. It is very important to prevent vacation guilt by letting our colleagues know in time that we will not be available and to communicate with them what tasks they should perform for us in our absence (Eyman, 2022).

Vacation guilt is not an unusual phenomenon, it is a real thing that needs to be addressed, even if it is not a medically proven problem. The global platform Perkbox reflects on the concept as follows: " 'Guilty Vacation Syndrome' is the latest workplace epidemic sweeping the nation. Defined as the 'nagging urge to cancel or delay a vacation due to guilt." (Ramsell, 2019). Perkbox also carried out a survey in 2018 with a sample size of 1342 individuals, unveiling a revelation that 66% of the participants in Britain have encountered the Vacation Guilt Syndrome. Interestingly, this syndrome seems to afflict those who are in dire need of a respite from work the most, yet feel hesitant to actually take a vacation. The survey also highlighted that there is a close connection between the syndrome and workplace burnout. In addition, the phenomenon is most characteristic among those who have a senior position. In terms of gender, women are more sensitive to vacation guilt. This is shown by Perkbox's research – 67% of employed women, and 59% of employed men have experienced the 'Guilty Vacation Syndrome' in 2018; and the earlier mentioned Expedia's 2022 Vacation Deprivation Report also confirms this - based on the survey, women were slightly more deprived of vacation and were more burned out than males. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that management should address these issues, and, whenever feasible, seek remedies to alleviate them.

Balancing personal life and work commitments can pose challenges, particularly in societies or organizations that place a premium on rewarding employees who dedicate extensive time and effort to their work. These prevailing "ideal worker" standards prevalent in capitalist societies and economies foster expectations of prioritizing work, a predicament encountered by workers across the board. The contemporary embodiment of the ideal worker is an

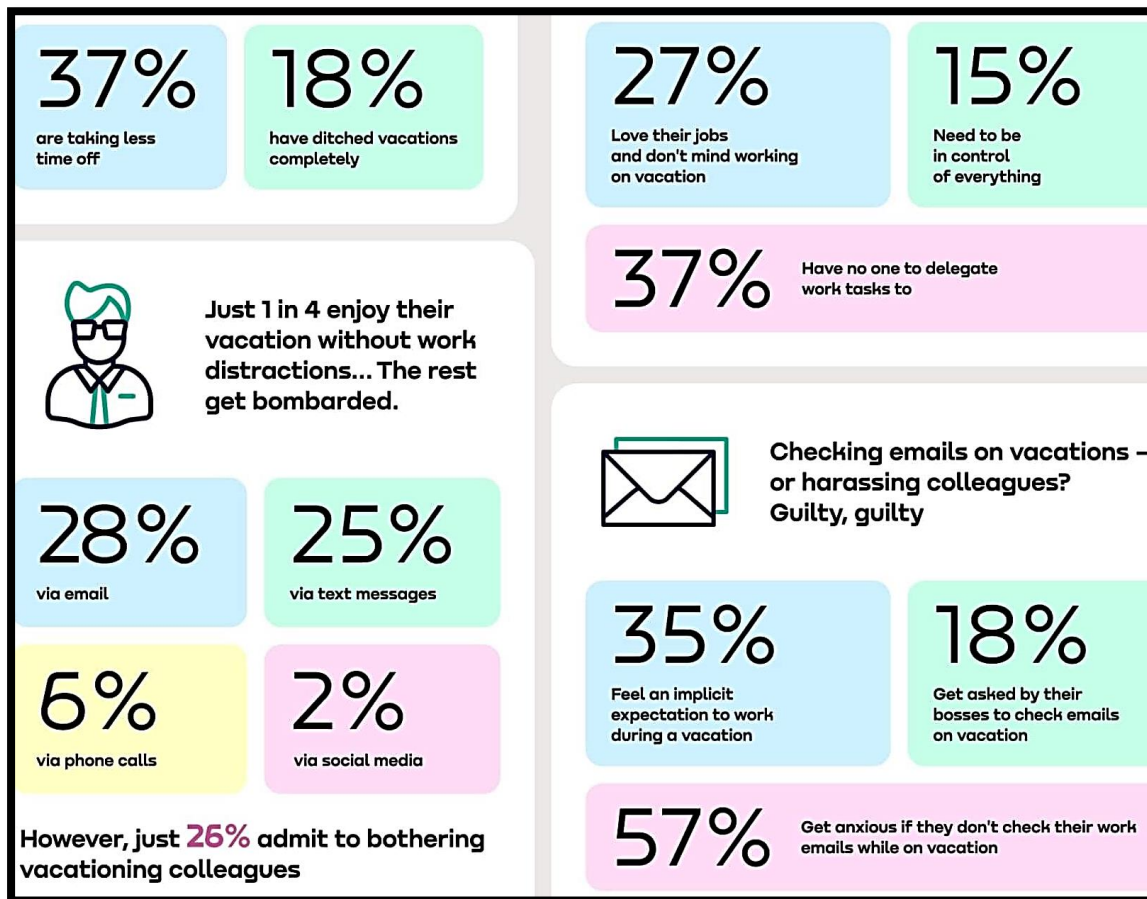


individual, who is constantly accessible and interconnected with the workplace, irrespective of time or location (Filippi et al., 2022). It is also worth noting that more and more companies focus on results and do not care as much about time physically spent in the office, which means that, if necessary, we can devote some time to work even on our days off.

In recent years, several surveys have been conducted on the subject, highlighting the challenge workers face in disconnecting from work even during their designated days off. The above-mentioned fears can be supported by the following statistics. A report in 2017 exposed that a whopping 48% of people globally had to postpone or cancel a vacation due to work. Among the reasons given by Americans for not taking time off, the predominant factors include financial considerations, with 43% citing budget constraints. Additionally, 30% expressed the desire to accumulate vacation days for a more extensive holiday, while only 22% indicated their inability to disconnect from work as a hindrance to taking time off (Expedia, 2017). In 2019 40% of Americans left unused paid vacation time on the table every year. 56% of Americans still worked while on vacation (omnesgroup.com, 2019).

Once celebrated as the epitome of liberty, America has transformed into a land marked by fatigue. In 2023, a comprehensive look at work-life balance in the American context reveals intriguing statistics. On average, Americans work an additional 400 hours annually when compared to their peers in other developed nations (elvtr.com, 2023). For a comprehensive study, ELVTR researchers conducted a survey involving 2,300 participants aged 18 and above, encompassing 1,800 respondents from the United States and 500 from Canada. Even when it is not explicitly mandated by their employers, a considerable portion of the workforce perceives an implicit expectation to sustain their work responsibilities, during periods when they are not obligated to do so. Not to mention that a sense of guilt accompanies this professional dedication, as written in ELVTR's study. Given the prevalent levels of stress, anxiety, and depression and the statistics in the American workplace, it is apparent that a breaking point could be approaching (elvtr.com, 2023). Figure 8 provides a detailed breakdown of the quantitative findings.

Figure 8: Statistics on work-life balance in 2023



Source: ELVTR (2023).

A notable 46% of participants reported difficulties in fully disconnecting from work during their vacations, with 68% acknowledging that they engage in work-related activities while on vacation. Interestingly, only 26% of respondents admit to reaching out to their vacationing colleagues with work-related concerns. A mere one in four individuals find true solace and enjoyment during their vacations, free from the clutches of work-related distractions. For the rest, the vacation experience is marred by work-related intrusions, with 28% receiving work-related emails, 25% inundated with text messages, 6% interrupted by phone calls, and a small fraction of 2% grappling with work-related content on social media. Approximately just 27% are motivated by their passion for their work, while for a significant majority, which is 58%, the drive to work during their designated relaxation time stems from a sense of obligation or the fear of potential job insecurity. A pervasive sense of implicit expectation pervades the atmosphere, affecting a notable 35% of participants, who feel compelled to engage with work even during their vacations, and 18% reveal being directly asked by their supervisors to monitor work-related emails during their time away. Alarming is the fact that a substantial 57% experience heightened levels of anxiety if they refrain from checking their work emails while on vacation, illustrating a growing psychological

attachment to work-related responsibilities even in moments designated for relaxation and rejuvenation (elvtr.com, 2023). These findings shed light on the evolving dynamics of work-life balance and the impact of modern technology on the ability to disconnect and truly unwind during vacations.

