Exploring the leadership of employee wellbeing

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Exploring the Leadership of Employee Wellbeing

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Abstract

Employee wellbeing has significant positive and negative impacts on workers. Employees can experience energy (Bakker et al., 2023), perceptions of fulfilment (Thorsteinsen & Vittersø, 2020), and thriving at work (Dhiman, 2021). In contrast, poor employee wellbeing contributes to psychological distress (Boddy et al., 2021), mental illnesses (Leiter & Maslach, 2023), physical illnesses, diseases (Bakker & de Vries, 2021), and fatalities (Bakker & de Vries, 2021; Goh et al., 2016; Timming, 2020). In addition to these recognised negative impacts to employees, workplaces continue to become more stressful (Koinig & Diehl, 2021; Rudolph et al., 2020), therefore, it is vital to further investigate employee wellbeing.

Exploring the employee wellbeing and leadership literature showed that leaders and their leadership extensively and directly impact employee wellbeing (Inceoglu et al., 2021; Vincent-Höper et al., 2017). Literature suggests that leaders and their leadership can support employee wellbeing (Inceoglu et al., 2021) through workload management, job control and support (Goh et al., 2016). Particularly as workplace stressors likely arise from job demands and exposure to damaging work environments including toxic leadership (Brough et al., 2021). While leaders are significant, other workplace actors, followers, and an organisation actor, were also present in the literature (Horstmann & Remdisch, 2019). Unfortunately, research is inconsistent and ambiguous regarding workplace actor roles and their involvement in the leadership of employee wellbeing. Consequently, to better understand workplace actors in the leadership of employee wellbeing, two research questions were posed in this study:

1) How are workplace actors involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing?

2) Why are workplace actors involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing?

To answer these questions, the leadership of employee wellbeing was explored in two Australian workplaces through a qualitative case study (Stake, 1995). The case study involved interviewing 23 participants in the case organisations, undertaking 12 observations, and reviewing 20 organisational documents. Collected data were analysed according to Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis approach, which complemented the social constructivist paradigm (Grandy, 2018) which is at the core of this research. Six themes were constructed from analysed data and contributed to answering the two research questions.

Based on the findings located in the six themes, key contributions to theory and practice are made. An expanded definition of employee wellbeing is offered, and a framework was developed from the findings which contributes a clarified understanding of four distinct human workplace actors and two non-human actants involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. In addition, the framework contributes the identification of four core leader practices to enact and enable the leadership of employee wellbeing: 1) establishing a foundation of employee wellbeing within the organisation, 2) structuring the organisation to enable leadership of employee wellbeing, 3) establishing and enabling interpersonal connection and practices, and 4) enabling self-leadership practices. The framework also offers extended understanding of individual and follower involvement in the leadership of employee wellbeing through distinct intra-individual processes including self-leadership. Answers to the second research question contribute expanded understanding of the dual motivations for workplace actor involvement in the leadership of employee wellbeing: 1) for the betterment of the business, and 2) because employees are human, and therefore have inherent worth.

Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed)_____
Lisa Smith

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the outline for this thesis and introduces the background to employee wellbeing and the motivations for investigating the leadership of employee wellbeing. Next, the research is situated in the employee wellbeing and leadership literature, where a key gap is identified, which is addressed through the development of two research questions. With the foundation of this thesis established, a summary of the key contributions arising from this research are presented, followed by an overview of the thesis structure.

1.2 Background to the Research

In this thesis, employee wellbeing is defined as a combination of hedonic, eudaimonic, negative and positive affect, social, and physical wellbeing (Fisher, 2014; Inceoglu et al., 2018) at work. This aggregated conceptualisation offers a broad foundation that encompass an employee's lived positive and negative work-related experiences and outcomes. Employees can experience positive wellbeing, including feelings of pleasure, fulfilment (Jaskeviciute et al., 2021; Thorsteinsen & Vittersø, 2020), and engagement. Engaged employees experience energy and dedication (Bakker et al., 2023; Sonnentag, 2015), and are enthusiastic about their work and life (Hamilton Skurak et al., 2021; L. Liu et al., 2022).

In contrast, employees can also experience poor wellbeing, which can have significant negative consequences for workers. Poor employee wellbeing contributes to psychological distress (Boddy et al., 2021; Maslach & Leiter, 2017), injuries (McHugh et al., 2020), the development of diseases (Bakker & de Vries, 2021), and at times, fatalities (Goh et al., 2016; Timming, 2020). Workplaces are becoming more stressful (Koinig & Diehl, 2021; Rudolph et al., 2020), with work stress reaching "epidemic levels" in current workplaces (Podsakoff et al., 2023, p. 166) and considered a major public health issue in Australia (Brough et al. (2021). According to Gallup (2023), 47% of Australian and New Zealand workers reported

experiencing daily stress, the second-highest regional rate, and only 23% of respondents felt they were thriving at work. Moreover, work-related fatalities have increased over the past five years (Safe Work Australia [SWA], 2023c) and close to half a million Australian workers sustained a work-related injury (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). These fatalities, injuries, and illnesses have widely-felt negative impacts on the affected individuals, and their families and wider communities (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2023b).

Understanding the causes of poor employee wellbeing is vital due to the recognised negative impacts. Researchers have indicated that leaders and their practices have significant and direct impacts on employee wellbeing (Inceoglu et al., 2021; Vincent-Höper et al., 2017) and the relationship between follower and leader is critical (Martin et al., 2023). In addition, several researchers have suggested that working conditions, such as job demands and stressors, can lead to poor employee wellbeing (Bakker et al., 2023; Haver et al., 2019; Leiter & Maslach, 2023; Schwepker et al., 2021; Sonnentag, 2018). While Gulseren and Lyubykh (2023) argued that "job-related factors such as imbalanced job designs, occupational uncertainty, and lack of perceived justice and respect are the major triggers of poor well-being" (p.198). Significantly, Brough et al. (2021) highlighted that the probable causes of workplace stressors include "excessive work demands, inadequate work resources, and exposure to psychologically unhealthy work environments predominately marked by interpersonal conflicts including 'toxic leadership'" (p.8). It is unsurprising then, that Inceoglu et al. (2021) argued that leaders and their leadership "can protect and support employees' wellbeing" (p.459) through workload management, job control, and support (Goh et al., 2016).

1.3 Situating this Research, the Research Gaps, and Research Questions

The concept of employee wellbeing refers to worker-specific wellbeing (Warr, 1999), in contrast to a generalised notion of wellbeing, a state of happiness, or other tangential wellbeing constructs (Wijngaards et al., 2021). The literature on employee wellbeing has had

many focus areas, with several key theories that provide understanding on different aspects of employee wellbeing, for example, jobs-demands resources theory (Bakker et al., 2023), burnout (for example, Leiter & Maslach, 2023), and psychological safety (for example, Edmondson & Bransby, 2023). Surprisingly, though employee wellbeing is situated in a large and diverse body of literature spread across multiple fields, the concept remains poorly defined (Chan et al., 2021). There is also significant term proliferation where authors such as Wright et al. (2017), Inceoglu et al. (2021), Bachman et al. (2023) and others switch between employee wellbeing and related terms such as worker wellbeing, resulting in a poor defined concept.

While it has been established that leaders play a pivotal role in employee wellbeing (Inceoglu et al., 2021; Inceoglu et al., 2018), studies have also shown the involvement of other workplace actors in employee wellbeing, particularly, non-leader employees or followers (Bakker & de Vries, 2021), and the organisation (Horstmann & Remdisch, 2019; Jaskeviciute et al., 2021). However, despite the known presence of multiple workplace actors in employee wellbeing, research combining all three actors is limited. Within the leadership literature, healthy leadership theory, an employee health and wellbeing focused concept (Rudolph et al., 2020), encompasses multiple workplace actors, followers, leaders, and the organisation (Horstmann & Remdisch, 2019). Each workplace actor plays different but interrelated roles important to employee wellbeing and the leadership of employee wellbeing. However, literature has tended to be leader focused, and the perspectives of other workplace actors are required (Kaluza et al., 2021). Additionally, further understanding of how leaders influence followers' wellbeing is necessary (Inceoglu et al., 2018; Jimmieson et al., 2021). Therefore, understanding of workplace actors and how they are involved and why they are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing is limited. Thus, to extend current understanding, two research questions are proposed for this study:

1) How are workplace actors involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing?

2) Why are workplace actors involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing?

The answer to these questions was found through this exploratory research, where I investigated the leadership of employee wellbeing in action within the context of two Australian workplaces. The focus of this research was on lived experiences, the everyday enacted leadership of employee wellbeing within operating workplaces. As such, an appropriate methodology and research design was required to support and provide a framework to explore workplace actors and their unique experiences with the leadership of employee wellbeing. A qualitative case study provided a flexible framework with three different data collection techniques to gain multiple perspectives of workplace actors in their usual working environment. Data were analysed following Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic approach, which complemented the social constructivist paradigm (Grandy, 2018) at the core of this study. Such philosophy highlights an expectation that individuals construct reality in their social world (Grandy, 2018), and that the findings and overall inquiry are based on a subjective view of social reality. Indeed, the findings and outcomes of this thesis are my constructions of truth and reality and do not represent causal static truth.

1.4 Thesis Structure

This thesis comprises six chapters. In this chapter, I introduced employee wellbeing and provided the context for this thesis, including a rationale for investigating the leadership of employee wellbeing, coupled with an explanation of the research questions and a summary of the contributions.

In Chapter 2, I define employee wellbeing and key dimensions of the concept, followed by a discussion of the identified workplace actors involved in employee wellbeing. Next, the importance of employee wellbeing, its current state, and likely causes of poor employee wellbeing are presented. Stemming from the employee wellbeing literature review, leadership

literature is explored, with the presence of multiple workplace actors identified; however, there was limited understanding of the actors' involvement in the leadership of employee wellbeing. The review of employee wellbeing and leadership literature provided a clear gap and associated research questions were proposed.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodology for this thesis. I outline my constructiist philosophical paradigm and the accompanying implications for the research design and analysis. A qualitative case study design using reflexive thematic analysis was used to answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022) and the chapter concludes with an outline of the ethical considerations.

In Chapter 4, the findings are of the six themes are presented, including: 1) having an awareness of employee wellbeing for leadership, 2) structuring the organisation to enable leadership of employee wellbeing, 3) leaders and their practices, 4) individuals and self-leadership, 5) social connection, and 6) changing expectations and workplace practices.

In Chapter 5, the findings are extended through discussion and comparison to the relevant literature. To begin, the broad and dysfunctional concept of employee wellbeing is clarified, and an extended definition of employee wellbeing and an associated model is presented. Next, the workplace actors involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing and how they are involved are discussed. With the workplace actors and their involvement established, focus turns to a discussion of the motivations for why workplace actors are involved in leadership of employee wellbeing. The chapter concludes with an outline of the limitations and areas for future research.

Chapter 6 contains a summary of this research, the findings, and discussion, and outlines the four significant contributions arising from this research. First, unifying the concept of employee wellbeing through developing an extended definition which responds to the call

for a more unified conceptualisation of employee wellbeing (Pradhan & Hati, 2022) and contributes needed additions to prior definitions. Most importantly, the extended definition clarifies that the meaning of employee wellbeing is individually constructed. Prior definitions entirely lack this essential characteristic, which directly impacts the leadership of employee wellbeing, because a static, single, organisation-wide meaning is not enough to provide relevant leadership. Second, clarifying and establishing specific workplace actors involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing, followers, middle leaders, top-middle leaders, and organisation leaders, along with two non-human actants which influence the leadership of employee wellbeing. This is significant as prior understanding of workplace actors is limited and often provides a leader dominant view (Kaluza et al., 2021) and those leaders are frequently homogenised into one group (Hu et al., 2023) and at times connected with vague ambiguous descriptions of an organisation leader (for example, Horstmann & Remdisch, 2019; Inceoglu et al., 2021). Followers were obscurely involved in the literature, and at times, the individual was discussed without clarification of their status as a follower or leader (for example, Bakker et al., 2023). Consequently, practices are assigned to poorly defined groups of diverse workplace actors who do not have the same roles and functionalities.

Third, this thesis contributes a framework of how the workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing which provides a distinct understanding of the divergent roles that each workplace actor type plays in the leadership of employee wellbeing so that leaders and followers can take relevant action in the leadership of employee wellbeing. Four, this thesis establishes two motivations for why workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing, for the betterment of the business and because employees have inherent work. This understanding is vital as attribution theory suggests that individuals attempt to make sense of and explain to themselves why phenomena occur (Guest et al., 2021; Hewett et al., 2018). Finally, I present my concluding remarks.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

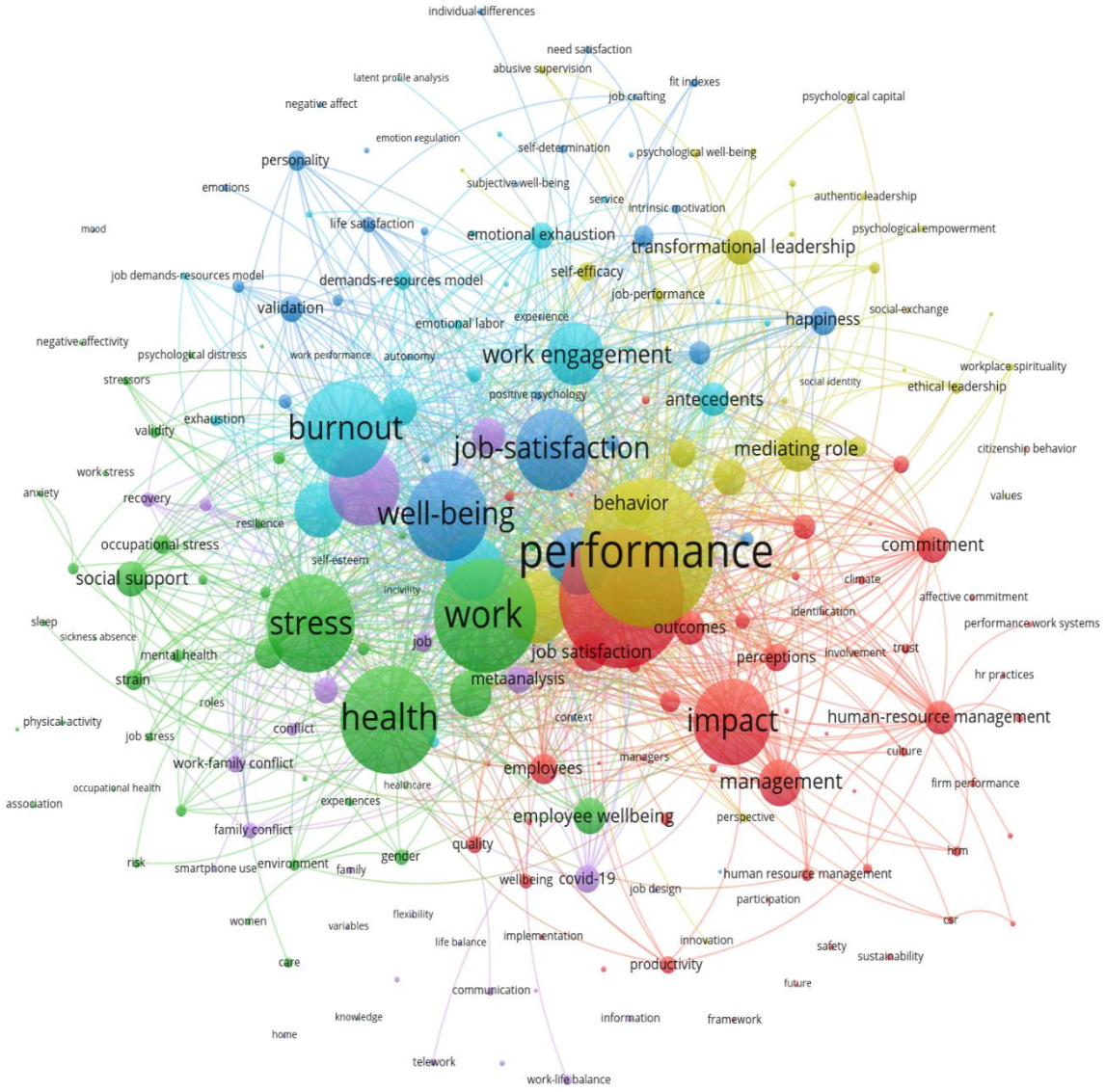
In this chapter, I present a review of employee wellbeing and leadership literature. First, I outline how employee wellbeing is conceptualised in the literature to better understand the term, consequences, and likely causes of poor employee wellbeing. Due to the recognised organisational and leadership factors contributing to poor employee wellbeing, leadership literature is then reviewed for theories used in employee wellbeing research. Consequently, I investigate transformational leadership, leader-member exchange, and moral-based theories of authentic, ethical, and servant leadership styles; however, each of these prominent theories has inherent issues. As an alternative, the relatively new healthy leadership theory provides an explicitly employee health-focused leadership framework to explore employee wellbeing. In both employee wellbeing and leadership literature, three workplace actor types are identified: followers, leaders, and an organisation-type actor. Each plays a different, though inter-connected, role in employee wellbeing and the leadership of employee wellbeing; however, understanding of their roles is limited, which presented an important gap to be investigated.