In addition to the United States, the situation is similar in Asia. Singapore and Malaysia are recognized as cities where the workforce dedicates significant hours to their jobs, averaging around 45 hours per week with an annual leave of about two weeks. On the other hand, Australia follows a more balanced approach, with an average work week of 33 hours and approximately a month's worth of annual leave. Similarly, certain Asian countries like Japan, Korea, and China are also known for a culture that often encourages their employees to work extended hours (theaccessgroup.com, 2022). According to an online survey conducted in 2018, the sentiment of guilt associated with utilizing paid vacation was most prominent among Japanese workers, with 58% expressing this feeling, the highest compared to respondents from other regions (Gatayama, 2018). Additionally, despite a majority of workers across all surveyed locations expressed they deserved more time off, the proportion in Japan was relatively lower at 54% compared to other regions. Keizo Ishii, head of Expedia Japan said: "We have to change the mentality of feeling guilty for taking days off" (Gatayama, 2018). In April 2019, the Japanese Government took a significant step in workplace reform by implementing the Revised Labor Standards Act. This legislation, designed to enhance the well-being of employees, introduced the compelling 5-days Paid Holiday Rule. Under this rule, all companies, regardless of size or industry, are encouraged to ensure that employees who are entitled to 10 or more days of paid annual leave utilize a minimum of 5 days each year (Yasuzawa, 2021). Yasuzawa (2021) also provided examples in his article about the most common reasons, why Japanese workers may feel that guilty way. These include wanting to save leave days for emergencies, the workplace being understaffed, and fearing judgment from colleagues for being perceived as lazy. Additionally, concerns about work not being completed or lacking someone to cover their tasks contribute to this hesitation. The work ethic of many Asian employees is deeply ingrained with the belief that dedicating extensive hours to work is a demonstration of hard work. This perspective often leads them to hesitate in leaving the workplace before their superiors and declining additional work assignments, aiming to showcase their dedication. However, this cultural approach to work often distinguishes it from the work cultures prevalent in other parts of the world. Notably, as of 2022, three of the world's top five overworked cities are situated in Asia. Conversely, eight of the top ten cities promoting a good work-life balance can be found in Europe (theaccessgroup.com, 2022).

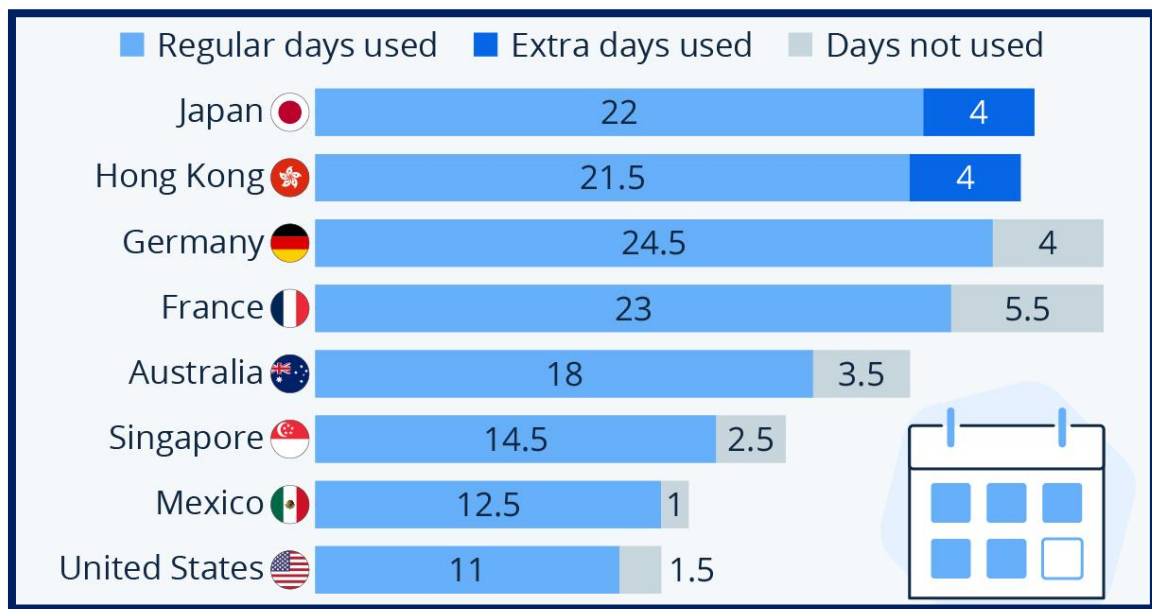
Using the information from Expedia's 2022 Vacation Deprivation Report, conducted from December 14 to December 30 in 2021, the Vacation Deprivation study encompassed a global online survey involving over 14 thousand participants across 16 countries on different continents. It is noteworthy that half of the Americans still carried their work laptops, and a significant 41% frequently participated in Zoom calls while they were on vacation. While a

considerable 80% of individuals perceive their colleagues as supportive when it comes to taking vacations, more than half experience feelings of guilt when their coworkers have to cover their workload during their absence. Additionally, there are 44% of workers who feel compelled to apologize or provide excuses for utilizing their vacation time. In another survey conducted by New View Strategies, a business management group, concerning trends related to burnout, vacation usage, and work-related guilt were uncovered through the responses of approximately 500 workers. The findings show that 72% experienced burnout, 45% did not utilize all their vacation time, and a third felt guilty when taking time off. Additionally, about half of the workers checked emails during vacations, and around 60% received work-related calls while on break. These results highlight the prevalent challenges surrounding burnout, vacation usage, and the difficulty in disconnecting from work obligations. Interestingly, the authors of the survey also asked European workers, who felt much less guilty about taking time for themselves. According to this, the feeling of guilt can depend not necessarily on the workplace, but also on nationality and culture (NBC Boston, 2022).

Expedia also shared its 2023 Vacation Deprivation Report recently. The research was carried out online between February 9 and March 3, 2023. It encompassed a total of 14,527 participants from North and South America, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific region. The research was conducted in collaboration with Northstar Research Partners, a global strategic research firm. A concerning revelation is that worldwide, levels of vacation deprivation have now exceeded the rates observed during the pandemic, reaching the highest point they have been in the past decade. A significant majority of vacation-deprived workers worldwide (67%) express a strong desire to switch jobs for the opportunity to enjoy more time off. This desire is worth considering, given the proven advantages of time off for both employees and employers. These benefits include a more positive attitude and outlook among employees and enhanced motivation. Globally, individuals utilized one or more vacation days for various personal reasons, including personal appointments (65%), sick days (56%), home improvement projects (50%), taking care of children (48%), and mental health days (47%).

Figure 9 illustrates the average allocated vacation days and the corresponding days taken off by employees in specific countries in 2022. It provides insights into where vacation days are either exceeding or falling below utilization expectations.

Figure 9: Over- and underused vacation days in 2022



Source: Buchholz (2023).

Certain countries, such as the United States, rank on the lower side concerning the average number of vacation days granted to their employees. Despite this, the average American worker still tends to have a few vacation days left unused, typically around 1.5 days on average. In Singapore, a nation known for its strong work ethic, 2.5 days are left unused on average. Comparatively, Germany and France also have a higher number of unused vacation days. However, it is important to note that these countries provide a more generous annual vacation allowance. Interestingly, both Germany and France observe a considerable number of public holidays, adding between 10 and 14 days to the vacation day count for employees. In the case of Japan - which in 2019 implemented the Revised Labor Standards Act aimed at enhancing employee well-being, as mentioned earlier - the survey results indicate no unused vacation days, a testament to the effectiveness of the initiative (Buchholz, 2023). As an example, the situation in 2018 revealed another trend. Japanese workers were observed to utilize only half of their entitled paid vacation days, as indicated by a survey (Gatayama, 2018). Based on these, the results for 2023 are promising.

In today's society, many individuals recognize the importance of maintaining optimal mental health and are aware of the prevalence and severity of mental illnesses. However, some employers may still hold old-fashioned views and may not consider stress, burnout, or mental health disorders as legitimate reasons for taking time off from work, even if we talk about only one 'rest' day. If someone finds him / herself in a situation where the employer is less understanding about mental health, it may require a different approach. This could involve using one of the existing days off or allocating time during the weekend or a public holiday to prioritize own mental well-being (forhims.com, 2022). While individuals may not

hesitate to call in sick when experiencing a physical illness, many feel reluctant to disclose their need for time off due to their mental well-being. However, it is crucial to recognize that well-being is just as significant as physical health. It is essential not to dismiss discussions about mental health or well-being in the workplace. By acknowledging and addressing these matters openly, we can prioritize and nurture our overall health effectively, without feeling guilty due to our day off (seek.com, 2021). According to Emily Simonian, a licensed marriage and family therapist, the existential perception of going to work daily is closely intertwined with our mental and physical survival (Bennett, 2022). Consequently, when faced with the prospect of missing work, whether for a delightful reason like a vacation or otherwise, an inherent sense of stress or, perhaps subconsciously, fear arises.