2.2 What is Employee Wellbeing

The literature on employee wellbeing (Warr, 1999) is vast, with thousands of published academic sources, and as illustrated in Figure 2.1, there is an expansive use of different concepts related to employee wellbeing.

Figure 2.1

Bibliometric Co-word Cluster Map of Employee Wellbeing



The keyword co-occurrence map in Figure 2.1[1] contains 213 terms, this condensed visualisation only contains terms with at least 15 co-occurrences to show the most used words in employee wellbeing research in the last 10 years. As shown in Figure 2.1, employee wellbeing is broad field encompassing many individual dimensions, such as physical and

[1] Figure 2.1 was developed using VOS Viewer and is a keyword co-occurrence visualisation of keywords (title and abstract) from search terms “employee wellbeing” OR “employee well-being” from the Scopus database on 4.10.23.

psychological health and work-related dimensions including factors such as job stress and satisfaction, but also leadership and management theories related to performance. Figure 2.1 reflects that employee wellbeing encompasses extensive literature; however, the concept is poorly defined and lacks a universally accepted conceptualisation (Chan et al., 2021). Instead, there is a proliferation of ideas and theoretical perspectives, creating a "conceptual jungle" within employee wellbeing literature (Makikangis et al., 2016, p.62, as cited in Wijngaards et al., 2021). The original quote by Makikangis et al. (2016) illustrates that the present confusion in the field has existed for many years, and is yet to be resolved. Researchers have focused on individual theories within, or that relate to, employee wellbeing, such as job-demands and resources theory (for example, Bakker et al., 2023), burnout (for example, Leiter & Maslach, 2023), and psychological safety (for example, Edmondson & Bransby, 2023). Although these theories contribute to knowledge on specific aspects of employee wellbeing, these researchers focussed on specific constructs and instruments, resulting in a lack of broad understanding (Wijngaards et al., 2021). Unsurprisingly, the siloed focus on the individual theory rather than employee wellbeing as a whole contributes to the difficulties of developing a unified concept (Chan et al., 2021; Fisher, 2014).

Ambiguity in employee wellbeing continued in the literature through term proliferation. For example, Wright et al. (2017) and Inceoglu et al. (2021) used the term employee wellbeing interchangeably with the more general concept of wellbeing (without the designation of wellbeing relating to employees). Likewise, Bachman et al. (2023) obscured the concept, alternating between employee wellbeing and wellbeing at work, and suggested a narrower concept of leader wellbeing within the employee wellbeing and wellbeing at work typology. Murtola and Vallelly (2023) noted term substitution, and then added to the conceptual indistinction with their work on corporate wellness, and frequently substituted wellbeing, worker wellbeing, and employee wellbeing without acknowledgement. Interchanging

employee wellbeing terms within research is not a new phenomenon. For example, 25 years ago, Warr (1999) discussed job-specific wellbeing and context free wellbeing (relevant to any life context, at work or not), which they said sits within mental health, and then, without explanation, added employee wellbeing as the umbrella term. Thus, there is considerable ambiguity surrounding employee wellbeing; however, it was crucial to have a conceptual foundation for this thesis, and several definitions are presented in Table 2.1 below. Though Table 2.1 is relatively extensive, the breadth of employee wellbeing research makes it impossible to cover all conceptualisations. Therefore, Table 2.1 and the following discussion are presented to provide a broad view of the fractured, complex, and dynamic conceptualisations of employee wellbeing and concludes with a definitional foundation for this research.

Table 2.1

Definitions of Employee Wellbeing

Concept	Definition or Definitional Components	Author(s)
Job-specific Wellbeing	"People's feelings about themselves in relation to their job" (393). Dimensions include job-specific and non-job features, the work and non-work environment, emotions, socio-demographic, and individual factors.	(Warr, 1999)
Workplace Wellbeing	"The starting point for defining the term accepts its multi-faceted nature. Workplace wellbeing encompasses physical health and comfort, mental health, a preponderance of positive over negative affect, and positive attitudes towards work" (pp. 1-2).	(Cooper & Leiter, 2017)
	"Workplace wellbeing relates to all aspects of working life, from the quality and safety of the physical environment, to how workers feel about their work, their working environment, the climate at work and work organisation" (n.p).	(ILO., 2023c)
Worker Wellbeing	"The general well-being of working people" (p.798).	(Wijngaards et al., 2021)

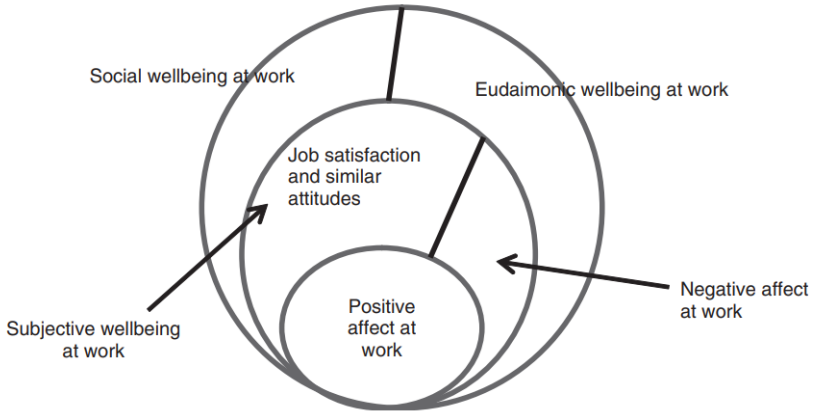
Wellbeing at Work	"Well-being at work is a multifaceted construct that refers to the quality of an employee's experience and functioning along three dimensions: psychological, physical, and social" (pp.74-75).	(Bachman et al., 2023)
Employee Wellbeing	"The total quality of an employee's experience at work across a host of dimensions" (p.74).	(Bachman et al., 2023)
	"The overall quality of an employee's experience and functioning at work" (p.52).	(Grant et al., 2007)
	"Employee wellbeing consists of subjective wellbeing (life satisfaction plus dispositional affects), workplace wellbeing (job satisfaction plus work-related affect) and psychological wellbeing (self-acceptance, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, autonomy, purpose in life and personal growth)" (p.454).	(Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009)
	"Not only subjective job evaluations (e.g., satisfaction) and emotions (or affect) but also the quality of employees' psychological experiences while at work, the detrimental effects that excessive work demands can have on employees (e.g., strain and burnout, which diminish EWB), and the influences that experiences and evaluations from the work domain have on employees' broader life experiences and evaluations" (p.827).	(Ilies et al., 2015)

	"Three main facets of work-related well-being concerned with psychological, physical and social functioning" (p.27).	(Guest, 2017)
	"The concept of 'employee wellbeing' has multiple definitions; however, they mainly include the interaction of two intertwining components: the hedonic aspect capturing how well an employee is 'doing' generally rather than 'feeling' at any one time, and the eudaimonic aspect which captures the extent that employees are undertaking tasks consistent with their values" (p.1).	(Brunetto et al., 2021)
	"Well-being is a multifaceted construct, broadly defined in terms of psychological (feeling good), physical (e.g., bodily functioning), and relational well-being (having quality social relationships … Well-being has both stable and variable components" (p.460).	(Inceoglu et al., 2021)

The definitions presented in Table 2.1 use different terms; however, they are not conceptually distinct. Instead, the definitions each encompass aspects of physical and psychological health and safety, social dimensions, and other aspects of individual and work-related functioning and affect. However, no single definition covers all of these aspects. Interestingly, Fisher (2014) developed a model to define employee wellbeing, and argued that it should be conceptualised as a combination of subjective hedonic (the perception of pleasure) and eudaimonic (the perception of fulfilment or satisfaction) dimensions, negative and positive affect, and social wellbeing (see Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2

Definition of Wellbeing at Work (Fisher, 2014, p. 15)



Fisher's (2014) model contains elements of many other definitions, but provides a clear conceptualisation drawing of many key facets of employee wellbeing. However, Fisher's (2014) model lacks a physical component that Inceoglu et al. (2018) argued is vital. Therefore, employee wellbeing is defined in this thesis as *a combination of hedonic, eudaimonic, negative and positive affect, social, and physical wellbeing* (Fisher, 2014; Inceoglu et al., 2018). This aggregated conceptualisation offers a broad foundation that encompasses lived positive and negative work-related experiences and outcomes, which are discussed in more depth in the following section.

With a definition of employee wellbeing established, it is important to clarify the contested area of who is included in the term. Wijngaards et al. (2021) stated that worker wellbeing "pertains specifically to the lives and experiences of working people" (p.798) and claimed that worker wellbeing is not the same as employee wellbeing, because not all people who work are employees of an organisation. Warr (1999) highlighted the status discrepancy of working people several decades earlier, arguing that people can work in their homes, but are not employed. Likewise, Wijngaards et al. (2021) highlighted volunteers and entrepreneurs as individuals who work but are not employees. However, if a self-employed person takes on an employee, according to Wijngaards et al.'s (2021) conceptualisation, there would be two differing concepts of entrepreneur wellbeing and employee wellbeing co-occurring, creating further ambiguity. Thus, the discussion on employee wellbeing throughout this thesis refers to people who are employed by an organisation, and excludes non-paid workers such as volunteers and the self-employed.

2.2.1 Dimensions of Employee Wellbeing

To better understand the overall concept of employee wellbeing, each of the dimensions contained in the definition above (hedonic, eudaimonic, negative and positive affect, social, and physical wellbeing) are further outlined in this section.

Subjective Wellbeing: Hedonism and Eudaimonia. In various forms, wellbeing has been considered for thousands of years through hedonism and eudaimonia (Thorsteinsen & Vittersø, 2020), which originated in the works of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (Ryff, 2023). Researchers regard hedonism and eudaimonia as differing philosophical wellbeing dimensions (for example, Thorsteinsen & Vittersø, 2020; Wijngaards et al., 2021). The differences between the two concepts are outlined below; however, the two are linked as primarily subjective wellbeing dimensions that are dependent on an individual's feelings and perceptions (P. Grant & McGhee, 2021).

The hedonic perspective regards "well-being as a subjective experience of happiness" (Wijngaards et al., 2021, p. 799) and incorporates an individual's perception of the quality of their life (P. Grant & McGhee, 2021). Hedonic wellbeing is characterised by feelings and perceptions of pleasure (Bianchi et al., 2022) and happiness (Vakkayil et al., 2017). Additionally, in the literature, hedonic wellbeing is linked to job satisfaction (Ilies et al., 2015; Inceoglu et al., 2018; Nielsen et al., 2017), life satisfaction (der Kinderen & Khapova, 2021; Thorsteinsen & Vittersø, 2020), and perceptions of experiencing more positive than negative affect (Thorsteinsen & Vittersø, 2020).

In contrast, the eudaimonic perspective focuses on "the realisation of human potential" (Wijngaards et al., 2021, p. 799). In their review, P. Grant and McGhee (2021) highlighted that some researchers consider the hedonist focus on pleasure a misunderstanding of Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia, which emphasised a well-lived life rather than a pleasurable one. Perceptions of fulfilment (Fisher, 2014; Thorsteinsen & Vittersø, 2020) and thriving typify eudaimonic wellbeing (Dhiman, 2021; Inceoglu et al., 2018). The ultimate pursuit of eudaimonia is for individuals to achieve their best (Ryff, 2023). Eudaimonic wellbeing also encompasses individuals being able to act according to their deeply held values (der Kinderen & Khapova, 2021), having positive work engagement (Inceoglu et al., 2018), and psychological wellbeing (der Kinderen & Khapova, 2021; P. Grant & McGhee, 2021).

Researchers describe psychological wellbeing as positive mental functioning, growth, the absence of mental illness (Hannah et al., 2020), feeling positive, optimistic and having purpose (Kubzansky et al., 2018). Earlier, Ryff (1989) suggested six psychological wellbeing dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery and autonomy. These dimensions continue to be used in more recent employee wellbeing research (for example, Hannah et al., 2020) and indicate the importance of psychological wellbeing within employee wellbeing, and are included in several of the

reviewed definitions in Table 2.1 (for example, Bachman et al., 2023; Brunetto et al., 2021; Guest, 2017; Ilies et al., 2015; Inceoglu et al., 2021; Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009).

Despite the subjective nature of hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing, Wijngaards et al. (2021) stated that subjective wellbeing is a different concept, comprising broader aspects of life satisfaction. However, fulfilling an individual's potential and having purpose in life (Wijngaards et al., 2021) have been a long-regarded part of eudaimonic wellbeing (Ryff, 1989). Therefore, this review does not support Wijngaards et al.'s (2021) view that subjectivity is a distinct dimension, instead, hedonism and eudaimonia are subjective to an individual's perspective. The argument from Wijngaards et al. (2021) attempting to separate neighbouring dimensions reinforces the ongoing ambiguity and complexity of employee wellbeing.

Negative and Positive Affect. Dong and Shumin (2022) argue that positive and negative affect are two key components of employee wellbeing. Positive affect is defined as "the extent to which a person feels active, alert, energised, engaged pleasurably, and able to concentrate" (Medvedev et al., 2023, p.1555). This characterisation aligns with the concept of employee engagement, where engaged employees are said to experience "energy (instead of exhaustion), involvement (instead of cynicism), and efficacy (instead of ineffectiveness)" (Bakker et al., 2023, p. 27). Earlier, in evidencing their conceptual model of job demands and resources on burnout, Bakker and de Vries (2021) proposed that engaged employees actively attempt to optimise job demands and resources through participating in job crafting as a positive self-regulation practice. However, individuals can experience low positive affect and exhibit sadness or low energy (Medvedev et al., 2023).

In their qualitative review of the employee wellbeing leadership literature, Inceoglu et al. (2018) highlighted that researchers have focused on negative wellbeing dimensions less frequently than positively-focused hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing. Negative affect is

defined as “as subjective distress that is present in a range of aversive mood states” (Medvedev et al., 2023, p.1555). In the literature, negative aspects of employee wellbeing include job strain and stress (Inceoglu et al., 2018), which adversely affect employee wellbeing (Inceoglu et al., 2018; Schmidt et al., 2019). Indeed, according to Podsakoff et al. (2023), workplace or job stress is one of the most critical challenges for organisations, which Schwepker et al. (2021) described as “a psychological process in which individuals perceive personal resources are taxed, making them unable to effectively cope with job demands” (p145). Therefore, according to the descriptions provided, job stressors and strain negatively impact employee wellbeing by reducing an individual’s efficacy and psychological wellbeing.

Individuals can experience two different types of stressors: hindrances and challenges. Kern et al. (2020) and Podsakoff et al. (2023) argued that challenge stressors can positively impact individuals, for example, job complexity (variety and breadth in a role) and having responsibility are linked to job satisfaction. In contrast, hindrance stressors such as role conflict, role ambiguity, job insecurity, interpersonal conflict, and a lack of job resources lead to decreased job satisfaction and negatively impact employees (Podsakoff et al., 2023). Negative stressors also comprise job demands, which are the aspects of a role that require “sustained physical, cognitive, and/or emotional effort” from an employee (Bakker et al., 2023, p. 33). Crucially, Bakker and de Vries (2021) contended that persistently high job demands, and a lack of job resources negatively impact employee wellbeing, consequently resulting in poor physical and psychological health.

In addition to job strain and stress, Inceoglu et al. (2018) identified that negative employee wellbeing also encompasses burnout, which can have severe impacts on an individual. The World Health Organisation (2019) defined burnout as:

> A syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterised by three dimensions:
>
> - feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
> - increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and
> - reduced professional efficacy (n.p.).

In their recent review of burnout and its classification as a workplace phenomenon, Leiter and Maslach (2023) argued the syndrome results from "continual stimulation arising from relentless work demands" that triggers a prolonged and heightened response from individuals, leading to "wear and tear of the body" (p. 139). Such wear and tear results in a range of significant physical ailments, including musculoskeletal disorders, cardiovascular and upper-respiratory diseases, back and neck pain, and gastroenteritis (Leiter & Maslach, 2023). In addition, burnout is an independent risk factor for Type 2 diabetes and an increased risk of "all-cause mortality or premature death" (Bakker & de Vries, 2021, p. 4). Leiter and Maslach (2023) identified that burnout is related to depression and anxiety disorders, sleep disturbances, and negatively impacts employees and their work through reduced professional efficacy, cynicism, and distancing themselves from work.

Social Wellbeing. Pradhan and Hati (2022) define social wellbeing as "the positive state of our relationships, our social stability and social peace. … the degree of feeling of belongingness and attachment towards the society. It consists of items related to social acceptance, social actualization, social contribution and social integration" (p.396). Likewise, in their study on lay descriptions of employee wellbeing, Rook et al. (2021) found that social wellbeing has "a range of indicators" (p.127) and particularly relates to individuals having a

sense of belonging and connection to others. Over a wide timeframe, numerous researchers have purported that social dimensions include having interpersonal relationships with others (for example, Guest, 2017; Inceoglu et al., 2021; Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). However, Inceoglu et al. (2021), and earlier, A. Grant et al. (2007), indicated that the *quality* of social relationships is important, though neither outlined what a quality social relationship or connection means or what makes them unique. When describing employee wellbeing in their review, Guest (2017) argued that social wellbeing not only includes interactions and relationships, but also having social support, perceptions of trust, and being treated fairly. Interestingly, an additional aspect to social wellbeing was identified in S. J. Wood et al.'s (2021) diary study, who found that loneliness reduced employee wellbeing in the context of Covid-19 where employees were isolated when working from home. Thus, a lack of social connection can have negative consequences where isolation and loneliness develop.

The literature highlights that interpersonal relationships can also be harmful with instances of bullying, aggression, and social exclusion (Kern et al., 2020). Ahmad et al. (2020) described workplace bullying as "hostile, humiliating and unethical acts at work with a potential to harm one or more targets of weaker power" (p.160). Correspondingly, in their review, Suggala et al. (2021) highlighted that employee wellbeing is negatively impacted, linking workplace bullying to lower self-esteem, stress disorders, and psychological illnesses such as depression. While Burke (2017) argued in their review that negative social interactions between leaders and followers led to higher blood pressure and poor cardiovascular recovery after work. Significantly, Brough et al. (2021) asserted that interpersonal conflict is a negative stressor for individuals and cited interpersonal conflicts, including toxic leadership as a common antecedent of workplace stress in Australia.

Physical Wellbeing. Inceoglu et al. (2018) emphasised the importance of the physical dimension; however, this is under-researched in comparison to other areas of employee

wellbeing. Within the literature, physical wellbeing is not always a standalone entity, instead, it is represented by and encompasses individual variables such as sleep quality (Inceoglu et al., 2018). In their two-week German online diary study of over 170 non-industry specific workers, Wiegelmann et al. (2023) found that sleep quality was more important for employee wellbeing than sleep duration. Poor sleep quality was additionally deleterious when coupled with a high workload (Wiegelmann et al., 2023), which illustrates the interrelated nature of employee wellbeing (for example, workload and sleep quality). Other research has focused on workplace injuries, illnesses, and stress (for example, A. Grant et al., 2007; Isham et al., 2021). However, in Rook et al.'s (2021) qualitative study on non-expert descriptions of employee wellbeing, participants indicated that physical wellbeing was more than the absence of sickness and injuries; instead, it involved feeling energetic, fit and healthy.

At the beginning of this section, I highlighted that physical wellbeing is under-researched in comparison to other dimensions (Inceoglu et al., 2018); however, this apparent limitation may be due to the dual field of workplace or occupational health and safety. Literature on occupational health and safety has a strong focus on reducing workplace accidents, injuries, and deaths (M. Zhang, et al., 2020; Zorzenon et al., 2022). For example, SWA (2023a) highlighted that a range of physical work-related illnesses and injuries have occurred in Australia, and included the development of cancer, vehicle accidents, occupational violence, falls, and many others. Despite the concept of employee wellbeing including physical dimensions as described earlier there has been a marked separation between workplace health and safety and employee wellbeing. Indeed, SWA[2](2023b) has asserted that employee

[2] Safe Work Australia is a national body that represents the Commonwealth of Australia and the individual states and territories. The body develops national policy, strategy, legislative frameworks on workplace health and safety in Australia (SWA, 2023d).

wellbeing does not protect workers from harm and limits employee wellbeing to aspects such as healthy eating.

2.2.2 Dynamic Nature of Employee Wellbeing

The above section outlined four key dimensions of employee wellbeing (subjective, negative and positive affect, social, and physical). While each dimension has specific characteristics and impacts on individuals, these dimensions are interrelated. For example, an employee may be satisfied with their job, impacting their hedonic wellbeing (P. Grant & McGhee, 2021); however, they may be in conflict with a colleague, which could affect their social wellbeing (Guest, 2017). This employee may also travel frequently for work, which could impact their physical wellbeing through sleep disturbances (Inceoglu et al., 2018; Smith & Bone, 2021). Thus, some expect that the multi-dimensional nature of employee wellbeing is "the starting point for defining the term" (Cooper & Leiter, 2017, p. 1) and is central to understanding the concept.

Employee wellbeing is not only multi-dimensional, but also fluid. In a review of 40 quantitative longitudinal studies on the development of employee wellbeing in individuals, Mäkikangas et al. (2016) found that there is more variability than stability in employee wellbeing over time. Interestingly, among the many studies reviewed, the authors found that employee wellbeing varied more in younger employees than older. This finding suggests that perceptions of studied variables such as job satisfaction and burnout change more frequently when employees are more recent entrants into employment life. Perceptions of employee wellbeing also change within the individual, and Ellis et al. (2019) highlighted that perceptions of belonging, relationships with leaders, and emotional exhaustion can fluctuate daily. Correspondingly, Kożusznik et al. (2019) indicated that perceptions of the meaningfulness of an individual's work can vary within a single day, reflecting that individuals constantly assess and reassess perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, impacting on their eudaimonic

wellbeing. Interestingly, employees can have high wellbeing in hedonic dimensions, for example, job satisfaction (Inceoglu et al., 2018), and low wellbeing in eudaimonic dimensions, such as psychological wellbeing (P. Grant & McGhee, 2021), and vice versa (Peiro et al., 2019).

While individual perceptions and experiences influence changes in employee wellbeing, external contexts can also have a direct impact. For example, Rossi et al. (2024) and Kotowski et al. (2022) highlighted that altered work contexts and practices during the Covid-19 pandemic led to different employee wellbeing concerns. Corresponding with their work, S. J. Wood et al. (2021) found that changes to working from home during the pandemic increased loneliness and reduced the ability to detach from work.

Certainly, employee wellbeing is complex, as it comprises multiple dimensions that are subject to an individual's perceptions, which are changeable, and influenced by at work and external factors. As employee wellbeing pertains to employees, of which there are different types, the employee wellbeing literature also features multiple workplace actors. The actors and their involvement in employee wellbeing are discussed next.

2.3 Workplace Actors in Employee Wellbeing

The broad employee wellbeing literature encompasses non-leader employees (Bakker & de Vries, 2021; Jaskeviciute et al., 2021), leaders (Inceoglu et al., 2018; Jimmieson et al., 2021; Stein et al., 2020), and the organisation (Jaskeviciute et al., 2021). The workplace actors have different roles and functions in employee wellbeing. These actors are each explained in more detail below. The term workplace actor is broad and for clarity is used here to describe those who participate in a workplace such as leaders, colleagues, and non-leader employees.

Followers and Individuals. In the literature, the term 'follower' is used to described employees with at least one person in a position of authority who leads them (Alvesson, 2019;

Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). It is important to clarify that followers may also be leaders. For example, a middle leader may have a team of followers hierarchically below them, and a group manager and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) above; thus, simultaneously rendering them a follower and leader. Followers and individual workplace actors are discussed together here, as it is not always clear in the literature which type of employee a researcher is referring to. For example, Bakker et al. (2023) discussed individual traits, their values, resilience, health, and personality, rather than outlining specific employee types (leaders or followers).

A follower and individual's role in employee wellbeing includes sharing perceptions of their employee wellbeing and needs (Rook et al., 2021), and through their adaptive or maladaptive self-regulation practices (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). Individuals exhibit maladaptation as they undermine themselves and are inflexible with coping strategies, while adaptive practices encompass active recovery during employees' non-work time (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). In their 10-year review of recovery research, Sonnentag et al. (2022) argued that work recovery is the process of unwinding and returning from strain built-up during work time to pre-stressor levels. Arnold et al. (2023) asserted that relaxation, control of the recovery activity, and participating in activities that build a sense of mastery are important dimensions of work recovery; however, their results showed that psychological detachment from work was a fundamental recovery practice. Furthermore, they argued that *daily* recovery from work is necessary to maintain positive employee wellbeing; though, understanding of recovery activities is still limited (Arnold et al., 2023).

Notwithstanding the positive outcomes for individuals associated with recovery, Sonnentag et al. (2022) found that some organisational factors negatively impact an employee's ability to recover. For example, in organisations with cultural norms of integrating work and non-work lives, it is more difficult for employees to detach outside of working hours (Sonnentag et al., 2022). Likewise, the respective works of Barber and Santuzzi (2015) and

Vakola et al. (2023) suggested that leaders may influence employee recovery during non-work time through their expectations, normalised behaviours and attitudes towards work blending into non-work time. As indicated earlier, employees can practice adaptive or maladaptive behaviours; however, Bakker and de Vries (2021) argued that job strain "not only leads to more maladaptive self-regulation cognitions and behaviours such as inflexible coping and self-undermining, but also to fewer adaptive self-regulation strategies such as job stress recovery and job crafting" (p.5-6). Though their model is still conceptual, it provides a plausible caveat to individual practices that organisational influences intertwine to enable or constrain employee action.

Followers are also involved in employee wellbeing through job crafting, the practice of making changes in a person's work to reduce stress and make their work more meaningful (Bakker & de Vries, 2021; Tims et al., 2022). Literature on job crafting contains several dimensions, including reducing stressors and increasing positive challenges, increasing job resources, improving social connection, and altering work type or volume (Tims et al., 2022). Despite the positive associations of job crafting, follower practices may again depend on or be influenced by leader and organisation actors. Vakola et al. (2023) argued that specific leader actions can improve follower engagement with job crafting. The authors indicated that leader role modelling, developing work environments where individuals could practice job crafting, and enabling followers to access resources are important (Vakola et al., 2023). Thus, job crafting is not solely dependent on the follower; instead, other workplace actors are involved. While followers are included in employee wellbeing through specific practices, understanding is limited and not always distinct from individuals of any employee type. Additionally, how followers are involved in employee wellbeing in conjunction with other workplace actors requires investigation.

Leaders. These workplace actors play a "pivotal role in organisations and their behaviour has significant impacts on the work behaviour, performance and well-being of their employees" (Inceoglu et al., 2018, p. 179). Researchers suggest that leaders can improve employee wellbeing through their actions (Gulseren & Lyubykh, 2023; Inceoglu et al., 2021). In their Australian interview study of supervisors, Jimmieson et al. (2021) identified a range of leader strategies for managing employee stress that encompass organisational processes (i.e. job design and organisational culture) and individual processes (i.e. providing support and guidance). Though Jimmieson et al.'s (2021) study focused only on managing stress which is only a narrow aspect of employee wellbeing, their study provides a helpful view of enacted leader practices and illustrates the crucial role that leaders play in employee wellbeing.

Gulseren and Lyubykh (2023) recently asserted that leaders are involved in managing the work environment and practices, developing normalised beliefs and attitudes within the organisation (Inceoglu et al., 2021; Inceoglu et al., 2018), and need to provide opportunities for followers to develop skills and abilities (Khoreva & Wechtler, 2018; X. Zhang et al., 2020). Literature has suggested that it is vital for leaders to manage job demands and resources (Bakker et al., 2023; Wolter et al., 2018), as followers respond to resources provided to leaders by the organisation (Adendorff et al., 2021). Leaders can minimise followers' stress by modifying workloads, controlling jobs, and managing work-life balance (Goh et al., 2016; Jimmieson et al., 2021). It is clear that leaders and their practices impact employee wellbeing; however, knowledge of the specific mechanisms through which leaders influence followers' wellbeing is limited (Inceoglu et al., 2018; Jimmieson et al., 2021).

Organisation Actor. This final workplace actor is the least understood of the three discussed in this section. Hwang and Colyvas (2020) argued that the idea of an organisation participating as an actor is contested. However, several scholars have asserted that organisations can participate as social actors (for example, Ashforth et al., 2020; Hwang &

Colyvas, 2020; Westman et al., 2019). Actor-network theory asserts that many non-human entities have the potential to be actors according to the view that an actor is "any thing that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference—or, if it has no figuration yet, an actant" (Latour, 2005, p. 71). Significantly, the term *any thing*, rather than *anything*, is used, indicating the potential of things and objects to be workplace actors. Indeed, Sayes (2014) and Wadham (2021) put forward that non-human actors can encompass natural phenomena, tools, economic goods, structures, and texts. Thus, in the context of this thesis, an organisation's culture, management structure, and policies could be considered actors, because they could make a difference and alter the social world of employees.