An interesting additional perspective is that vacation guilt also encompasses the sense of remorse experienced by individuals, particularly related to excessive spending during holidays. A survey conducted among 7,480 American adults shed light on this phenomenon, revealing that nearly half of Americans (43%) admitted to exceeding their financial means while on vacation. Disturbingly, such actions resulted in unfavorable outcomes for many individuals upon returning home. Specifically, 27% faced financial consequences, such as accumulating excessive credit card debt, missing payments, or resorting to borrowing money. Additionally, 49% reported experiencing guilt associated with their vacation spending, while 46% reported experiencing stress related to their expenditures. Notably, the regret over spending decisions often emerged after the vacation itself, possibly attributed to the subsequent confrontation with current financial obligations, bills, and payments that must be addressed post-holiday (Huntsberger, 2022).

Experiencing guilt over vacation spending may indicate a misalignment between the allocated funds and personal priorities. It could suggest that the expenditure is not fully aligned with one's values or that the financial resources are already designated for other essential purposes. Therefore, it is crucial to have a clear understanding of one's economic priorities, namely the cost or benefit of a vacation related to other financial objectives. As such, an individual should always update his / her goals to consider all of the external factors as well. By recognizing and respecting individual priorities, one can make informed and conscientious decisions about vacation spending (Mecham, 2016). Lakisha L. Simmons, financial freedom coach and CEO at Brave Consulting says – "Tomorrow is not promised, so while you may be focused on long-term debt payoff or saving for the future, know that these travel memories are important and can last a lifetime. No need to feel guilty about living and enjoying life!" (Catmull, 2023).

### 2.5.2 Vacation fade-out effect

Despite the numerous positive effects of vacations, studies indicate that once individuals return to work, the benefits of their vacation experience gradually diminish within a few days and can even completely disappear within a few weeks (Kühnel & Sonnentag, 2011).

When employees come back from vacation, they experience a drastic change. They must find the "work-life" balance once again and not be overly impacted by work. This means an enormous change for our body and our psyche, which often leads to a bad mood and a drop in performance (Zimmermann, 2023). This phenomenon is referred to by various names, including post-vacation depression, post-vacation syndrome, post-holiday blues, or holiday syndrome. Individuals may encounter different symptoms associated with post-vacation depression, including vague anxiety, heightened irritability, a sense of nostalgia, difficulty sleeping, and a general feeling of discomfort or unease (Sissons, 2022). According to Dr. Peter Wish (psychologist and stress management consultant), the stress experienced upon returning from vacation is also known as "re-entry stress," and it is considered a normal response. This stress can arise due to various reasons, such as unmet vacation expectations or unexpected incidents. Often, the abrupt transition from vacation to work contributes to this stress (CBS News, 2002).

Nevertheless, the notion of post-holiday blues is not a novel concept. As early as 1955, the term 'holiday syndrome' was mentioned in the *Psychoanalytic Review*. This syndrome encompassed the period from a few days before Thanksgiving (the fourth Thursday of November) until a few days after the New Year and it was associated with the challenges of returning to everyday life after an extended holiday period (Bretones, 2017).

As reported by the Mirror news portal, a survey conducted in 2017 revealed that 57% of British individuals shared experienced feelings of depression or deflation after returning home from their holidays (Lillywhite, 2017). Another research by Healthspan indicates that it takes a minimum of three days to restore a normal sleep pattern after a holiday, extending to four days after a two-week break. In a survey of 2,000 participants, it was found that six in ten individuals struggle with resuming their morning routine after a trip. Moreover, four in ten admit to feeling anxious before returning to work. To ease this transition, a quarter of respondents opt to take an additional day off (Prideaux, 2019). The study also reveals that a majority of people spend two days of their vacation feeling anxious about work. Interestingly, one-third of participants reported experiencing better sleep while on holiday, while one in five believed their sleep quality worsened during their time away (Prideaux, 2019). This merits further reflection.

In a study conducted in 2020 involving 60 workers, researchers examined psychological changes occurring before, during, and after vacations. The findings revealed that negative emotions, stress, and aggression do not exhibit any significant change prior to the vacation. However, these factors decreased significantly following the vacation. Interestingly, the

study also identified that certain benefits were observed primarily among individuals with low work stress levels. These findings suggest that the presence of work stress can spread and undermine the gradual fading-out benefits typically associated with vacations (Sissons, 2022; Gump et al., 2020).

It is important to note that in certain cases, post-holiday blues symptoms can be exacerbated by different organizational issues, for instance, bullying, violence, incivility, or conflicts with colleagues or superiors. However, there are many solutions to alleviate the phenomenon examined in this chapter. Some suggestions might be arriving home from vacation a few days earlier; readjusting the sleeping time to the usual working time; having a calm start to work in the first days; complying with a reasonable work schedule; practicing some social and leisure activities, and performing physical activity outside of work, or practicing relaxation techniques and meditation (Bretones, 2017). Relaxation can be achieved, for example, by taking a walk, taking a bath, or simply listening to music or stretching muscles (Kühnel & Sonnentag, 2011). Based on Kühnel and Sonnentag's investigations, it was found that the practice of leisure relaxation experiences in the working weeks after the vacation slowed down the emotional exhaustion and the vacation fade-out phenomenon.

In a recent pre-post-interventional study, researchers investigated the potential of a mobile application to extend the positive effects of a vacation. Significant and lasting improvements in mental health outcomes were observed up to 14 days after the vacation period. This suggests the promising role of digital interventions in supporting worker recovery. Nonetheless, further randomized controlled trials are needed to strengthen the evidence and provide insights into sustaining recovery behaviors beyond vacation (Smyth et al., 2020).

According to De Bloom, Geurts, and Kompier (2012), prioritizing frequent breaks is potentially more decisive for maintaining overall well-being than solely focusing on the duration of a single recovery period. To ensure long-term health, it is necessary to alternate periods of dedicated effort at work with adequate periods of recovery. This balance between exertion and recovery is essential for sustaining a healthy lifestyle.

Following the ideas of De Bloom et al. (2012), consider, for instance, the inclusion of school holidays, where students relish multiple breaks throughout the academic year — be it the autumn break, festive winter break, spring break, or longer summer break — a rhythm that influences teachers and school workers as well. This prompts a thought-provoking question: given our upbringing surrounded by the positive advantages of breaks, should we not similarly appreciate and integrate them into the realm of our professional lives?

## **2.6 Perceived vacation deservingness**

The concept of deservingness sheds light on why individuals occasionally develop self-defeating thoughts and behaviors following negative experiences. It seems that people



possess an inherent desire to perceive the world as just and organized, where individuals receive what they merit and merit what they receive (Callan et al., 2014). The study conducted by Callan, Kay, and Dawtry (2014) provides evidence that individuals who encounter or recall random instances of misfortune or fortune tend to diminish their self-worth, subsequently reinforcing their beliefs about deserving unfavorable outcomes. Consequently, when individuals lack self-belief or face challenges in their personal or professional lives, they might feel unworthy of taking a break – a vacation, even when that may not be the case. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the availability of accrued leave should not be impacted, regardless of personal beliefs about deservingness.

Within the realm of perceived deservingness, researchers such as O'Leary-Kelly, Rosen, and Hochwarter (2017) have deeply explored the manifestations of entitlement, specifically within the framework of "work-situated entitlement." Their research focuses on the socially constructed nature of entitlement, underscoring its discordance with perceptions within the workplace. It can also mean that an individual's beliefs regarding entitlement can shape their perception of deserving time off. Notably, there is a growing body of evidence indicating a heightened sense of entitlement among younger generations. Recent studies have revealed that contemporary college students exhibit self-perceptions and feelings of deservingness that surpass those of their counterparts in the 1979-1985 period by a striking 30%. In essence, entitlement embodies a lasting conviction of being deserving and entitled to more than others across various facets of life (Anastasio & Rose, 2014).

It is no longer just about "time equals money"; it is about "results equals money." We all understand that being present in the office for longer hours does not equate to achieving better results. A successful business should ideally serve as a facilitator for a fulfilling life — one that encompasses moments of relaxation and recreation as well (SheKnows Editorial, 2007). "Well-deserved paid time off" may intend to tell your coworker that they have worked hard, effectively and made a difference in the office. Yet when you say "well-deserved PTO", you are also implying that time off needs to be deserved — when really, time off is an essential part of having a successful career and company (hive.com, 2022). Quoted from SheKnows Editorial's (2007) article: "Do you really deserve free time? As a matter of fact, no, you do not. Free time is not a reward for good behavior, it is a necessary precondition for optimum productivity."

In order to enhance the deservingness framework and knowledge about the role of vacation deservingness, it is imperative to incorporate qualitative research methodologies, such as in-depth interviewing or focus groups (Laenen et al., 2019). By engaging individuals in open and candid conversations, researchers can gain valuable insights into the criteria that individuals lean towards when determining their deservingness for vacations. This type of research holds great potential in uncovering the specific attributes that indicate certain criteria for vacation deservingness and its role in experiencing vacation along with vacation outcomes.