While many non-human entities can be considered actors, non-human actors are not perceived in the same way as humans (Piovesan, 2022). Non-human actors do not have their own moral agency or the ability to determine action (Latour, 2005; Sayes, 2014). For example, if an employee who travels for work by air gets a poor night's sleep because the economy class seat did not lie flat, the seat did not choose to cause a poor night's sleep. Nor could a seat in business class decide to cause a good night's sleep because of its ability to lay flat. Instead, the seat, an entity created and developed by humans, mediated the employee's perception of having a poor night's sleep (Law, 1992; Law & Singleton, 2013). The seat caused a negative employee wellbeing outcome, but choosing to cause a specific outcome was beyond the seat's ability. Consequently, human and non-human actors are a complex interrelated coupling. However, Ashforth et al. (2020) highlighted that organisations can be perceived as taking on human-like qualities and represented through anthropomorphic language. For example, statements such as *"*My organisation cares about my employee wellbeing" or "My organisation is friendly and welcoming", were used in their study and demonstrated the blurring of non-human entity and human-like qualities (Ashforth et al., 2020). They also suggested that anthropomorphism occurs because organisations are "created and maintained by people and, thus, are rather easily

and even reflexively construed as individuals" while simultaneously satisfying individual desires for sensemaking and social connection (Ashforth et al., 2020, p. 32).

Descriptions of organisations within the employee wellbeing literature are varied, and frequently ambiguous. The organisation actor inter-relates with other human actors and is said to be influenced by external social relationships and the social environment (Westman et al., 2019). In their literature review, Jaskeviciute et al. (2021) combined general leadership into the role of the organisation, encompassing decisions impacting the whole workplace, such as work design, flexibility, and individual practices of communication and interpersonal relationships. As a result, from the interrelatedness with other actors, particularly leaders, it is difficult to clearly understand the organisation actor and what role it specifically plays in employee wellbeing.

Despite the lack of clarity surrounding the organisation actor, Westman et al. (2019) suggested that the organisation participates as an actor in several ways. First, through the actions of individuals within the organisation; second, through the organisation's culture; third, through external social relationships and networks; and fourth, through the context and external environment in which the organisation operates. The organisation was anthropomorphised by Stein et al. (2020), who suggested that the organisation could influence leaders' workloads, which could correspondingly impact whether leaders provided supportive practices to followers. Likewise, other authors presented organisational anthropomorphising, for example, the organisation was said to influence how work is designed (Jaskeviciute et al., 2021), as it controls the availability of resources for individuals to complete their roles (Schaufeli, 2017). Corresponding findings from an Australian quantitative survey study of high-stress occupations showed that perceived organisational support influenced how employees felt about their employee wellbeing (Brunetto et al., 2021). Interestingly, the authors did not differentiate between leaders and the practices of the organisation. Instead, the organisation was portrayed

as either providing adequate or inadequate support to employees without regard for individual roles within the organisation, illustrating the continual blurring of the boundaries between workplace actors in employee wellbeing.

It is evident from the reviewed literature that the organisation actor is a complex combination of individuals with authority in an organisation, who at times act as gatekeepers of organisational resources. However, a more thorough understanding of the organisation actor, who or what is encompassed by the actor, and the differences between the organisation actor and the leader actor is required. Likewise, further understanding of how followers are involved in employee wellbeing in conjunction with other workplace actors is necessary, coupled with a broader knowledge of the mechanisms leaders use, and how they influence and are involved in employee wellbeing. In the next section, the relevance of employee wellbeing is illustrated through outlining the current context to reinforce why future research exploring workplace actors in employee wellbeing is necessary.

2.4 Impacts and State of Employee Wellbeing

As previously outlined, researchers have indicated that individuals can experience positive employee wellbeing, for example, feelings of pleasure, fulfilment (Jaskeviciute et al., 2021; Thorsteinsen & Vittersø, 2020), and engagement (Inceoglu et al., 2018). Engaged employees are said to have "a sense of energetic and affective connection with their work" (Bakker et al., 2023, p. 27) and improved psychological and physical health (Saks, 2019). Employees who experience engagement at work are often more satisfied with their work and life (Hamilton Skurak et al., 2021). In addition, Yoon et al. (2022) suggested that positive affect at work improves psychological and physical health, work experience, and social relationships.

In contrast, research highlights the wide-reaching negative impacts that results from poor employee wellbeing. The ILO (2023b) stated that "occupational accidents and diseases

lead to devastating impacts on workers, enterprises and entire communities and economies" (n.p). Likewise, in the recent national work health and safety strategy, SWA (2023a) detailed that "work-related injury and illness impacts workers and their families deeply" (p.5). The impacts of poor employee wellbeing on individuals was presented in Boddy et al.'s (2021) qualitative interview study of 21 corporate leaders from the United Kingdom and United States of America. Participants shared:

> The early stage of stress was almost immediate, and the problem with stress is that you don't get relief. Over time it becomes a physical illness. I knew the mental stress caused my physical ailments (Boddy et al., 2021, p. 857).

> (I) came home at night and felt depressed. Almost every night there were tears or lots of discussion and (I) was trying to figure out how to get through this ... It was a terrible experience (Boddy et al., 2021, p. 859).

> The stream of bullying ... until I was fired, destroyed my self-confidence and for two years I was frightened of seeking work, mentally and emotionally I was in tatters. ... It took me many hours of psychotherapy ... to regain the minimum self-esteem to go back to work (Boddy et al., 2021, p. 858).

Likewise, a participant in McHugh et al.'s (2020) qualitative study conducted in four large manufacturing plants in the United States, related:

> A production employee who, towards the end of his 12-hour shift, was badly injured after failing to follow safety protocol. … 'this guy admitted he was rushing. He was trying to get it done before he went home. He was right at the end of a 12-hour night shift, his third 12-hour shift in three days' (p.304).

The participant comments above illustrate how poor employee wellbeing has extensive and enduring impacts on individuals that blur into employees' home lives. Additionally, the quotes

above highlight that poor employee wellbeing stems from multiple dimensions, such as fatigue and workplace bullying by leaders, and unintentionally provide evidence of the involvement of different workplace actors and the influence of workplace conditions. Gulseren and Lyubykh (2023) argued that "there is a well-established connection between poor work conditions and poor well-being outcomes" (p.198). More specifically, Goh et al. (2016) asserted that workplace stressors of work-family conflict, high workloads, and lack of job control and job security likely contributed to over 120,000 excess deaths annually. While Timming (2020) argued that the phenomenon of karoshi, or death by overwork, which reportedly accounted for approximately 2,700 karoshi deaths in Japan during 2018/19, is "linked inextricably to occupational stress" (p.97). Likewise, Howard et al. (2022) outlined the links between work stress, particularly job insecurity, interpersonal conflicts and burnout, and suicidal ideation.

Interestingly, Koinig and Diehl (2021) and Rudolph et al. (2020) argued that workplaces are becoming more stressful, reaching "epidemic levels" in current workplaces (Podsakoff et al., 2023, p. 166). Likewise, Brough et al. (2021) asserted that workplace stress in Australia is a major public health issue. According to Gallup (2023), Australian and New Zealand workers have the second-highest regional rates of daily stress, where 47% of participants reported experience daily stress, and only 23% of respondents felt they were thriving at work. Adding to the research above, according to the ILO (2023a), more than 395 million workers globally sustained workplace injuries in one year. Significantly, there were 2.93 million work-related fatalities, which account for almost 7% of worldwide deaths from all causes (ILO., 2023a). In Australia, despite efforts to reduce deaths, work-related fatalities have increased since 2018, and there were 195 work-related fatalities in 2023 (SWA., 2023c). Outside of fatalities, 497,300 individuals in Australia sustained a work-related injury or illness, of which, 66% took time off work (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Additionally, where

stress or mental health conditions were the cause of worker absence, employees took an average of 44 days off work (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

2.5 Causes of Poor Employee Wellbeing

As indicated in the discussion above, poor employee wellbeing results in significant adverse outcomes for workers; consequently, understanding the causes of poor employee wellbeing is vital. Researchers have indicated that leaders and their practices extensively and directly impact employee wellbeing (Inceoglu et al., 2021; Vincent-Höper et al., 2017). The relationship between follower and leader is vital for employee wellbeing (Martin et al., 2023), as "job-related factors for instance imbalanced job designs, occupational uncertainty, and lack of perceived justice and respect" are key drivers of poor employee wellbeing (Gulseren & Lyubykh, 2023, p. 198). Similarity, Brough et al. (2021) highlighted that in an Australian context, the probable causes of workplace stressors included "excessive work demands, inadequate work resources, and exposure to psychologically unhealthy work environments predominately marked by interpersonal conflicts including 'toxic leadership'" (p.8). While several other studies have indicated that working conditions, such as job demands and stressors, can lead to poor employee wellbeing (Bakker et al., 2023; Haver et al., 2019; Leiter & Maslach, 2023; Schwepker et al., 2021; Sonnentag, 2018). Furthermore, Goh et al. (2016) suggested that employee wellbeing may be improved through managing workloads, job control, and support, as leaders and their leadership can safeguard and support the wellbeing of employees (Inceoglu et al., 2021). As leaders are crucial to the leadership of employee wellbeing, the remainder of this chapter is focused on exploring the employee wellbeing leadership literature.

2.6 Leadership of Employee Wellbeing

In this thesis, leadership is defined as "the intentional influencing of ideas, meanings and emotions of others within an asymmetrical, yet mainly voluntary relational context, primarily through interpersonal interactions" (Alvesson et al., 2023, p. 459). Clegg et al. (2016)

highlighted that leadership was “one of the most overtheorised, overresearched, and empirically messy areas of management and organisation theory” (p.123). The field contains “a bewildering range of different approaches” (Martin et al., 2019, p. 465), which has resulted in a confusing field (Einola & Alvesson, 2021b) marked by theory proliferation (Antonakis et al., in press, p. 1). Indeed, in their review of the leadership literature, Zhu et al. (2019) found close to 60 leadership theories, illustrating the vastness of the field.

Though many leadership theories exist, fewer have been used to research employee wellbeing. Despite the smaller number, the literature includes the prominent transformational leadership theory (Gulseren & Lyubykh, 2023; Inceoglu et al., 2018), leader-member exchange, authentic (Inceoglu et al., 2018), ethical, servant leadership (Das & Pattanayak, 2023; Vincent-Höper et al., 2017), and the more recent healthy leadership theory (Gulseren & Lyubykh, 2023; Vincent-Höper et al., 2017). The remainder of this chapter discusses these five theories, as these are the most prominently used in the context of employee wellbeing research.

Transformational Leadership. The transformational leadership theory is one of the most researched leadership concepts (Gulseren & Lyubykh, 2023; Siangchokyoo et al., 2020) and has been previously used as a primary theory in research on employee wellbeing (Inceoglu et al., 2018; Lundqvist et al., 2023). In their review, Lundqvist et al. (2023) reported that research using transformational leadership theory is predominantly quantitative and a mixture of longitudinal and cross-sectional studies. Of the studies they reviewed, Lundqvist et al. (2023) found that none explored various leadership behaviours, instead focussed on composite variables. In their earlier review, Inceoglu et al. (2018) likewise found research skewed to cross-sectional designs, though with some longitudinal studies. Interestingly, all reviewed transformational leadership studies from Inceoglu et al. (2018) were survey based, indicating a methodologically limited view of the concept.

Burns (1978) posited that transformational leaders aim to address followers' higher-order needs and seek to motivate and improve morale and morals (Bass, 1999). More recent views on transformational leadership theory continue to represent the transformational leader as someone who inspires and motivates followers to achieve higher-order goals, meet psychological needs, and positively influence followers (Das & Pattanayak, 2023). In the literature, transformational leadership encompasses four interrelated behaviours: 1) development of a shared inspirational vision, 2) exhibiting integrity and exerting an idealised influence, 3) consideration of the individual needs of followers, and 4) empowerment of followers to develop creative solutions to issues (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Gulseren & Lyubykh, 2023). Transformational leaders are conceptualised as using coaching methods (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Diebig et al., 2017) and role modelling appropriate behaviours (Beerel, 2021), so that followers are inspired to think for themselves (Beerel, 2021), innovate, and challenge the status quo as trust and respect are built, leading to improved performance (Bass, 1999; Boehm et al., 2016).

Despite the moral basis of transformational leadership (Bass, 1999; Burns, 1978), the original theory asserts that "the transforming leader recognises and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower" (Burns, 1978, p. 4). Exploiting follower needs appears at odds with a theory of motivation and lifting followers. Transformational leadership theory is also criticised for being poorly conceptualised, overly ideological, and leader centric (Einola & Alvesson, 2021b), resulting in top down leadership (Beerel, 2021). Further, the measures associated with transformational leadership may not be specific enough to assist leaders in influencing employee health and wellbeing (Arnold & Rigotti, 2021; Franke et al., 2014). Likewise, Klug et al. (2019) argued that transformational leadership was developed to improve performance; consequently, the theory may not be appropriate for use in health-focused leadership such as employee wellbeing. Additionally, Das and Pattanayak (2023) argued that

transformational leadership research is frequently accompanied by narrow dimensions of employee wellbeing and rarely takes a multi-dimensional view of employee wellbeing. Excluding a multi-dimensional view of employee wellbeing is inappropriate; because, as highlighted earlier in this chapter, employee wellbeing is far from being a unitary static phenomenon. These limitations make transformational leadership theory less appropriate for exploring the leadership of employee wellbeing; thus, it was not used in this research.

Leader-member Exchange (LMX). LMX is considered a relationship-based approach to leadership (Gottfredson et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2023) and was developed as an alternative to traditional leadership models (Dansereau et al., 1975). LMX is predicated on a belief that leaders use non-authoritative leadership with some followers, while other follower relationships are based predominantly on authoritative supervision (Dansereau et al., 1975). In other words, "through engaging in different types of social exchanges, leaders differentiate in the way that they treat their followers" (Martin et al., 2023, p. 103). Consequently, LMX is centred on a reciprocal relationship between leaders and followers (Martin et al., 2023). For example, it is expected that followers are more likely to invest in developing a quality relationship with their leaders because they receive additional resources, such as rewards from leaders, being given more information, and trust than followers in lower-quality relationships (Lee et al., 2019; Xerri et al., 2023). However, Das and Pattanayak (2023) argued that the quality of a leader-member exchange is dependent on leaders using additional leadership styles, such as transformational leadership, in the leadership of employee wellbeing.

Researchers have used LMX to investigate the leadership of employee wellbeing in different ways. However, LMX research was considerably less prevalent than other theories in Lundqvist et al.'s (2023) recent review, where only one of the 40 studies used LMX along with authentic leadership theory, which explored job satisfaction and health. Other researchers have linked LMX to positive employee wellbeing outcomes (for example, Kaluza et al., 2021;

Vincent-Höper et al., 2017; Xerri et al., 2023). Likewise, Xerri et al. (2023) and Kaluza et al. (2021) similarly found that LMX was positively related to employee wellbeing as an organisational resource that individuals could use to develop their psychological capital.

In contrast, Das and Pattanayak (2023) indicated that negative outcomes can occur from LMX, as leaders build different types of relationships with employees. For example, Liang et al. (2021) explained that when individuals experienced different quality relationships with leaders, stress increased due to perceptions of organisational injustice. Das and Pattanayak (2023) also indicated that employee wellbeing may be negatively impacted through increased expectations, obligations, and workload. In congruence, Lee et al. (2019) asserted that when followers perceive they are in a high-quality relationship with leaders, they are more likely to engage in extra-role and organisational citizenship behaviours, including working longer hours (Schaufeli, 2017). In addition to the negative impacts on employee wellbeing, Gottfredson et al. (2020) argued that LMX has so many fundamental issues including unclear conceptualisation, measurement and modelling problems, that the theory should no longer be used within research. Instead, new relational theories are necessary (Gottfredson et al., 2020). Due to the core theoretical issues in LMX and the possibility of reduced employee wellbeing through perceptions of organisational injustice, the theory was not used in this research.

Authentic Leadership. An authentic leadership style is encompassed under the umbrella of positive psychology (Johnson et al., 2023) and was developed in response to disruptions in the world and the perceived need for genuine and trustworthy leaders who act according to their espoused values (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003). An authentic leader is conceptualised as having "(a) self-awareness, (b) balanced processing, (c) relational transparency, and (d) having an internalised moral perspective" (Helmuth et al., 2024, p. 1). The authentic leader empowers followers, while remaining true to their personality (Beerel, 2021), core values, and identity (Gardner et al., 2021; Weiss et al., 2018). Thus,

authentic leaders enact “their true selves in their role as a leader” (Leroy et al., 2015, p. 1677), and do the right thing (Olley, 2021).

Research on authentic leadership and employee wellbeing has included investigating links between leaders and followers’ psychological wellbeing and emotional exhaustion (Kampa et al., 2017; Weiss et al., 2018). Results of Salehi et al. (2023) mixed methods study of Australian healthcare workers showed that authentic leadership positively impacted employee wellbeing through increasing psychological capital and reducing the perception of harassment. Johnson et al. (2023) explored the concept through a five-study approach encompassing two field studies and three experiments. Seeking to address criticisms of authentic leadership theory, they found that authentic leadership positively enhanced psychological capital through a relations-oriented pathways that improved organisational identification and through task-oriented processes of role clarity. However, one of their experiments relied on asking participants to imagine that they were in a hypothetical leadership situation rather than exploring reactions or behaviours of individuals in real leadership contexts. Such a methodology may limit understanding of enacted authentic leadership.

Johnson et al.’s (2023) study importantly calls attention to the significant conceptual debates surrounding authentic leadership theory. Issues with the theory have been raised, as researchers have “stopped questioning the validity, key premises, and the way in which the construct was operationalised” (Alvesson & Einola, 2023, p. 137). Helmuth et al. (2024) likewise argue that the positive psychology dominated view of authenticity limits the concept; while simultaneously, the concept is misused, as researchers conflate leader actions with a leader as an individual. It is therefore unsurprising that Einola and Alvesson (2021a) have argued that authentic leadership theory emphasises “not so much what the leader does but who the leader is, or should be” (p.488). They caution that the theory could lead to unrestrained,

self-focused leaders (Einola & Alvesson, 2021a). Due to the combination of issues associated with authentic leadership, the theory was not used in this study.

Ethical and Servant Leadership. Ethical and servant leadership are grouped together here, as they are both considered moral-based leadership forms (Banks et al., 2021). Research across many years has indicated that the rise of ethical leadership theory is due to unethical practices and associated scandals in organisations (Banks et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2005; Eisenbeiss, 2012). This moral emphasis provides the core tenet of ethical leadership. Brown et al.'s (2005) early, and widely cited, definition of ethical leadership conceptualises the theory as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (p.12). Das and Pattanayak (2023) further explained that leaders within an ethical leadership paradigm enact "trustworthiness, honesty, fairness, and care through personal behaviour and interpersonal relationships, ethical leaders protect subordinates from unfair treatment" (p.21312). In addition, ethical leaders ensure that followers can participate in decision-making and have a voice in their organisation, enable development, provide feedback, and contribute to a positive work environment (Das & Pattanayak, 2023).

Conversely, there is subjectivity in ethics, and organisations are replete with differing and competing moralities (Alvesson & Einola, 2019). Banks et al. (2021) described ethical leadership as a leader's normalised practices that promote stakeholders' wellbeing; though, they did not indicate who stakeholders are. However, different organisational stakeholders have differing, and at times, competing expectations regarding employee wellbeing. For example Alvesson and Einola (2019) argued that acting ethically can be "doing good for owners, for subordinates, for colleagues, for customers, for the planet, for taxpayers, or for specific interest

groups" (p.388). Thus, competing demands inherent in organisations likely result in divergent views and expectations of ethical or moral practices.

Surprisingly, research on ethical leadership and employee wellbeing is limited compared to other leadership theories. However, in their study involving co-working pairs in two Indian organisations, Agarwal et al. (2022) found that ethical leadership positively impacted employee wellbeing through reducing knowledge hiding behaviour. However, in their work on workplace bullying, Ahmad et al. (2020) highlighted that ethical leadership cannot be relied on to improve and support employee wellbeing in isolation. Instead, issues such as bullying need to be managed through the use of multiple leadership practices, for example, offering counselling services and bullying prevention activities (Ahmad et al., 2020). Despite positive aspects of ethical leadership, Banks et al. (2021) argued that ethical leadership theory and measurement need to be refined due to the conflation of leader behaviours and follower evaluations.

Remaining with moral-based leadership, in Lundqvist et al.'s (2023) recent review, only two out of 40 articles explored servant leadership, with a cross-sectional and longitudinal quantitative study. In the literature, servant leadership focused on leaders helping followers, with Eva et al. (2019) conceptualising the theory through three dimensions: "(1) other-oriented approach to leadership, (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritising of follower individual needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organisation and the larger community" (p.114). Servant leaders continue to be characterised by prioritising followers and their needs (Das & Pattanayak, 2023). Such leaders often take a long-term sustainable view rather than an immediate profit-first focus (Eva et al., 2019) and a desire to do good beyond the business (Meuser & Smallfield, 2023). Schowalter and Volmer (2023) described this dual purpose of servant leadership as being "people-centred without ignoring performance expectations" (p.2).

Research that combines servant leadership theory and employee wellbeing is also surprisingly limited. Schowalter and Volmer (2023) suggested a scarcity of causal research on servant leadership and literature instead tends to focus on explanations, limiting the ability to make reliable conclusions about the theory. However, more concerning than the lack of literature is the foundation of positive psychological and moral-based leadership constructs, including servant leadership. Like ethical and authentic leadership, perspectives differ between stakeholders on how servant leadership is operationalised (Alvesson & Einola, 2019). Thus, the theory tends to neglect conflicting interests that exist in organisations and perceptions of what is morally good and what will make different people in the organisation happy (Alvesson & Einola, 2019). Due to the conflicting perceptions and issues with construct clarity in moral-based leadership, ethical and servant leadership theories were not used in this research.

Healthy Leadership. The relatively new healthy leadership theory aims to provide an intentionally employee health-focused (Krick et al., 2022) leadership framework (Klug et al., 2019) that expands on traditional leadership theories (Yao et al., 2021). The theory was developed to help researchers understand and identify leadership behaviours that could influence and enable improved employee wellbeing and a healthy work environment (Jiménez, Winkler, & Dunkl, 2017). Grimm et al. (2021) argued that "well-established, general leadership styles take health and well-being only indirectly into account" and that leadership literature lacks an explicit focus on health and wellbeing (p.2). Instead, healthy leadership theories provide a promising alternative for developing explanations, predictions, and influencing employee wellbeing leadership (Grimm et al., 2021), and research in the field has grown steadily over the past decade (Rudolph et al., 2020).

Defining healthy leadership is complicated, as researchers have used many names to describe individual theories under the broader umbrella of healthy leadership (Gulseren & Lyubykh, 2023; Rudolph et al., 2020). Theories include health-oriented (Arnold & Rigotti,

2021; Klebe et al., 2022), health-focused (Boehm et al., 2016), health-promoting (Jiménez, Winkler, & Dunkl, 2017; Spiess & Stadler, 2016), and health-specific leadership (Gurt et al., 2011). Each theory aims to improve employee health and wellbeing; however, the focus of individual theories differs slightly (Gulseren & Lyubykh, 2023). For example, health-promoting leadership aims to improve employee health and wellbeing through leaders initiating, developing, and participating in health-promoting activities (Eriksson et al., 2011). In comparison, health-oriented leadership practices focuses on improving health through leader awareness of their own and followers' health and acting to protect or improve employee health (Franke et al., 2014). Despite the different terms used, the overall focus on employee health and wellbeing remains central, as indicated in the definitions of healthy leadership presented in Table 2.2, below.

Table 2.2

Definitions of Healthy Leadership

Healthy Leadership Theory Term	Definition	Author(s)
Health-specific leadership	"The leader's explicit consideration of and engagement in employee health" (p.108).	(Gurt et al., 2011)
	"The managerial intent to be more focused on employee health rather than on performance or other objectives" (p.321).	(Horstmann & Remdisch, 2019)
Health-promoting leadership	"The process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health" (p.75).	(Eriksson et al., 2011).
	"A combination of different leadership behaviours with the aim to design a healthy workplace for the employees" (p.2).	(Bregenzer et al., 2019)
Health-oriented leadership	"Health-oriented leadership is defined as behaviours, values and attitudes of leaders that are geared toward health at the workplace" (p.406).	(Kaluza et al., 2021).

	"Health-oriented leadership explicitly focuses on employee health, such as designing beneficial working conditions or being a role model for health and safety behaviour at work" (p.2).	(Klebe et al., 2022).
Healthy leadership	"Health-specific influence of leaders on employee health and wellbeing" (p.4).	(Koinig & Diehl, 2021).

Despite the differences, each of the definitions outlined in Table 2.2 focus on improving employee wellbeing, though more specifically, their health. However, for clarity, and in congruence with Rudolph et al. (2020), the single term healthy leadership is used hereafter in this thesis. Surprisingly, while many definitions are presented in the table above, the literature lacks a clear foundational definition (Rudolph et al., 2020). However, for conceptual clarity in this thesis, healthy leadership is defined according to Jiménez, Winkler and Dunkl (2017), who asserted:

> We understand health-promoting [healthy] leadership culture not as a specific leadership strategy or leadership style but more as a set of leadership behaviours that is in continuous interaction with the working environment. The aim … should be to gradually design the working environment in a way that it is able to enhance health" (p.4231).

This definition from Jiménez, Winkler and Dunkl (2017), conceptualises healthy leadership as moving away from prescriptive leadership styles that specify characteristics that leaders should possess to be successful (Einola & Alvesson, 2021a). The definition presents leadership as an ongoing process rather than an end state. From this perspective, leaders interact with the workplace and employees to develop an organisation where the meaning of health and wellbeing and the needs of employees are negotiated and monitored. For example, altered family circumstances may change a follower's needs, or the organisation may develop in new markets, creating different employee impacts. By viewing healthy leadership according to Jiménez, Winkler and Dunkl's (2017) definition, the leadership of employee wellbeing contains influences from the work environment in an ongoing process that recognises that needs and stressors change.

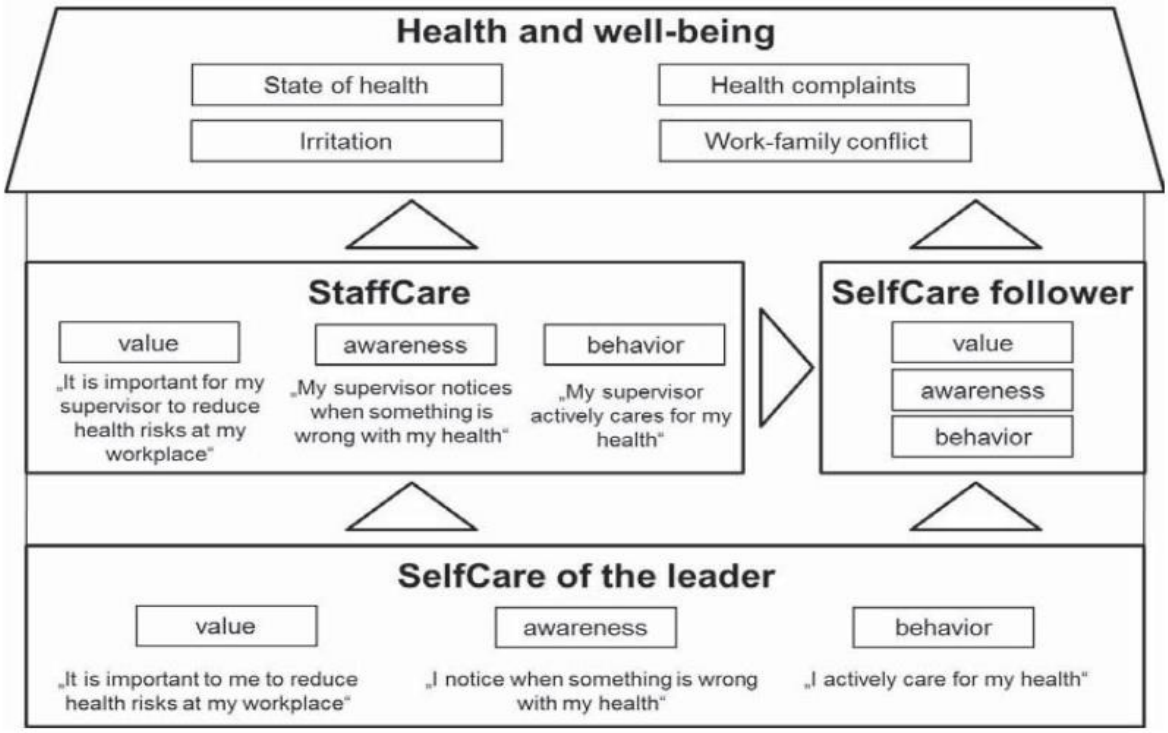
2.7 Healthy Leadership Theory

As outlined previously, leaders and their leadership play a significant role in employee wellbeing (Inceoglu et al., 2021; Inceoglu et al., 2018); thus, understanding how leaders and their practices impact and improve employee wellbeing is crucial to mitigating the serious impacts of poor employee wellbeing. The following discussion shows that health leadership research contains a range of leader practices to improve employee wellbeing, and the reviewed research has been encompassed within three themes: 1) leader behaviours, 2) developing the work environment, and 3) normalising behaviours and values. The themes are distinct, though some overlapping dimensions exist; for example, part of developing the work environment consists of normalising behaviours and values.

Leader Behaviours. Leaders' behaviour is central to the leadership of employee wellbeing (Das & Pattanayak, 2023; Inceoglu et al., 2021). A prominent aspect of healthy leadership theory is the need for leaders to be aware of follower's health and wellbeing (Boehm et al., 2016; Franke et al., 2014; Furunes et al., 2018; Gurt et al., 2011; Horstmann & Remdisch, 2019; Jiménez, Winkler, & Bregenzer, 2017; Santa Maria et al., 2021). Leader behaviours were initially conceptualised by Franke et al. (2014) in their prominent model illustrated in Figure 2.3, below.

Figure 2.3

Health-Oriented Leadership Model (Franke et al., 2014, p. 142)



As represented by their model, Franke et al. (2014) indicated that leaders have dual self-care and staff-care responsibilities. Leaders need to value, have an awareness of, and act to support and improve their own and followers' health and wellbeing. Interestingly, Franke et al.'s (2014) model integrates followers and leaders' behaviours in their conceptualisation, which was reinforced by Klug et al. (2019), who argued that health-promoting behaviours need both types of workplace actors rather than being limited only to leaders.