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

The author's qualitative research helps better understand the topic, for which in-depth interviews were carried out. Conducting in-depth interviews with open-ended questions offers respondents the opportunity to craft their own responses and express themselves expansively. This approach encourages candid and detailed discussions, allowing participants to share their thoughts and perspectives freely. Furthermore, through observing their behavior, reactions, and choice of words, we gain insights into their personal connection with the subject matter and the questions posed. The theoretical background research facilitated the methodological framework.

#### **3.1 Research design**

In-depth interviewing involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents (small sample) to explore their perspectives on the research topic (Showkat & Parveen, 2017).

With carefully crafted interview questions, our objective was to approach a deeper understanding and address the key aspects of the research questions. At the beginning of the interview, we asked the interviewees general introductory questions and questions related to their work. In addition, the interview covered 3 major topics: 1. Personal feelings about taking a vacation, 2. Vacation deservingness, 3. (Post-)Vacation experience. The issue of sustainability was considered in the questions posed to the participants. Sustainability was concerned insofar as how much an employee on vacation considers the potential influence of environmentally conscientious travel during one's leisure time in contrast to the perception of the vacation being merited. As a last question, respondents had the chance to expound upon their supplementary thoughts and comments. The interview questions can be found in Appendix number 2.

I initiated communication with prospective participants through both phone calls and online interactions to arrange an appointment for the interviews. Later, the interviews were conducted through a combination of in-person and online sessions. The conversations were 6 - 13 minutes long. Some respondents opted for brief and succinct answers, resulting in a swift completion of the interview. Conversely, others dived into extensive discussions, sharing their experiences and viewpoints in great detail. The interviews were captured in audio format, preserving the richness of participants' contributions. The participants were informed that their answers and data would be treated confidentially, solely for the purpose of researching this thesis. Interviews commenced in the early months of 2023, with the first ones taking place in February and the final ones concluding in July of the same year.

The following tasks were carried out after the interviews: classifying and categorizing responses; developing categories during data analysis that fit the qualitative results; emphasizing latent content (underlying meaning) and focusing on theory building.

To summarize, the research aims to explore the personal work experiences of the interviewees after a vacation, concerning how much they consider the given vacation to be deserved. By excavating both the literature and conducting in-depth interviews, we were able to unearth valuable insights. Comparing these findings allowed us to arrive at well-founded conclusions that address the core research questions.

### 3.2 Sampling and interviewees

Interviewees were selected based on non-probability sampling and with a combination of convenience and purposive sampling methods. Findings primarily apply to the sample, because non-probability sampling is characterized by a lack of significant tools to produce a sample that is representative of the overall population. In employing convenience sampling, we opt for units that are easily accessible and allow for self-selection. However, it was also important to maintain significant variability within the selection. Purposive sampling entails choosing particular individuals or groups based on predetermined criteria that align with the research objectives. For instance, this involved assembling a diverse group of workers from various countries with varying experiences and work models (Cooper & Schindler, 2013).

The size of the sample was determined with data saturation. Data saturation means carrying on theoretically sampling until a category has been saturated with data - until no new or relevant data seems to be emerging regarding a category (Saunders et al., 2018). Table 1 provides information about each respondent.

*Table 1: Interviewees - sample description table*

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Country of work</b>	<b>Years of employment – current job</b>	<b>Paid time off per year</b>	<b>Place of work</b>	<b>Job - Position</b>
<b>A</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Austria</b>	<b>1 year</b>	<b>~ 15 days</b>	<b>Fieldwork</b>	<b>Delivery girl</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Hungary</b>	<b>30 years</b>	<b>30 days</b>	<b>Doctor's office</b>	<b>General practitioner</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Austria</b>	<b>2 years</b>	<b>5 weeks</b>	<b>Hybrid</b>	<b>HR-Lawyer</b>

*Table continues*

*Table 1: Interviewees – sample description table (continued)*

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Country of work</b>	<b>Years of employment – current job</b>	<b>Paid time off per year</b>	<b>Place of work</b>	<b>Job - Position</b>
<b>D</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Austria</b>	<b>8 months</b>	<b>13 days</b>	<b>Office</b>	<b>Intern at a law firm</b>
<b>E</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Austria</b>	<b>8 months</b>	<b>13 days</b>	<b>Office</b>	<b>Assistant</b>
<b>F</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Hungary</b>	<b>2 years</b>	<b>21 days</b>	<b>Business lounge</b>	<b>Hostess &amp; Receptionist</b>
<b>G</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Hungary</b>	<b>&lt; 1 year</b>	<b>14 days</b>	<b>Hybrid</b>	<b>Digital Marketing Intern</b>
<b>H</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Luxembourg</b>	<b>10 years</b>	<b>28 days</b>	<b>Hybrid</b>	<b>Depositary Assistant Manager</b>
<b>I</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Slovenia</b>	<b>2 years</b>	<b>21 days</b>	<b>Hybrid</b>	<b>Business Development Manager</b>
<b>J</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Hungary</b>	<b>38 years</b>	<b>35 days</b>	<b>Doctor's office</b>	<b>Assistant</b>
<b>K</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Germany</b>	<b>2 years</b>	<b>30 days</b>	<b>Hybrid</b>	<b>Strategy &amp; Business Development Manager</b>
<b>L</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Hungary</b>	<b>26 years</b>	<b>30 days</b>	<b>Hybrid</b>	<b>Community nurse in mother- &amp; childcare</b>
<b>M</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Hungary</b>	<b>40 years</b>	<b>35 days</b>	<b>Hospital</b>	<b>Urologist</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Hungary</b>	<b>29 years</b>	<b>26 days</b>	<b>Hybrid</b>	<b>Occupational physician</b>

*Source: Own work.*

The interviewees are employees of various nationalities, who work in different European countries and different work sectors, some of whom have several decades of work experience in the given workplace, while others are at the beginning of their careers. The number of days off is also influenced by the weekly working hours of an individual (part-time / full-time), and by the country they work at.

As can be seen, the place of work varies, and it is likely that prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, remote work options and home office were less prevalent. Many employees now have the option to embrace a hybrid work format. This allows them to maintain a presence in the office while also having the flexibility to work from home on specific days or for a designated number of days. It is also important to note that in the case of healthcare workers, the tasks can also involve field work, when, for example, the doctor must go to see a patient, or has to spend a shift in the hospital due to medical on-call service instead of his / her own clinic; or the nurse has a house visit with the mother in her home. Also, workers in marketing frequently find themselves needing to represent their organizations at various events, at diverse locations.

The participants in the deep interview also provided some details about their current job roles and responsibilities, shedding light on various aspects of their professional lives. The participants' job professions span a wide array of industries and functions, from legal and administrative positions to healthcare, marketing, and hospitality. Some roles, such as the food delivery rider (mentioned as Respondent A), might be physically demanding. On the other hand, there are positions that involve multitasking across various areas and require continuous learning, as well as mental and emotional preparation. In addition, it is important to note that certain interviewees are also engaged in studies alongside their professional commitments. This dual responsibility demands a significant investment of both time and energy.

The diverse roles and responsibilities could influence participants' post-vacation experiences based on the nature of their work, level of engagement, and perceived deservingness of a vacation.

During the process of collecting the sample, other observations can also serve as interesting information about people, who were planned to be interviewed, but in the end, these interviews did not take place. One of these people's circumstances included a passive income, eliminating the necessity to work and enabling the freedom to embark on a vacation whenever desired, essentially living each day as if it were a vacation. Another potential interviewee in consideration was a private teacher who conducts the majority of his classes online, a shift accelerated by the impact of Covid-19. This flexibility allows him to travel away from his home almost anytime, as he can seamlessly continue his work online from any location. And online classes also result in flexibility, so that the person can allocate his time as he wishes. Furthermore, we intended to conduct interviews with two individuals employed in the United States. However, they were amidst a particularly busy period due to

their professional commitments and ongoing personal matters, such as house renovation. Consequently, we were unable to proceed with the planned interviews.

### **3.3 Analysis of data**

To ensure the accuracy of the gathered data, I collected and noted the answers in a document after each interview session. A transcript was also taken and is available. The methodology of data analysis encompasses the inductive analysis method. This comprehensive approach integrates the exploration of both manifest and latent content through thematic analysis, synergized with the utilization of coding techniques, for which a codebook was prepared.

Manifest content analysis entails the classification and arrangement of data according to the words and phrases provided by the participants. On the other hand, latent content analysis is searching for the underlying meaning and making an overall assessment of the message. Inductive coding involves an iterative process, where codes and themes are continuously refined during the examination of the interview transcripts. By employing diverse analysis methods, we aimed to enhance the reliability and validity of the research findings (Trošt, 2021).

At the top of the next page, Table 2 shows which keywords were identified based on the answers. These words were used several times in the responses. A portion of the interviews was originally conducted in Hungarian, yet through the process of translating the transcript and individual words into English, we managed to consistently identify and integrate them into the Codebook.