Extending Franke et al.'s (2014) idea of leader awareness, Pischel and Felfe (2023) defined awareness as "the ability to detect potential health issues" (p.186) and argued that leader awareness is crucial to healthy leadership. The importance of leader awareness and how they value employee health is found in the influence that this has on an individual's expectations of whether they can or should be open about their mental health (Pischel & Felfe, 2023). Correspondingly, findings from Horstmann and Remdisch's (2019) German interview

study of managers indicated that leaders need to role model appropriate behaviours, congruent with Franke et al.'s (2014) idea of self-care or "the way leaders think, feel, and behave with regard to their own health" (p.143). Leader self-awareness is therefore important, because it establishes a foundation for their practices and provides role modelling for followers (Franke et al., 2014).

Further leader practices have been associated with healthy leadership, such as clarifying job roles (Furunes et al., 2018; Horstmann & Remdisch, 2019) and creating boundaries around work (Efimov et al., 2020; Horstmann & Remdisch, 2019). Caring for employees' health and wellbeing is a prominent aspect of healthy leadership Jiménez, Winkler, & Bregenzer, 2017; Santa Maria et al., 2021), and the literature shows it is particularly necessary during high-stress situations, as leader support can buffer some of the adverse effects of increased job demands (Krick et al., 2022). Likewise, in their study of Austrian and Slovenian workers (mostly non-leaders), Bregenzer et al. (2020) found that listening is an essential leader practice, as it is a predictor of job satisfaction.

Developing the Work Environment. In their review, Boehm et al. (2016) argued that workplace conditions can positively and negatively impact employees' wellbeing. Their discussion emphasised the need for leaders to develop an appropriate work environment where workloads are not excessive, working overtime is limited, and followers have the opportunity to recover. In their work, Efimov et al. (2020) stressed that organisation-level leaders need to set reasonable and attainable expectations to practice healthy leadership within the organisation. Pressured working conditions with very high-performance expectations and ignoring employee work-related health negatively correspond with the application of healthy leadership (Efimov et al., 2020). In congruence, Eriksson et al.'s (2011) early healthy leadership study indicated that developing a health-promoting workplace is essential and encompasses physical characteristics, psychosocial factors, and allowances made for

individual needs, such as flexible work. More recently, Pischel and Felfe (2023) found that leaders who experience high stress are less likely to notice depression and burnout symptoms in followers, which reinforces a corresponding need to develop a positive work environment for all employees to enable effective leadership of employee wellbeing.

Contextual conditions of the work environment are also important, as Santa Maria et al. (2021) explained the crucial influence arising from the demands of a particular industry, as some work stressors cannot be removed as they are inherent to a specific work context. For example, in their study with a German police department, intrinsic psychological and physical stressors could not be removed, instead, leaders needed to be aware of follower's employee wellbeing and provide situation-appropriate assistance (Santa Maria et al., 2021). Horstmann and Remdisch (2019) argued that "as leadership does not take place in a vacuum, contextual factors influence the impact of leadership on employee health and have to be considered as influencing factors" (p.311). The argument stresses that industry contexts, legislation, and other environmental and contextual factors may influence efforts to develop health-promoting workplaces. Consequently, it is important for leaders to be cognizant of internal and external contexts that may limit leadership of employee wellbeing.

Personal functioning within the work environment contributes to healthy leadership, and in their qualitative study of nurses in Norway, Furunes et al. (2018) found that individual autonomy was the most important work condition. Study participants highlighted that they wanted the opportunity to make their own choices and deal with issues in a manner they felt was best. Though participants also emphasised five other aspects for healthy leadership: role clarity, minimising stressful job demands, participating in decision-making, having professional development, and social support. This range of actions further reinforces the inherent complexity in leading employee wellbeing with differing demands, contexts, and individuals.

Normalising Behaviours and Values. In their work, Grimm et al. (2021) highlighted that a leader's attitudes influence healthy leadership outcomes. Similarly, Boehm et al. (2016) had earlier emphasised that leaders need to develop positive attitudes toward employee wellbeing, such as being sick is not a weakness. Likewise, Santa Maria et al. (2021) stressed that taking action to reduce stigmas is a critical factor in individuals choosing to seek help. The results of Pischel and Felfe's (2023) quantitative study indicate that healthy leadership practices are essential for facilitating followers' disclosure of mental health issues. Their findings highlight the importance of developing a work environment where individuals feel comfortable disclosing about poor psychological health to leaders.

Research has indicated that normalising values and attitudes regarding employees' wellbeing may need to occur within an organisation's culture (Bregenzer et al., 2020; Gurt et al., 2011). Furthermore, Jiménez, Winkler and Bregenzer (2017) argued that "organisational culture influences the leadership behaviour by its guidelines, practices and values. Therefore, leaders can only act when the organisational culture allows them to" (p.12). The authors highlighted that leaders can influence an organisation's culture with their values and behaviour to develop a healthy leadership culture (Jiménez, Winkler, & Bregenzer, 2017). However, developing open and flexible working conditions may require organisational culture changes (Efimov et al., 2020). Despite the suggestion that attitudes, values, and changes may need to become integrated into an organisation's culture, it was unclear from the reviewed literature, how this occurs.

Leader behaviours, developing the workplace, and normalising values are critical aspects of the healthy leadership literature. However, as shown throughout this section, other workplace actors are likely involved, particularly followers, who are prominently seen in Franke et al.'s (2014) model. Interestingly, Horstmann and Remdisch (2019) also included an organisation actor, though it was tied closely to leaders. Regardless, the divergence of

workplace actors in the literature provides a broader perspective of who is involved in healthy leadership, as discussed in more detail below.

2.8 Workplace Actors in Healthy Leadership

As discussed previously, the healthy leadership literature is replete with various ways that leaders are involved in healthy leadership and can support and improve employee wellbeing. However, follower and organisation actors also participate and are necessary in the leadership of employee wellbeing (Horstmann & Remdisch, 2019). Followers and individuals are present in the healthy leadership literature, but are presented tangentially to leaders. For example, in Frake et al.'s (2014) model, follower action is predicated on leader action. However, followers are more autonomously involved through the idea of self-leadership, where individuals care for their own employee wellbeing (Franke et al., 2014; Klug et al., 2019). Likewise, Horstmann and Remdisch (2019) asserted that followers need to be responsible for their wellbeing by valuing and acting to protect it, and when required, making relevant changes. In addition, followers are also part of healthy leadership through building relationships with leaders, reacting to leaders' actions (Bregenzer et al., 2020), and participating in decision-making (Furunes et al., 2018). Interestingly, Kaluza et al. (2021) found that follower expectations may be an influencing factor of healthy leadership practices. However, additional research of this non-leader workplace actor is necessary (Kaluza et al., 2021) to more fully understand the complex nature of leading employee wellbeing.

Followers were a noticeable, though less prominent, workplace actor in the healthy leadership literature; however, there is limited research and ambiguity surrounding the organisation actor. Some literature has shown that this actor is present in healthy leadership through providing adequate resources, enabling appropriate job designs, and keeping work demands reasonable so leaders could provide staff-care behaviours (Eriksson et al., 2011; Klug et al., 2019). The organisation actor is also said to influence the flexibility of job roles, the way

followers and leaders participate in the organisation, and team cultures (Horstmann & Remdisch, 2019). Crucially, Efimov et al. (2020) argued that "the greatest potential for change" occurs from the organisation (p.10). Despite the presence of an organisation-type actor, specific research into healthy leadership is scarce. The characteristics of this workplace actor are poorly understood, and the differences between the organisation as an actor and leaders is unclear. It is evident that followers, leaders, and a type of organisation actor are present in the healthy leadership literature. However, leaders are often the focus, and Kaluza et al. (2021) argued that research involving other workplace actor perspectives is necessary.

2.9 Reasons for Addressing Employee Wellbeing

The literature previously outlined established the presence of multiple workplace actors in employee wellbeing and healthy leadership theory. However, understanding the motivations of why workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing is necessary, as attribution theory suggests that individuals attempt to make sense of and explain to themselves why phenomena occur (Guest et al., 2021; Hewett et al., 2018). Attribution's encompass interpersonal occurrences such as between leaders and followers, as "any task success or failure is followed by a search for the cause of the outcome" (Hewett et al., 2018, p. 91). Therefore, understanding the reasons for workplace actor involvement in the leadership of employee wellbeing is vital.

The motivations for addressing employee wellbeing in the literature have often focused on the positive benefits to the organisation rather than the benefits to employees (Inceoglu et al., 2018; Xerri et al., 2023). Indeed, Inceoglu et al. (2018) concluded that "as a starting point for future research, leadership researchers will need to take employee well-being more seriously as a criterion in and of itself – as an end goal rather than merely as a means to higher performance" (p.189). However, there continues to be a performance-wellbeing correlation in the employee wellbeing literature, with comments such as:

> "Employee's wellbeing is critical to the survival and development of organisations around the world" (X. Zheng et al., 2015, p. 621).

> "Modern business organisations are increasingly aware of the importance to sustain and promote employees' wellbeing in order to gain and maintain competitive advantage" (Berger et al., 2019, p. 1).

> "Promoting innovative work behaviour and employee wellbeing has become essential as it endows companies with competitive advantages to thrive in today's complex business environment" (Salem et al., 2023, p. 657).

From these perspectives, employee wellbeing is a means to improve organisational outcomes of increased productivity and performance, but which may also deliver a positive side-effect outcome for employees.

For many years, the employee wellbeing-productivity link has been explored through the happy-productivity worker thesis, which contends that "'happy' workers should have better performance than 'less happy' ones" (Peiro et al., 2019, p. 1). Indeed, Peiro et al. (2019) indicated that employees with higher job satisfaction have higher productivity over time, put more effort into their work, and have higher task performance and increased creativity. However, research on the theory shows contrasting results (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009; Peiro et al., 2019), and there is considerable debate surrounding the premise of whether employees' happiness results in higher productivity and performance (Bellingan et al., in press; Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009). Furthermore, researchers have not adequately focused on the operationalisation of productivity, as productivity is sometimes isolated in research as job performance, and there is conceptual ambiguity and issues surrounding contextual factors that impact performance and productivity (Peiro et al., 2019). Significantly, researchers of the happy-productive worker thesis have studied happiness as an antecedent of productivity, but

seldom the reverse, and assume a linear relationship between happiness and productivity (Peiro et al., 2019).

The literature shows that researchers have primarily focused on employee wellbeing for productivity benefits. However, Inceoglu et al. (2018) showed that it is important to address employee wellbeing outside of organisational outcomes. When coupled with research on attribution theory, this review has shown that it is vital to further explore the motivations of why workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing.

2.10 Gaps in the Literature

The employee wellbeing and healthy leadership literature both present three workplace actors; however, understanding of them is limited, particularly regarding followers, as healthy leadership literature has been leader centric at the expense of other workplace actors (Kaluza et al., 2021). Furthermore, understanding of the organisation actor, their involvement, and interrelatedness with other actors, especially leaders, is both scare and ambiguous, and understanding of how leaders influence the wellbeing of followers is surprisingly limited (Inceoglu et al., 2018; Jimmieson et al., 2021). Coinciding with these limitations are the motivations for addressing employee wellbeing, which Inceoglu et al. (2018) and Xerri et al. (2023) argued are organisationally beneficial, rather than for the purpose of improving the wellbeing of workers. Consequently, two research questions are proposed in this thesis:

1) How are workplace actors involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing?

2) Why are workplace actors involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing?

Through addressing both research questions, it is anticipated that this thesis will contribute to theory and practice by providing a better understanding of the specific workplace actors and their unique practices involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing [RQ1]. Additionally, it is expected that this study will contribute to an expanded understanding of what

motivates workplace actor involvement in the leadership of employee wellbeing [RQ2]. Together, it is anticipated that the findings will contribute to a better understanding of the leadership of employee wellbeing.

2.11 Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter highlighted the complex, multi-dimensional, and changeable characteristics of employee wellbeing (Bachman et al., 2023; Inceoglu et al., 2021), which is poorly conceptualised (Chan et al., 2021), with literature scattered across multiple domains. Significantly, the literature presented leadership as critical in influencing and enabling improved employee wellbeing (Inceoglu et al., 2021; Jimmieson et al., 2021) and several prominent leadership theories were investigated; however, each had inherent issues. Healthy leadership provided an employee health and wellbeing specific leadership theory (Rudolph et al., 2020), and though leader practices were central, followers and the organisation were also present in the literature (Horstmann & Remdisch, 2019). Despite what is known, the conflation of workplace actors and surrounding ambiguity necessitates a better understanding of the workplace actors, and how and why they are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing is necessary.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the research philosophy, design, and method of analysis used to plan for and conduct the research for this thesis. First, I outline the philosophical paradigm that provided a foundation for this study, and which influenced the qualitative methodology and case study research design. Next, I discuss the methodological limitations that can arise from qualitative and case study research, and the mitigation practices designed into this research to enhance the trustworthiness of this thesis. Attention is then given to ethical considerations, and the chapter concludes with a discussion of the reflexive thematic analysis approach used to develop the findings within a strongly qualitative framework.

3.2 Research Philosophy

The foundation for developing quality research is explicitly describing the philosophical paradigm that forms the basis of a study (S. Patnaik & Pandey, 2019). Spencer et al. (2020) highlighted that a researcher does not so much choose a philosophy, but rather, their research philosophy is a reflection of how they see the world. A research philosophy encompasses three primary considerations: 1) ontology, what is reality; 2) epistemology, how a knowledge of reality can be gained (Lincoln et al., 2024); and 3) axiology, how a researcher's values and assumptions influence their practice (Spencer et al., 2020).

Creswell (2014) argued that researchers place themselves on an epistemological continuum, with positivism at one end and interpretivism at the other. Positivist researchers expect that people experience the world or reality in the same way (Neuman, 2014), because such researchers perceive that reality is "out there" and external to people (Guba & Lincoln, 2008, p. 269). In contrast, interpretive researchers seek to understand how reality has been constructed by people, social processes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Silverman, 2017), human relationships, and social life (Miles et al., 2014). Other philosophical paradigms are found

along the epistemic continuum and include critical realism (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017), pragmatic realism (Miles et al., 2014), post-positivism, feminism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), constructionism, and constructivism (Grandy, 2018; Potter & Robles, 2022).

In considering reality and how a knowledge of reality can be gained, this research is based on my philosophical paradigmatic view, that within the social world there is truth; however, such truth or reality is built from an individual's experiences, perceptions, assumptions, and socialisation. A personal expectation that social reality is built by the individual places this thesis on the epistemic continuum (Creswell, 2014), near constructionism and constructivism. According to Potter and Robles (2022), constructionism and constructivism evolved from a dissatisfaction with a natural-science positivist causal approach to the social world. Within constructionist and constructivist paradigms there is an expectation that people have individual agency, individual constructions, and joint co-constructions of reality (Gergen, 2020). Constructionist and constructivist researchers seek to explore the meaning-making and constructed realities of individuals (Grandy, 2018; Rees et al., 2020), which provides an ideal foundation for exploring workplace actors and their individual involvement in the leadership of employee wellbeing.

There are many different perspectives of constructionism and constructivism (Potter & Robles, 2022). The differences between the two perspectives centre on whether reality is individually or socially constructed (Grandy, 2018). However, this research aligns with Grandy's (2018) dualistic view, which combines constructionism and constructivism to create a middle ground of social constructivism. Grandy (2018) defined their view of social constructivism as a process "whereby individuals continually construct and negotiate meanings to make sense of experiences. Constructionism is dialectical; marked by tensions and complexities because of the opposing yet inseparable nature of subjective and objective realities" (p.174). In this view, constructed reality is intersubjective and contextual (Grandy,

2018; Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Intersubjective, because people individually and collectively construct meaning that is "personal and shared, shaped by one's experiences of self and self in-relation-to-others" (Grandy, 2018, p. 174). Contextual, because constructions are influenced by social and objective realities such as cultures, and social and political histories that an individual did not construct, but impact how they act, interpret, and construct their world (Grandy, 2018).

My social constructivist philosophy is not limited to this methodology section, instead, the philosophical foundations are seen throughout this thesis. The literature review chapter reflects my individual perceptions and constructions. Reviewed literature was not simply transferred from author to review. I went through sensemaking and constructing processes to understand, condense, relate, and ultimately synthesise a body of knowledge into a comprehensive reflection of my understanding. Similarly, the research questions and the topic of this thesis are a product of my constructions from cultural, societal, and personal experiences that shape what I consider is important. The findings and outcomes of this research are also constructions. Grandy (2018) asserted that data contains a participant's view of reality, and the findings contain a researcher's construction of the data. In other words, it is expected in this thesis that the findings contain meaning that I constructed from a participant's constructed meaning of their lived experiences (Grandy, 2018).

With the philosophical foundation clarified, the methodology becomes clearer. A social constructivist paradigm sits in contrast to positivist (Lincoln et al., 2024) quantitative methods (Cassell et al., 2018), and instead aligns with qualitative methodology (Potter & Robles, 2022). Denzin et al. (2024) defined qualitative research as:

> A situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. … qualitative

> researchers study things in their natural settings, which are socially constructed, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p.14).

Thus, a qualitative methodology was deemed well aligned with the purpose and philosophical foundations of this research.

3.2.1 Reasoning Paths

Within the methodology, it is also important to clarify the reasoning path, or the process that a researcher uses to reach their conclusions (Thornberg, 2022) because the reasoning path explains the researcher's logic of inquiry (Blaikie, 2018). Common reasoning paths include deduction, induction, and abduction (Thornberg, 2022). Blaikie (2018) also included retroduction; however, Kennedy and Thornberg (2018) argued that retroduction is simply another term for abduction. There are different perspectives on reasoning paths, even within the same reasoning paradigm, where dimensions, such as abduction (Thornberg, 2022) or whole reasoning paths, are debated (Blaikie, 2018).

Despite the difference perceptions in the literature, Sætre and Van de Ven (2021) argued that deduction begins with a theory-informed hypothesis before testing to confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis (Blaikie, 2018; Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018). Inductive researchers seek to identify patterns in data, and from those patterns, attempt to develop general conclusions or principles (Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018; Sætre & Van de Ven, 2021). In contrast, abduction is an iterative (Blaikie, 2018) and creative process that draws on prior and new knowledge (Thornberg, 2022) to generate and evaluate possible, then plausible explanations (Sætre & Van de Ven, 2021). For example, if a researcher observes that 10 swans are swimming on a lake and nine have white feathers, but one has black feathers, the abductive researcher would not confirm or disconfirm a hypothesis or aim for generalisable findings

(Sætre & Van de Ven, 2021). Instead, they would seek for possible explanations and could probe the lake's conditions and ask questions such as: are all birds on the lake swans, is algae present, does algae change the colour of waterfowl feathers, and so on, to investigate the phenomenon (Sætre & Van de Ven, 2021).

Based on Sætre and Van de Ven (2021) descriptions of reasoning paths, deductive and inductive reasoning share positivist leaning principles according to Su's (2018) explanation that positivist researchers seek for generalisable and causal findings. A positivist philosophy did not align with the foundation of this research; as a result, deductive and inductive reasoning paths were deemed unsuitable. According to Blaikie (2018), retroduction uses deductive and inductive processes, working backwards from what is known to confirm whether something exists. The reliance on deduction and induction also made retroduction incompatible with this research. In contrast, abductive processes promote the development of divergent thinking and seeing unexpected phenomenon by generating possible and then plausible explanations (Sætre & Van de Ven, 2021). For example, reviewed organisation documents initially provided an understanding of the content. However, once I was further into my data analysis and had begun revising the themes and writing up, I returned to the documents and constructed more refined meaning as I made connections to other data sources that provided more in-depth conclusions. As the purpose of this research was to explore *how* and *why* workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing, abduction was deemed most appropriate and was a fundamental aspect of the research design, and particularly, the data analysis.

3.3 Research Design

"Scholars in the field caution qualitative researchers to maintain flexibility in their designs because settings and people are unpredictable, fluid, and even messy" (Koro et al., 2022, p. 156). Research with a social constructivist philosophy, qualitative methodology, and abductive reasoning requires an appropriate method to explore workplace actors' realities,

perspectives, and meaning-making (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Many qualitative research designs are available to facilitate exploring the lived experiences of individuals in the workplace, including phenomenology, ethnography, ethnomethodology, grounded theory, interview studies, and case studies. Each research design has a different purpose and "makes the world visible" in its own way (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 10). As outlined below, each research design has strengths and limitations that would make a particular design more or less suitable for use in this thesis.

1) Phenomenology is paradigmatically compatible with social constructivist research, because researchers seek to understand participants' experiences (Eberle, 2022). However, phenomenological research often involves a broad and deep exploration of a participant's world and the researcher's involvement (Eberle, 2022). This research focused on exploring the actions and interactions of workplace actors and their processes, sensemaking and the broader occurrences of organisational practices, but only as they relate to the leadership of employee wellbeing. The wider phenomenological exploration of the "levels of everyday living" (Kuchinke, 2023, p. 42) made this research design unsuitable for this thesis.
2) Ethnographic research requires researcher immersion over extended periods in the lives of participants to describe and understand specific groups of people (Silverman, 2017) and their cultures (Hammersley, 2018). Long-term engagement of the researcher in participants' lives, even if limited only to work time, was not possible within the timeframe of this research. Additionally, while organisational culture and the work environment are important, the focus of ethnographic research on broad culture, as described above, made ethnography less suitable for this thesis.
3) Ethnomethodological research shares some of the characteristics of ethnographic research. Ethnomethodology also involves extended periods of involvement with

specific participants in formal and informal settings (Rawls & Lynch, 2024). Ethnomethodologists aim to understand the theories individuals use to create order and organise specific social events (Whittle, 2018). The long-term involvement with participants at work and outside of work was beyond the scope of this thesis; thus, ethnomethodology was not used.

4) Grounded theory comprises a contested and sometimes contradictory collection of differing approaches (Thornberg & Keane, 2022). Researchers seek for the systematic and iterative collection and analysis of data to build theory (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). According to Holton's (2018) view of grounded theory, researchers enter the field without predefined research questions, interview guides, or literature reviews, instead, they are sensitive to the problems they encounter in the field, and actively pursue meaningful avenues. This thesis addresses specific research questions based upon a wide review of the employee wellbeing and leadership literature, which provides a strong theoretical foundation. Additionally, grounded theory is perceived to have an underlying positivist leaning foundation (Holton, 2018). These factors made grounded theory unsuitable for this thesis.
5) An interview study is one of the most popular methods used in qualitative social science research (Brinkmann, 2022). Interviewing enables researchers to understand individual perspectives, opinions, and sensemaking (Roulston & Halpin, 2022), because researchers are said to gain a literal "inter-view"; a joint view into an individual's experiences (Brinkmann, 2022, p. 2); thus, this was deemed an ideal technique for the purpose of this research.

   While interviewing individuals working in multiple organisations would have provided a broad view of how and why workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing, the depth of knowledge would have been limited. Such limitations

were observed when testing the interview guide on individuals from different workplaces. Their experiences were interesting and relevant. However, exploring different perspectives of the same instances of the leadership of employee wellbeing was impossible and reduced the ability to gain an in-depth understanding, which came from having multiple standpoints of the same events. In contrast, using additional data collection techniques, such as observation and reviewing organisational documents, offered the opportunity to gain additional insight beyond the interview. Thus, a standalone interview study was not ideal for this research.

6) Case study research design is said to be a bounded investigation of a phenomenon in its natural context (Tight, 2022). Case studies are bounded because a study explores a phenomenon of interest within the boundaries of a defined context (Stake, 1995, 2006; Tight, 2022). Researchers using a case study design seek to understand how and why something may have happened (Thomas & Myers, 2015) and aim to understand complex interactions from different perspectives (S. Patnaik & Pandey, 2019; Thomas & Myers, 2015) using multiple data collection sources (Silverman, 2017). Interviewing, observation, and document reviewing are common data collection techniques (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Stake, 1995, 2006) and provide ideal methods to explore workplace actors in the leadership of employee wellbeing. Thus, the case study research design was used in this research, as outlined further in the next section.

3.3.1 The Case Study

Case study research has been defined many ways (Piekkari & Welch, 2018; Schwandt, 2018). Tight (2022) provided a broad definition, conceptualising case study research as "small scale research with meaning." (p.400); while Miles et al. (2014) defined this design as the investigation of "a phenomenon of some sort occurring within a bounded context" (p.28). Yin (2009) offered a two-part definition of case study research design:

1. A case study is an empirical inquiry that
    - Investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when
    - The boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. …
2. The case study inquiry
    - Copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
    - Relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
    - Benefit from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (p.18).

Yin's (2009) definition of case study research is clear and detailed; however, Yazan (2015) and Piekkari and Welch (2018) highlighted that Yin's (2009) philosophical approach is positivist leaning, rendering it a less compatible approach for this thesis. In contrast, Stake (1995) defined case study research as a bounded system focused on a "specific, complex functioning thing" from which data is gathered and analysed (p.2). Though Stake's (1995) definition is not as detailed in comparison to Yin's (2009), the surrounding ideas are. Stake (1995) provided a detailed explanation for building a case study from a quintain, or central unifying focus on the phenomenon of interest. Additionally, Stake's (1995) established approach has an underlying expectation that "knowledge is constructed rather than discovered" (Stake, 1995, p. 99). The philosophical alignment of constructed reality make Stake's (1995) approach a methodologically-sound research design to explore the workplace actors in the leadership of employee wellbeing.

It is important to note that Stake's (1995) seminal approach to case study design (Yazan, 2015) is older than may be expected in current research. However, Piekkari and Welch (2018) outlined that case study methodology has not developed at the same pace as other approaches. Consequently, older case study research design work is still accepted and frequently used (Piekkari & Welch, 2018).

Stake (1995) outlined three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective (multi) case studies. It is expected that researchers who use an intrinsic case study design generally seek to understand the particulars of a case itself, rather than representing a broader phenomenon (Stake, 1995). In contrast, researchers using an instrumental case study are said to focus on understanding a "puzzlement" or a phenomenon, and the case provides boundaries around what is being investigated (Stake, 1995, p. 3). Intrinsic and instrumental case studies can also be single or collective, where multiple cases are investigated simultaneously (Stake, 1995, 2006).

The leadership of employee wellbeing could be studied in endless organisations or instances. However, a two-organisation instrumental case study approach was fitting in this research because the design enabled a deep exploration of how and why workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. Limiting to two bounded contexts enabled collection of in-depth data, while gaining multiple participant perspective of the same workplace occurrences related to workplace actor involvement in the leadership of employee wellbeing. Consequently, this provided both depth and breadth of data to address the research questions.

3.3.2 Case Organisations and Selection

Selecting the case organisations is central to addressing the research questions. Stake (1995) asserted that the first consideration in case selection is an underlying need to maximise

learning. Purposive sampling was used to select the case organisations to maintain alignment with the research questions and maximise potential learning (Silverman, 2017). Three criteria were used for case selection: 1) the case needed to be a workplace to ensure the participation of workplace actors who were employees, 2) the workplace structure needed to have multiple actors, including a mixture of followers, leaders, and organisation actors, and 3) a workplace that espoused values of employee wellbeing was preferable to increase the likelihood of instances of the leadership of employee wellbeing occurring. Here, the organisation actor, refers to participants who are high-level leaders, according to the view that this workplace actor can provide adequate resources, enable appropriate job designs, and manage their work demands of leaders (Eriksson et al., 2011; Klug et al., 2019).

Two organisations were selected that fit the three selection criteria. Both case organisations had strongly espoused values of employee wellbeing, which were visible in annual reports and other communication materials, such as their respective organisation websites. Espoused values were ascertained in case selection through reviewing publicly available materials, such as a website and where accessible, the organisation's annual plan or other organisation documents. Additionally, the organisations were taking proactive steps in the leadership of employee wellbeing. For example, each had an employee assistance program (EAP), conducted surveys to understand employee sentiment, and provided specific initiatives intended to improve and support employee wellbeing. The contacts were leaders within their respective organisations and discussed the importance of employee wellbeing and their desire for this research to be conducted within their workplace.

The case organisations participated anonymously and are therefore described generally in Table 3.1 below. The organisations were assigned the pseudonyms of Ferris Group and Apex Group, which are used throughout this thesis. Ferris and Apex Group's core business and purposes differed; however, the organisations shared many similarities.

Table 3.1

Characteristics of Case Organisations

Ferris Group	**Apex Group**
Part of the professional, scientific, and technical sector (Business, 2023).	Part of the professional, scientific, and technical sector (Business, 2023).
Approximately 200 employees.	Approximately 150 employees.
• Central headquarters. • Several smaller offices in other Australian locations. • International offices.	• Central headquarters. • Several smaller offices in other Australian locations.
• Work was mainly office-based. • Employees mostly worked in traditional operating hours between 8am and 5pm, Monday to Friday. • Variations occurred in specific roles, and accommodations were made for individuals to have flexible work hours and location.	• Work was mainly office-based. • Some frontline roles. • Employees mostly worked in tradition operating hours between 8am and 5pm, Monday to Friday. • Variations occurred in specific roles, and accommodations were made for individuals to have flexible work hours and location. • For some frontline employees, location and work time flexibility were not available.
• Traditional hierarchical organisational structure.	• Traditional hierarchical organisational structure.

• Multiple workplace actor types, including a Board of Directors, CEO, executives, middle leaders, and followers. • Organisation was divided into distinct functions with clear departments and groups. • The organisation had responsibilities to work with external organisations and meet their own operating requirements.	• Multiple workplace actor types, including a Board of Directors, CEO, executives, middle leaders, and followers. • Organisation was divided into distinct functions with clear departments and groups. • The organisation had responsibilities to work with external organisations, end users, and meet their own operating requirements.

Table 3.1 above provides an outline of the organisational context of the two Australian case organisations. As Australian workplaces, both are governed by various regulations, including aspects of employee wellbeing, such as workplace health and safety legislation (SWA., 2024a). To further contextualise this thesis, data were collected from August 2022 to January 2023 during the Covid-19 pandemic, which had some negative impacts on the case organisations. The operating environments had altered substantially, both organisations downsized during Covid-19, and as required for Australian workplaces, shifted from office-based work to working from home for long periods. The first contact with Ferris Group occurred while lockdowns were actively used to manage the pandemic. At the time of the final interview in Apex Group, the final lockdown has passed; however, that was unknown.