When delving into the results chapter, readers will find an in-depth exploration of various overarching themes. Several of these themes emerged through the diligent utilization of the previously identified keywords. The Codebook's comprehensive compilation of instances serves to substantiate the interviewees' perceptions and experiences regarding the concept of paid time off from work, thereby adding valuable depth and credibility to our research findings.

Table 2: Codebook

Code	Description	Example
<b>traveling</b>	Most interviewees mentioned traveling when asked about what paid vacation means to them and how they usually spend it.	<p>“The first thing that comes into my mind is traveling abroad to the sea for leisure, for at least a week” (Respondent F)</p> <p>“My typical way to spend days off involves reading, and I love traveling as well.” (Respondent N)</p>
<b>motivation</b>	Many participants indicated that they find increased motivation for work either while anticipating their vacations, or when returning to work after it.	<p>“I prefer to work more before vacation; it is more hectic, but knowing that I can rest afterward motivates me.” (Respondent L)</p> <p>“My work performance and motivation are slightly better after vacation.” (Respondent I)</p>
<b>need</b>	Based on the answers, many people believe that employees not only deserve vacations, but also need them.	<p>“I always look forward to vacation and consider it necessary.” (Respondent A)</p> <p>“Vacation is not related to my performance, I always do my job appropriately, but to my human needs.” (Respondent F)</p>
<b>relaxation</b>	The interviewees often expressed that their periods of absence from work are closely associated with relaxation.	<p>“After a longer vacation, the more relaxed and recharged feelings last longer when I go back to work.” (Respondent B)</p> <p>“Vacation means no laptop and phone use. I can relax more, do something that I really want.” (Respondent K)</p>
<b>recharge</b>	It has been mentioned several times that vacations recharge people, enabling them to approach their work with revitalized energy.	<p>“I need to rest in order to be able to recharge and return to work in the same way.” (Respondent L)</p> <p>“For me, vacation means maximum recharge.” (Respondent G)</p>
<b>memories</b>	Following a holiday, the memories acquired during the vacation bestow a favorable impact on the employees. This influence can continue to yield positive results on individuals even long after the vacation is over.	<p>“I have a boost in my general happiness thinking of vacation memories.” (Respondent C)</p> <p>“It always varies, how long I feel the effects of vacation. Maybe a week or two, while memories of the holiday are still very fresh. Then I am in a better mood, I am calmer.” (Respondent K)</p>

Source: Own work.

The interviewees' responses provide intriguing information, yet delving into the unspoken, underlying thoughts is equally valuable for a comprehensive understanding.

The respondents not only shared their thoughts on the topic, but also conveyed an evident interest in the subject and divulged carefully contemplated answers. Another positive aspect is that the questions remained focused on neutral and comfortable topics, avoiding anything that might make someone uncomfortable or unwilling to engage in conversation. Even when providing a concise and short response to a question, individuals remained forthright and unhesitant in their willingness to answer.

They expressed a sense of enjoyment when talking about their vacation days, as they reflected on their experiences with ease and joy. Occasionally, they found themselves pleasantly surprised as they discussed the positive facets of paid leave, for example listing their reasons why they perceive vacation time as essential and deserved, because they have never really talked and thought about this topic before, so this process of articulation seemed to be a novel experience. We elaborate on these findings in the Results section.

## **4 RESULTS**

Within this chapter, the responses of the interviewees are brought to the forefront and examined, offering valuable insights into the research questions of this thesis. The interview data was analyzed through the utilization of inductive analysis, as detailed above. Also, as mentioned earlier, the size of the sample was determined with data saturation. In the case of this thesis, the individuals interviewed expressed a unanimous opinion: they always view their own vacations as thoroughly earned, and they provided similar answers to various questions. In the following sections, we present the most important themes that emerged during the interviews.

### **4.1 Meaning of vacation – Traveling**

The primary theme that promptly emerged from the interview responses was traveling. When we inquired about the interviewees' perceptions of what a vacation represented to them, a unanimous sentiment emerged wherein each participant associated vacation with the concept of traveling and exploring new places. For many, travel is the means to escape the confines of work and daily routine (such as using a laptop or mobile phone, spending more time with hobbies, etc. ...). When contemplating travels, more participants expressed a fondness for beach vacations, relishing in activities like swimming and sunbathing. Others mentioned their interest in winter vacations or active getaways, preferring more dynamic experiences over lounging at the beach all day.



Additionally, traveling on our days off is influenced by the amount of available time an individual has. For instance, Respondent A, who exhibited a strong passion for travel, mentioned that having a minimum of 3 days off would prompt her to plan a trip. But let's take a look at the importance of good timing as well. Respondent B highlighted the issue of employers mandating both the timing and the individual's eligibility for vacation. For example, if the provided leave falls within school days and someone has a child going to school, even having the means to spend days off with traveling might not make vacation feasible.

The interviewees also shared a variety of other activities they enjoy during vacations. Some like to invest their time in education, attending festivals, spending quality time outdoors, and indulging in reading. One participant, in the case of not traveling abroad and opting to stay within her home country, finds joy and a positive state of mind by engaging in activities like swimming, dancing, and exploring cultural places such as museums or attending the opera — experiences that offer a departure from her daily routines.

Furthermore, when asked about the meaning of vacation to the interviewees individually, a noteworthy aspect was the notion of relaxation, and utilizing this time to be with loved ones, family, or friends. In light of this, it is not surprising that visiting friends and relatives is a common and expected aspect of vacation travel. This type of travel encompasses visits where the primary purpose of the trip or the chosen accommodation involves spending time with friends and / or family. Within the surveyed group, the younger participants tend to travel either solo, with their partners, or accompanied by friends. In contrast, respondents B, J, L, M, and N, who have families and children, primarily choose to travel with their close family members.

#### **4.2 Enhanced motivation before and after vacation**

Out of the 14 respondents, 10 mentioned experiencing heightened motivation either in the period leading up to their vacation or upon returning to work. Before their vacations, individuals often willingly put in extra effort at work to ensure a seamless break, leaving the workplace with a sense of tranquility for the upcoming vacation. Respondent A enthusiastically emphasized the motivational impact of vacation in her life. She finds that having only for example two workdays left before a vacation makes it easier for her to persevere through the remaining tasks. Additionally, she believes that the prospect of a vacation enhances her performance at work.

Conversely, some respondents found increased motivation after the vacation, citing the recharge and relaxation experienced during their time off. This renewed energy and positive vacation experiences contributed to a better mood, enhancing motivation and quality of work performance upon reintegration into their work routine. However, a minority of respondents

stated that their motivation and performance remained unaffected by the periods surrounding their paid vacation.

### **4.3 Deservingness of vacation**

The participants expressed unanimous agreement regarding their belief in the importance of taking vacations, deeming them not only well-deserved, but also essential.

The respondents considered their vacations as well-deserved, earned through their dedication to their work, and striving to perform their best all the time. Respondent A added: *“I do not understand why someone would feel that she / he does not deserve the vacation, because if someone works decently, then she / he deserves it.”*

They also viewed vacations more as a need based on personal circumstances rather than deservingness based on performance. They emphasized the importance of periodic relaxation, recognizing the human need for time off, especially during demanding work situations to prevent burnout, bring relief from work, and recharge workers. Moreover, they acknowledged vacations as not only a personal benefit, but also a right for all colleagues, promoting a positive outlook toward utilizing vacation days.

Regarding feelings of not deserving a vacation, most respondents did not experience such sentiments. They firmly believed in the importance of rest and saw vacations as a vital aspect of life. However, they acknowledged that if an individual does not share this perspective, it could influence their perceived vacation deservingness and vacation experience.

The remarkable consensus among interviewees is that they always deserve time off from work and never felt it as undeserved. This resulted in a lack of highly uncommon or divergent responses. Respondent E commented on the topic as follows: *“I would not work in an environment that is giving me those negative feelings that I do not deserve a break.”* Respondent B said: *“It is an interesting approach to think about whether people deserve a vacation. I never thought about it, I think everyone deserves it, but it might not be expressed that way in people's minds.”*

In the context of formulating this thesis within the university's tourism department, a pertinent query has arisen regarding conscious travel and its correlation with the concept of deserving a vacation. Namely, we seek to explore the nuanced relationship between environmentally friendly travel methods and the sense of deserving a vacation, which advocates this. Given the current prominence of environmental protection, Sustainable Development Goals, and sustainable travel methods, the questionnaire asked whether respondents have engaged in tourism experiences that prioritize these aspects. If they have, how did these experiences differ from other types of tourism encounters? Moreover, do these sustainable practices influence their sense of deserving a vacation? Most respondents have

not participated in such activities; while one person considers sustainability options when traveling, particularly due to her vegan lifestyle; others have had educational or workshop-like experiences; a few have stayed in environmentally friendly accommodations, and one emphasizes the popularity of sustainable activities like hiking in their region. The interviewees know that sustainability is important, but they do not think that sustainable choices while traveling would change their fundamental perception of deserving a vacation.

The following are some examples of the answers. Respondent A expressed: *“It does not affect at all whether I travel or not, or whether I deserve a vacation or not. I do not particularly pay attention to sustainability during my travels, sometimes I travel by plane, but I always use public transportation; I do not waste food and I do not stay in luxury hotels. A sustainable trip would not affect whether I deserve a vacation, but I would probably feel better about it, and I would be proud of it.”*

*“I have lived in an environmentally friendly hotel before, but I have not yet participated in a program of this kind. It would not affect the worthiness of the vacation, but it would give me a good feeling if I knew that it also had a great impact on protecting the environment.”*  
(Respondent B)

In summary, it can be affirmed that the activities a person chooses to engage in during their days off do not really impact the deservingness of a vacation.

#### **4.4 Financial aspects of vacation**

Another common theme among the answers was the financial aspect of taking a vacation. Finances can be a possible component of feeling guilty while on vacation or going on vacation in the first place. Certain individuals noted that when they choose to utilize their leisure days for travel, they sometimes find themselves exceeding their intended budget. *“Sometimes I feel guilty for spending too much money during my vacation ... If I do not feel I deserve a vacation, then I stay in my city and do not spend money on traveling.”* (Respondent D). Additionally, there was a response indicating that a person would prefer to change his travel habits if he had the financial means to do so.

On the positive side, Respondent A also talked about one of her personal experiences: *“When I traveled to Jordan, I knew that I could do this with the money I worked hard for. It affected the enjoyment of my vacation, because I knew that I worked hard to be able to afford this trip, so I enjoyed it so much!”*

It is comforting to note that paid vacations are the prevailing standard these days. This assurance allows individuals to enjoy their time off without concerns about losing income. While it may vary based on the profession - like hairstylists, manicurists, or mechanics, whose earnings rely on clients - those individuals in roles with unwavering salaries can relish

their time off, secure in the knowledge that their consistent monthly earnings remain unaffected, regardless of whether they are working or on vacation.

#### **4.5 Benefits of vacation**

While the effects of vacation varied in terms of work performance and transition back to work, the overall consensus highlighted the positive impact of vacations on mental and physical well-being.

The vacation experience appeared to provide essential mental and physical rejuvenation. Interviewees noted feeling recharged, relaxed and better equipped to manage work-related stress and challenges. Some also acknowledged enhanced patience, understanding, and empathy toward their colleagues and tasks. A common sentiment was the infusion of positive energy and happiness, coupled often with the earlier discussed heightened motivation when re-entering the workplace.

The level of physical recharge experienced by workers post-vacation is contingent upon the activities they engaged in during their time off. The degree of physical activity during the vacation, such as an active or more leisurely vacation, plays a role in determining this. In terms of health, one individual mentioned having asthma as a health condition. Despite this, she enjoys motorcycle rides and frequently ventures to distant places for short getaways. She has noticed that when she spends time in mountainous areas during her days off, the cleaner air there prevents any asthma symptoms. Moreover, this environment alleviates her migraine and headaches, providing a pleasant relief during those times. This aligns with the advantages of traveling during holiday periods. Another respondent mentioned that he goes to medical treatment once a year for several weeks, which he also has time for during his vacation. Furthermore, visiting destinations or spending more time doing things that involve walking, hiking, swimming, or just working in the garden offers a fantastic opportunity to enhance your physical activity beyond your usual daily routine.

Additionally, spending at least one day at home before returning to work with actual relaxation, or for example unpacking from the suitcases after a holiday, sleeping a lot, or managing household tasks, (which often get neglected on workdays), can help to end the vacation in a more relaxed way, ready for work days.

## 4.6 Factors influencing the (post-) vacation experience and return to work

### 4.6.1 Navigating the challenge of returning to work

Respondents also reported negative experiences after the vacation. Among them is the feeling of sadness that the vacation is over and work is about to begin. Several people have reported that it is difficult to jump back into work and regain a routine after a long break, and that it can be stressful to handle the many tasks that have accumulated, (even if some of them are more motivated and recharged). During this period, some individuals think that they should not engage in traditional work and instead prefer to adopt a lifestyle they had during their days off. In general, transitioning back to work is not simple. However, for instance, Respondent K begins her workweek with a home office setup, allowing her to initiate her tasks in a more relaxed environment.

The type of work also plays a role in vacation experiences. As an illustration, an internship role might correlate with reduced workplace stress, contributing to a more tranquil anticipation of vacation, the vacation period itself, and the subsequent reentry into the workplace. Respondent D shares: “As an intern at an international law firm, I have a supporting role to the lawyers and do not bear any responsibilities.”

Furthermore, individuals who have a genuine passion for their work also tend to find it easier to go back to their responsibilities after a vacation, even when faced with a significant workload. One participant's passionate commitment to healthcare highlighted a potential link between job satisfaction and post-vacation experiences: “*I work in healthcare, mainly with small children, I see my work as a profession and I love it very much, even during the fast-paced moments.*” (Respondent L). Similarly, for Respondent E, curiosity about happenings in her company during her absence drives her. Also, she likes her routine, which makes returning to the office and resuming her tasks a smooth process.

### 4.6.2 Duration of the vacation's effects

The duration of the vacation's effects upon returning to work varied significantly among the interviewees. Most of the respondents reported experiencing the positive effects for approximately a week after returning to work. The length of the effects also depends on the challenges and tasks the worker has to face upon returning to work. Additionally, a few participants held the belief that the longer the vacation was, the more prolonged the positive effects lasted.

Interestingly, the recollection of vacation memories emerged as a significant factor. Even though the direct effects of the vacation were transient, memories of the holiday intermittently enhanced well-being. Participants mentioned revisiting pictures or creating

photo albums, helping them reminisce about their good experiences. Respondent L shared that looking at vacation pictures, even years later brings back the good memories, and because of that the vacation continues to exert its positive influence upon her. Conversely, Respondent H noted that while she does not perceive an increase in terms of energy, she experiences a lasting mental improvement for about a month after the vacation. However, two interviewees found it challenging to answer the question. In cases where negative or uncertain responses arose, for example, “I do not know” - answer, when discussing the lasting impact of vacations (“How long do you feel the effects of your vacation?” – question 9), it is possible that the interviewees have never thought about it or did not observe their reactions, feelings - before, during or after a vacation in these dimensions.

#### 4.6.3 Others' perceptions of deservingness influence vacation experiences

The opinions regarding whether other people's perceptions of deservingness can impact their vacation experience vary only a little among respondents, (ultimately, when they reflect on their personal experiences and emotions - as mentioned before - they always think that their respite from work is well-deserved). Some interviewees mentioned their hesitation to comment on other people's experiences, while others provided detailed responses to the question. Respondent C said: *"When you think you do not deserve the vacation, negative thoughts could evolve which can influence the relaxing effect of a vacation. Overthinking, not enjoying the moment, thinking all the time about the work."* Respondent E's answer was similar – she says that workers cannot fully enjoy days off, even when they are physically away from work, if they are still in the office with their minds. It can be a stressful situation to deal with. Besides, certain individuals might have issues unwinding during their holiday, Respondent I for example knows workaholics, who struggle on vacation. Respondent M said: *"Everyone has their own days off that they can schedule for themselves. Go on vacation when you know that you will enjoy it."*

## 5 DISCUSSION

At the beginning of the chapter, we present the answers – key findings for the main research questions. Later, we make a comparative analysis, which seeks to identify correlations and connections between the primary research findings and the existing theoretical framework. Moreover, we give practical recommendations that can be inferred from the empirical evidence, shedding light on how these findings can be applied in real-world scenarios. Finally, we discuss the limitations of the study and outline potential directions for future research to build upon these findings.

## **5.1 Findings – Addressing the research questions**

Having presented and examined a significant portion of the interview responses, the focal findings are harnessed to address the three research questions below. In response to the initial two research queries, we offer a unified answer owing to the inherent interconnectedness between the findings.

### **1. How do employees perceive the deservingness of a vacation on an individual level? & 2. How do employees react to the perception of deservingness during vacation?**

At the individual level, employees predominantly assess the deservingness of vacation based on the following factors: a) consistent commitment - they always strive to do their best at their jobs, b) recognizing the importance and necessity of periodic relaxation, particularly during demanding situations, and c) acknowledging that vacations are not only for personal benefit, but also for colleagues, thereby recognizing that all working individuals have the right and earn the opportunity to utilize their vacation days due to the fulfillment of their job responsibilities.

As long as employees consistently view their vacations as well-deserved, they are able to relish these breaks to the fullest. Conversely, if they were to perceive their paid vacations as unmerited, it is likely to have a notable impact on the quality of their vacation experience. Concerning the notion of not feeling deserving of a vacation, the respondents did not report experiencing such feelings. They held a strong belief in the significance of rest and viewed vacations as an essential component of life. Nevertheless, they recognized that for those who do not share this perspective, it could affect both their perceived deservingness of a vacation and their overall vacation experience.

### **3. How does the post-vacation experience differ among employees according to the perceived deservingness of the vacation?**

Reflecting on the answer to the previous question, when an individual perceives his / her vacation as deserved, the ensuing positive outcomes - such as recharge, increased patience, relaxation, and heightened motivation, tend to extend for a week on average, although the duration might vary from individual to individual and based on the given work circumstances. However, if someone spends their vacation in a manner that does not let them fully disconnect from work, potentially because of perceiving it as undeserved, then the positive effects are either shorter-lived or completely absent.

## **5.2 Theoretical implications**

The chapter on theoretical implications serves as the intellectual bridge that connects the research conducted with the existing body of knowledge and theories within the chosen field

of study. We highlight several topics and make a comparison between the theory and our original research.

Starting with the number of paid times off, as earlier outlined, the entitlement to paid holidays is a universal provision for workers, although subject to variations across different countries. This diversity also extends to the research participants, who represent various nationalities.

The importance of good timing is a factor to consider. Previous research has revealed that the vacation experience can be influenced by factors such as inconvenient timing or compulsory leave, as the employer can also determine when you take your leave (tuc.org.uk, 2022). This sentiment was also echoed in the in-depth interviews, such as when the parent is on paid leave, but the child is at school. The key point is that employees typically possess the autonomy to negotiate and schedule their time off according to their individual preferences and requirements. In addition, a self-employed individual may not have a predefined period for taking vacations. However, if they abstain from work, it could result in the loss of clients or a specific work project, leading to a temporary pause in earnings during that period. In such scenarios, they need to independently determine the opportune moments to schedule their time off.

Both the theoretical insights and the interview responses accentuate the vital role vacations play in fostering relationships and strengthening family bonds. Incorporating insights from Durko and Petrick (2016), it is crucial to emphasize that individuals within the workforce encompass multifaceted roles beyond their professional lives, including responsibilities as parents, spouses, friends, and more. Their study underscores the growing acknowledgment within the tourism domain regarding vacations playing a pivotal role in enhancing relationships and family bonds. In alignment with the aforementioned theory, the results obtained from the interview responses further reinforce the significance of vacation in nurturing relationships and familial connections. Notably, interviewees conveyed a predominant perception of vacation as a period intertwined with the opportunity to spend quality time with loved ones, be it family or friends.

As highlighted in an article by hive.com (2022), the concept of a well-deserved, paid vacation can serve as a testament to one's diligent and effective work. However, using the term "well-earned PTO" also implies that time off must be earned, which is not always accurate. This notion resonates with the respondents' perspectives as well. The interviewees consistently express the belief that their vacations are indeed well-deserved, given their consistent hard work at their jobs. If someone works diligently, they are clearly entitled to a break.

The interviewees also shared their experiences related to their work performance. Citing a 2017 study conducted by Expedia, it was found that more than half of global workers perceive reduced productivity due to insufficient amount of paid time off. Notwithstanding



this sentiment, paid time off yields a more positive attitude upon returning to work, enhances concentration, boosts productivity, and fosters a sense of relaxation among workers. This observation is substantiated by the interviewees, who said that taking days off allows them to rejoin work with heightened motivation, feeling recharged and full of energy, and with a greater sense of relaxation and patience.

We also examined the durability of the effects of the vacation. Drawing from the research by De Bloom et al. (2011, 2012), it has been established that the favorable impact of a vacation tends to wane within three days after one's return to work, and the length of the vacation itself does not significantly influence the length of these positive effects. Interestingly, the majority of the interviewees noted feeling the benefits for about a week upon rejoining work. Furthermore, some participants believe that the duration of the positive effects extends with the length of their vacation. Besides, the positive impacts of vacations on employees tend to be transient; however, the recollections of these vacation memories intermittently enhance employees' well-being. According to the interviewees, these memories play a role in reviving and sustaining the enduring beneficial effects of vacations. Memories help slow down the vacation fade-out effect.

Among the potential downsides of vacations is the phenomenon of workaholism, as outlined in the theory. Workaholism is classically described as an addiction to work, marked by an overwhelming preoccupation with excessive work and an obsession with working, devoid of external incentives like paid vacations (Makhdoom et al., 2022). This was exemplified by Respondent I, who noted an acquaintance preferring work over leisure and consequently not finding vacations enjoyable. Respondent I even described this person as a workaholic.

Additionally, the concept of vacation guilt surfaced both in theoretical contexts and in relation to the interviews, however, in the latter instance, it predominantly came from financial concerns.

Furthermore, observed responses from the interviewees align with the theoretical framework proposed by Dr. Peter Wish regarding the challenges of returning to work after a vacation. The purported negative emotions resonate with the concept of "re-entry stress" as described by Wish (CBS News, 2002). The respondents' expressed sadness after the vacation echoes the emotional aspect associated with the end of the vacation. This connection underscores the psychological and emotional experiences during the transition from vacation mode to work routine (Zimmermann, 2023). A number of respondents also shared some examples of what assists them in resuming work.

To summarize, numerous similarities can be identified between the theoretical background and the outcomes of the primary research. However, due to the limitation of the research sample, we can only partially contribute or make comparisons to the theoretical foundations.

### **5.3 Recommendation for practice**

On the positive side, more and more emphasis is placed on employee health and well-being these days, which has led to heightened recognition of the importance of a healthy work-life balance as well. The topic's growing global relevance is also reflected by the fact that the thesis could incorporate more transnational, current sources, which deal with these subjects.

Looking back at the past, performance-based pay has been a consistent practice throughout history, where greater effort corresponded to higher earnings. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that, much like in other aspects of life, the realm of work should value quality over quantity. Do not work more, work better! And you can perform better at work, if you have the resources to do so, such as energy and motivation.

Another important recommendation is to give special consideration to night workers or those engaged in extended shifts beyond the standard 8-hour workday. This is especially crucial for individuals performing physically demanding or hazardous tasks, such as driving. These professions can pose risks not only to the workers themselves but also to others if, for instance, the employee is excessively fatigued.

In practical terms, employers should always consider their employees' interests since this serves the common goal at the company level. Effective work requires both mental and physical preparedness and support. However, this can be a hurdle if, for instance, difficulties at work or excessive workload prevent proper relaxation. This thesis highlighted the significant outcomes that can originate from such circumstances.

It is important for managers and human resource management to recognize the needs of their employees; to provide guidance and clear information to them about the benefits and possibilities of paid leave, and to find solutions on how organizational policies and practices can effectively foster a culture of well-deserved rest and rejuvenation for workers. The support of the executives and in-house colleagues can ensure the effective utilization of these advantages.

In addition, companies could consider the option of establishing a work council or a work union. These entities can be instrumental in assisting workers by offering pertinent information regarding their vacation benefits and guidance on how to assert their rights effectively.

Moreover, to enable workers to manage their time effectively and attain a favorable work-life balance, experimenting with a four-day workweek and a three-day weekend, if possible, could prove beneficial to both the company as well as the employee. Although it is well known, it is still worth noting that within specific sectors such as the hotel industry, entertainment sphere, healthcare field, and transportation sector, the demand for services and operations transcends the usual Monday-to-Friday work structure. In these vital industries, the necessity for work during weekends is inherent and fundamental to ensuring seamless

operations, serving customers, maintaining public health, and meeting transportation needs. Employees within these domains often play pivotal roles during weekends, underscoring the critical nature of their contribution to society and the overall functioning of these sectors. The provision of services over weekends is a key component in meeting the needs of a constantly evolving and 24/7 global society, emphasizing the essential nature of weekend work in these specialized professions. Considering this viewpoint, it is worthwhile to ponder whether an individual consistently enjoying free weekends is actually in a fortunate position. This consideration enables more effective planning compared to someone with varying free days throughout the week.

As observed, most respondents associate their days off with traveling. Providing incentive trips to employees at specific intervals, coupled with learning opportunities and lectures, could be a fantastic way to utilize vacation days. In addition, tourism workers can also have a very uplifting feeling when they are receiving the attention instead of serving guests. While some workplaces already organize training sessions and conferences that integrate rewards with learning, this approach could be further encouraged, particularly if the organization has the financial capacity to support it.

Last but not least, employees themselves should be mindful of their mental and physical well-being, understand their personal boundaries, and recognize when it is crucial to take a longer break from work and completely recharge for renewed energy. For instance, when workers consciously reflect on the reasons why they value their time off and how it aligns with their needs, it can heighten their motivation in anticipation of a break. This heightened awareness allows them to truly appreciate the positive impact of paid time off, potentially leading them to make the most of their days off and, subsequently, devote greater effort to their work. This not only aids them financially in pursuing their desired activities during their free time, such as travel, but also reinforces their sense of deserving the rest due to their meaningful contributions at work.

#### **5.4 Limitations and future research**

In the case of a qualitative interview, investigating emotions and individual experiences presents challenges, as individuals frequently struggle to express or recollect their precise feelings in specific situations. To address these challenges, researchers should often consider employing various techniques besides open-ended questions, such as probing, and creating a supportive and empathetic environment to encourage participants to share their feelings and experiences more freely.

In connection with the in-depth interview method used during this research, it was undoubtedly also demanding to reach the potential participants for the sampling and then actually carry out the interviews.

A notable constraint of this research pertains to the absence of interviews with individuals who perceived their vacations as undeserved (but perhaps it is good news that all interviewees feel they deserve paid time off). This limitation prevented the opportunity to conduct a comparative analysis between participants who felt deserving of their vacation time and those who did not. Such a comparison could have provided deeper insights into the divergent experiences and perspectives related to vacation deservingness. Addressing this gap would be valuable for a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play in employees' attitudes towards vacation and its subsequent effects. We could ask workaholics and people who do not use their days off for other reasons, such as breadwinners; people who only get paid when they work, or people who think that they do not deserve to go on vacation based on their work performance.

Moreover, several considerations can be factored in to choose the participants for research in the same or similar field. We can differentiate based on an individual's passion for their work and whether they view it as a source of joy rather than a mere obligation. Furthermore, we can contrast the perceptions of vacation effects between for example: a) full-time employees and those who work reduced hours; b) employees who work in an office or on-site and those who can work from home or remotely and c) we can conduct a comparison based on job positions - we can analyze the differences between individuals in leadership roles with higher responsibilities and potentially higher stress levels, and those of regular employees. Furthermore, we can compare how workers and employees, who have a given number of days off a year experience their time off, and those who, for example, are self-employed and can take as many days off as they want, (of course, this is influenced by the fact that some people only get paid when they are working.) Also, it would be interesting to delve deeper into researching how individuals determine the post-vacation effects based on their activities during their time off.

Besides, considering interviews with workers from different continents, like Asians and Americans who tend to use their time off less than their European counterparts, would provide valuable perspectives. Not to mention that, for instance, existing studies from other continents are even scarcer. Additionally, it would be intriguing to conduct interviews with companies where the four working-day model has already been introduced.

Finally, it would be worthwhile to conduct follow-up interviews with the same participants, since in the future they may perceive their own reactions better and more consciously before, during, and following their vacation, after having been involved with the topic once.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The question of deserving a vacation might be so fundamental that its significance often goes unnoticed. Often, privileges like paid time off and the positive effects of traveling become such integral aspects of our lives that we scarcely recognize their importance.

Moreover, it is important to reflect on the timeless pattern of humans incorporating periods of rest into their routines, starting from a young age. Even little ones in kindergarten have designated times for napping in the afternoon, and school-aged children enjoy lengthy breaks during the day and more extended reprieves between school terms, like the cherished summer vacation. Additionally, there are opportunities for rejuvenation during holidays, even if it is just a blissful long weekend. This intrinsic rhythm of rest has been ingrained in our lives since childhood, making it quite natural to prioritize relaxation when we sense the need for it.

Embarking on the exploration of post-vacation work experiences and the intricate realm of perceived vacation deservingness has been a captivating and novel journey for me. I found it truly fascinating to discover the interviewees' viewpoints on different topics, most of which shared a harmonious agreement. As someone, who loves traveling and learning about different cultures, I felt comforted by the common belief that vacations are closely connected to the bliss of exploring new things and new places. I also deeply respect the participants who strongly emphasized that everyone has the right to vacations, going beyond any sense of competition or jealousy. Most of us have a goal to have a work environment and work culture that prioritize the well-being of all the employees, even if working together with others requires additional effort sometimes.

Furthermore, it was truly heartening to see the presence of individuals among the interviewees, who genuinely love their job, which is especially important considering the substantial amount of time we dedicate to our professional endeavors. This serves as a reminder that our work serves a purpose beyond just making a living. In the past, (and in some countries possibly even today), the norm was for individuals to remain in the same profession until they reached retirement. However, modern times have brought about a noticeable and prevalent shift, making it easier and more commonplace for people to change jobs with greater frequency. This trend empowers individuals to carefully select their workplace and even their residence, thanks to the enticing prospect of international work opportunities. Consequently, if one senses a misalignment with their current position, then it is worthwhile to consider making a change.

Exploring the individual-level factors that shape the perception of deservingness, we have gained insights into how employees assess their commitment, value relaxation, and recognize the collective right to enjoy paid time off with its benefits. The information gained emphasizes the importance of fostering a sense of deservingness to maximize the positive

effects of vacations on employees' overall well-being and subsequent work performance. As I delve into the realm of human resource management through my thesis, I am not only fulfilling an academic pursuit but also envision a practical application of this knowledge in my future career. Whether I find myself in the role of an employee or as a member of an HR team, the insights and expertise gained during this thesis writing process will undoubtedly contribute to my ability to enhance workplace dynamics and employee satisfaction.

Even if leisure time is limited compared to work hours, the interviewees expressed how making the most out of it according to personal preference is still a principle to be followed. When we finally have the freedom and opportunity to decide how time is spent, value must be placed on activities, seeing places, and spending time with people that bring joy and positivity into our lives.

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## **APPENDICES**







## **Appendix 1: Povzetek (Summary in Slovene Language)**

To magistrsko delo se poglobi v zapleteno razmerje med dopustom in delom posameznikov. Posebej se osredotoča na njihovo dojetje zasluženosti prostega časa in počitnic. V času, ko stres in izgorelost močno vplivata na duševno in fizično počutje ter delovno uspešnost, je razumevanje dinamike prostega časa in dela nujno. S poglobljenimi intervjuji in natančno analizo njihove vsebine ta študija razkriva pomembne vplive počitnic na dobro počutje, motivacijo in splošne delovne izide ter izkušnje zaposlenih.

Uporabljena raziskovalna metodologija vključuje celovito proučevanje perspektiv in izkušenj zaposlenih, ki ponuja poglobljeno razumevanje njihovega odnosa do počitnic. S poglobljanjem v osebne pripovedi posameznikov želi študija zajeti različne dejavnike, ki vplivajo na dojetje zasluženosti dopusta. Ta kvalitativni pristop omogoča bogato in kontekstualno razumevanje, kar omogoča raziskovanje vzorcev in vpogledov, ki jih same kvantitativne metode ne morejo v celoti razvozlati.

Ko se pripoved odvija, ugotovitve osvetljujejo kritično potrebo po priznanju in izkoriščanju potenciala počitnic pri spodbujanju uravnoteženosti med poklicnim in zasebnim življenjem. Ta študija skuša spodbuditi radovednost in izzvati razmislek, bralce pa vabi k ponovnemu premisleku o tradicionalnem pogledu na počitnice, pri čemer poudarja njihovo pomembno vlogo pri izboljšanju splošnega dobrega počutja in produktivnosti. Konec koncev si raziskava prizadeva opremiti organizacije s pronicljivim znanjem, ki utira pot za oblikovanje in izvajanje učinkovitih politik dopustov, ki dajejo prednost dobremu počutju zaposlenih in optimizirajo produktivnost.

## **Appendix 2: Interview Questions**

### **General introductory questions**

- Years of employment:
- Paid time off per year:
- Which country do you work in?
- Type of work models (Remote, office environment, hybrid, etc.)
- Tell me about your current job and responsibilities:

### **Area 1: Personal feelings about taking a vacation**

1. What does taking a vacation mean to you? How do you usually spend your vacations?
2. Tell me if and how the anticipation of a vacation impacts your motivation and performance at work (leading up to it).

### **Area 2: Vacation deservingness**

3. Think of a time when you felt particularly deserving or undeserving of a vacation. What factors contributed to your perception of deservingness in that situation?
4. How do you feel about taking a vacation when you feel like you have not earned it or do not deserve it? Do you have any strategies for dealing with these feelings?
5. Do you feel like your perception of vacation deservingness influences your enjoyment of the vacation? If so, how?

### **Area 2.1.: Vacation deservingness & Sustainability**

6. Have you ever participated in a tourism experience that emphasized sustainability? If so, how did it compare to other types of tourism experiences you have had? Does your involvement in these practices influence your perception of vacation deservingness?

### **Area 3: (Post-)vacation experience**

7. After you return from a vacation, how do you feel about the experience overall?
8. Please describe the difference in your work performance and motivation after the vacation compared to the time before the vacation or a general work week. How are these differences affected by the vacation?
9. How long do you feel the effects of your vacation? How do you know this? Can you provide examples?
10. Do you think that other people's perceptions of deservingness can affect their vacation experience? Why or why not?
11. Is there anything more that you would like to add?