How the environment of lockdown pressure and pandemic stressors impacted this research is not clear. It is plausible that aspects of employee wellbeing, such as flexible working and stressors of reduced employee numbers across the organisations due to Covid-19 may have

influenced the topics participants discussed. However, there did not appear to be any limitations stemming from the context of this specific period of the Covid-19 pandemic on the research design or content of data collected. Additionally, there were no issues accessing employees for data collection.

3.3.3 Enhancing Trustworthiness

Several methodological questions have been raised towards qualitative research, such questions regard researcher philosophy and often refer to the rigour and trustworthiness of conclusions. There have been increasing arguments that qualitative researchers need to improve the trustworthiness of their work (Grodal et al., 2021) and "demonstrate that the theoretical conclusions they reach are sound" (Harley & Cornelissen, 2022, p. 239). Qualitative case studies have been criticised for being based on a small number of participants (S. Patnaik & Pandey, 2019), researchers' interpretation of data (Flyvbjerg, 2006), and subjectivity issues relating to data collection sources. For example, interview participants may alter how they speak and what they speak about to express more socially acceptable ideas when they are voice recorded (Taylor et al., 2016) and interview data can be interpreted in multiple ways by the researcher (Brinkmann, 2020). Likewise, observation field notes are not a written record of facts; instead, they are remembered events filtered through various lenses of the observer (Anderson et al., 2006; Wästerfors, 2018) and documents can have biases and inaccuracies (Anderson et al., 2006; Atkinson & Coffey, 2011). These perceived drawbacks have been addressed through the intentional design of this study through several practices.

This research was designed to enhance trustworthiness through developing thick descriptions, triangulation, and member checking (Houghton et al., 2013; Tracy, 2010). Developing thick descriptions occurs as researchers provide concrete details of collected data and the research context (Houghton et al., 2013; Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) emphasised that when data or conclusions may be contestable, researchers need to provide additional examples,

data, and explanations that outline why they have made their interpretations. Additionally, researchers need to carefully outline the reasoning processes that they have used to develop conclusions (Harley & Cornelissen, 2022) and explicitly describe the philosophical paradigm that provides the foundation of a study (S. Patnaik & Pandey, 2019; Trainor & Bundon, 2021). I established thick descriptions in this thesis through explicitly outlining my social constructivist philosophical paradigm (see pp.54-55) and the abductive reasoning processes used in data analysis and to develop conclusions (see pp.56-57). I have outlined the context of the case study (see pp.62-65), and in Chapter 4, I provide participant quotes and other concrete details from raw data retained through the coding process and present the code book in Appendix E (see pp.301-314). These elements enable the reader of this thesis to understand why and how I have constructed the findings and discussion and enable readers to draw their own interpretations from the data (Stake, 1995; Tracy, 2010).

Triangulation is said to be equally important in developing trustworthy conclusions, particularly in case study research (Stake, 1995). Triangulation has often been described as developing research conclusions that include multiple participants, several data sources, and data collected at different times (Fusch et al., 2018; Houghton et al., 2013). Lincoln and Guba (2013) suggested three types of triangulation: data source, method, and theory; all of which can be used to improve trustworthiness in research. Data source triangulation refers to asking multiple participants the same questions, while method triangulation refers to using multiple data collection techniques within a study (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). For data source and method triangulation, Fusch et al. (2018) explained that data need to be collected over different time points and locations to explore ongoing interactions. Data source and method triangulation were achieved through collecting data in Ferris Group over five months in two organisations. I conducted 23 interviews from different workplace actor types, 12 individual observation occurrences, and reviewing 20 organisation documents across two unrelated organisations.

Data source triangulation was further strengthened in the interviews by including participants from follower, leader, and organisation workplace actor groups to provide many participant perspectives.

Theory triangulation is said to involve applying different theories during data analysis (Fusch et al., 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 2013). As outlined in the following data analysis section and discussion chapter, many theories have been used to support and explain the findings and in the development of the models found in the next two chapters. The use of theories in data analysis is part of the abductive process I used as I oscillated between collected data, theory, and developing possible and then plausible explanations (Kovács & Spens, 2005).

Member checking is the final aspect of triangulation particularly relevant to case study research (Candela, 2019; Stake, 1995). This practice occurs through participants reading and checking the accuracy of their interview transcripts (Candela, 2019) and clarifying the researcher's interpretations (Stake, 1995; Tracy, 2010). A small number of participants opted to member check and provided minor feedback on their transcript.

3.3.4 Ethical Considerations

"Ethics is an ever-present concern for all researchers; it pervades every aspect of the research process from conception and design through to research practice, and continues to require consideration during dissemination of the results" (Goodwin et al., 2003, p. 567). Iphofen and Tolich (2018) highlighted that the range of ethical concerns outlined by Goodwin et al. (2003) are applicable to all researchers, but particularly to qualitative researchers because they interfere in the lives of their participants. Interference was true in this research. I was physically present in the workplace, as I occupied meeting rooms, and chatted with employees during break and work times. Thus, the whole research design needed to be carefully considered so that collected data could appropriately address the research questions (Iphofen

& Tolich, 2018) and limit the need for further data collection and associated disruptions to the organisation.

Ethical research practice is said to display respect for the research site and minimise disruptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). When designing this research, I took care at each stage of the process to maximise the chance of gathering quality data within a set timeframe that would address the research questions. For example, once my research questions had been developed in response to the gaps identified in the literature review, I developed a qualitative case study with three data collection techniques that would complement each other but would not require additional time in the organisation. Observations occurred around interview times while I was already at the organisation. Documents from the organisations were gathered and sent at a time that suited my contacts, and some documents, such as an annual reports, were sourced from the case organisations' websites without the need for organisation assistance. In addition, when preparing for data collection, I developed and refined the interview guide by justifying each question to ensure a focus on the research questions. I tested the guide to further refine the questions and my interviewing skills and practiced observations to maximise opportunities once present in the case organisations.

Further ethical considerations included participant recruitment. All participation was voluntary and informed consent was gained from participants. Each interview was voice recorded and anonymised at the time of recording to protect participants' privacy. Participants were assigned codes and then gender-neutral pseudonyms, which are used in this thesis. Terms that could potentially identify individuals were avoided, particularly in observation notes. Before any data were collected, information sheets with support services were developed for participants to assist if any were to become distressed during an interview. Where sensitive topics were raised, I paused the interview and asked participants if they would like to stop or if they required additional support. In each instance, participants expressed that they did not

need any help and were happy to continue with the interview. Finally, all collected data are stored on an approved Griffith University cloud storage system and Griffith University ethical clearance was gained for this project (approval reference: 2022/342).

3.4 Data Collection

Capturing the ordinary happenings of participants is vital to case study data collection (Stake, 2006) and often includes interviewing, observing, and reviewing archival documents (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Stake, 1995, 2006). Denzin et al. (2024) emphasised the usefulness of using multiple data collection sources because they make different aspects of a participant's world visible. For example, interviews are said to capture a retrospective view of ordinary occurrences and sensemaking, while observations provide a current view of participants' experiences, and documents outline the expected normal functioning of the workplace (Anderson et al., 2006; Morgan et al., 2017). Using multiple data sources and participants also adds "rigour, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth" to a study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 5). Three data collection techniques: interviewing, observation, and reviewing archival documents, were used in this thesis to develop a broad understanding of participant experiences and enhance trustworthiness (Houghton et al., 2013), as shown in Table 3.2, below.

Table 3.2

Data Source Summary

Ferris Group	**Apex Group**
Interviews	
Total = 8 (one follower, six leaders, one organisation leader).	**Total = 15** (six followers, nine leaders, 0 organisation leaders).
Observation	
Total = 5 (five different days). Listed below:	**Total = 7** (four different days). Listed below:

Participant information meeting.	General work environment.
General work environment.	General work environment.
Tour of the headquarters office.	Tour of headquarters office to show employee wellbeing related posters.
General work environment.	Break room (during lunch time).
Posters in the staff toilets.	General work environment.
General work environment.	General work environment (reception area).
	Break room (during lunch time).
Documents	
Total = 12. Listed below:	**Total = 8.** Listed below:
Strategic plan.	Celebration calendar.
Employee support service intranet page.	Employee assistance program report.
Annual plan slide presentation.	Leader calendar.
Leave policy.	Leader newsletter.
Code of conduct.	Annual report.
Employment information sheet	Wellness program evidence.
Annual report.	People and culture policy.
Wellbeing intranet page.	Performance conversation checklist.
Work health and safety intranet page.	
Work health and safety management system.	
Work health and safety policy.	
Workplace rehabilitation procedure.	
Organisation Chart.	

The combination of data sources was vital to developing the findings of this thesis. It would not have been possible to gain the depth of insights into the involvement of workplace actors in the leadership of employee wellbeing without all three data sources. Interviews provided a deep data foundation with the major topics being raised. Observations and documents extended my understanding and expanded my constructions of the data through combining different perspectives. For example, interview data indicated that leaders had different functions; however, reviewing documents enabled me to understand the distinct formal role that multiple types of leaders played. Therefore, all three data sources were necessary and contributed to answering the research questions.

3.4.1 Participants

Participants were broadly purposively selected (Silverman, 2017), and limited to individuals employed in or contracted to one of the case organisations to ensure the inclusion of employees who were followers, leaders, or organisation-type actors. While a contractor is not typically considered an employee (Business, 2024), in this thesis, participation was accepted from anyone who worked directly for the organisation and had their working conditions, at least partly, controlled by the organisation. Participants did not include those who worked in the organisation but were employed by a secondary organisation, such as a consultant.

For interview recruitment, an overview meeting was held at Ferris Group and information was emailed to employees via company email in both case organisations to highlight the project and invite any employee who desired, to participate. The number of participants was important, and because the purpose of interviewing is to "get close" to the lives of participants, large numbers were not appropriate (Brinkmann, 2022, p. 48). Instead, Brinkmann (2013) indicated that approximately 15 participants are adequate for an interview study, and emphasised "fewer interviews that are thoroughly analysed are preferable to many

interviews that are only superficially explored" (Brinkmann, 2022, p. 48). For this thesis, 23 employees from both case organisations participated in an interview and topics became repetitive around the 20th interview. However, the remaining interviews had been scheduled, and the appointments were kept. While data from these last interviews were somewhat repetitive, the additional perspectives and examples were helpful and provided further evidence and confidence for the findings.

There was an imbalance in interview participation across both organisations, Apex Group had 15, while Ferris Group had eight. Additionally, Apex Group had only follower and leader workplace actors, while Ferris Group also included an organisation leader. It was not clear what led to the discrepancy in the number of interviews and workplace actor participants in each organisation. However, employees' feelings towards their organisations may have been an influencer. Both organisations were welcoming and pleasant environments to be in; however, they differed. Participants in Ferris Group appeared overall happier with their workplace than those from Apex Group, and participants from Apex Group discussed a wider range of issues compared to Ferris Group. The respective organisational cultures may also have been another factor influencing the differences in participation. Ferris Group felt more formal and closed off to an outsider. People were polite and welcoming, but as one would welcome a guest. Employees did not stop and chat with me, I was seldom asked what I was doing or about my research outside of those participating in an interview. In contrast, I felt welcomed into Apex Group like a new colleague. Non-participant employees often spoke with me and included me in personal conversations. Individuals were curious about my research and were quick to help me if I looked lost.

In contrast to the interviews, observations were informal and took place in each organisation around the pre-arranged interview times. No individual or group was a particular focus; instead, through the observations, I aimed to collect data on interactions in the workplace

and notice how employees went about their working lives. Thus, no selection criteria were used, as no specific participants were desired or recruited.

3.4.2 Interviews

Qualitative interviews are said to be conversations that have a purpose (Roulston & Halpin, 2022). Interviews are considered an important data collection technique for social science research (Brinkmann, 2022) and were central to this study. Roulston and Halpin (2022) explained that conducting interviews enables researchers to gain insight into participants' views, stories, experiences, beliefs, opinions, and sensemaking of the world around them. In other words, interviewing is helpful to "get inside the heads" of participants (Silverman, 2017, p. 284), and was the primary data collection technique used for this research.

Qualitative interviews can range from wholly unstructured conversations with participant-driven questioning (Roulston & Choi, 2018) to being tightly structured (Olson, 2011); though, a semi-structured format is most commonly used (Brinkmann, 2020). Semi-structured interviews provide the interviewer with more control over leading the direction of an interview than unstructured interviews (Brinkmann, 2020). However, semi-structured interviews enable participants more scope to lead the direction of discussion than in structured interview formats (Brinkmann, 2020). A semi-structured interview format was used in this research to create structure. Using an interview guide provided general topics for the interview, while still being unstructured enough to provide autonomy for participants to freely contribute and steer the discussion.

For qualitative interviewing, the research questions need to be translated into simple queries presented in colloquial language that are easy for participants to understand (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). To keep the research questions at the core of data collection, I developed a rationale for each question in the initial interview guide. Interview questions were

developed to explore participants' lived experiences and posed questions that enabled responses that included the potential for both human and non-human actors (Clifton & Mueni, 2021). For example, question six asked: "Can you tell me what you think influences your wellbeing at work?" This question allowed participants to include people as influencers and other entities such as expectations, organisational culture, or work structures. This form of questioning reflects Brinkmann and Kvale's (2015) diagnosis question structure, which is similar to a medical diagnosis. The interviewer avoids asking the participant what they think is the problem. Instead, the interviewer asks participants how they feel, and to explain their experiences, and any symptoms they have noticed (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The answers are then analysed by the researcher, who gives a diagnosis. Just as a doctor does not ask a patient what illness they have, the doctor asks for descriptions of experiences and symptoms from which they make their diagnosis (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). In congruence with the social constructivist abductive paradigm of this research, instead of one definite diagnosis, several possible explanations were developed, resulting in the construction of the multiple themes discussed in Chapter 4, which are expanded into plausible explanations in Chapter 5.

Developing the Interview Guide. Stake (1995) asserted that testing interview questions should be routine for undertaking case study research, because a pilot study can help researchers identify any changes that need to be made before data are collected (Silverman, 2017). Informal interviews were conducted in three stages one month prior to data collection to test the interview guide and improve my efficacy as an interviewer, as outlined in the summary provided in Table 3.3, below.

Table 3.3

Interview Testing Summary

Actions	**Timing**	**Location**
Pilot Interview 1	2 July 2022	In person
Pilot Interview 2	2 July 2022	Facebook video call
Pilot Interview 3	3 July 2022	In person
Revised interview guide	5-7 July 2022	
Pilot Interview 4	9 July 2022	Microsoft Teams
Revised interview guide	12-13 July 2022	
Pilot Interview 5	20 July 2022	In person
Revised interview guide	20-21 July 2022	

A range of employee types were included in the test interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the interview guide and potential types of data that could be collected and whether the research questions would be adequately addressed. After each interview, I reflected on the rapport established between myself and the interviewee. In line with Patton (2002), I asked myself whether the interview went well and whether the questions were asked well.

Testing the interview guide generated considerable positive outcomes for this research. When the interview questions and guide were initially developed, each question seemed critical. However, the initial guide had 22 questions, each with several sub-questions and probes, which ran to nine pages (see Appendix A). In the first pilot interview, I asked each question from the interview guide verbatim. To complete the interview in the 45-minute timeframe, I hurried participants by saying things like, ‘thanks for that, now we’re going to move on to …’, or unintentionally, by turning a page in the interview guide. Participants

interpreted page-turning as an indication that it was time for the next question and stopped speaking.

The first three pilot interviews occurred across two days and allowed time to reflect on the effectiveness of the questions and questioning. The interviews had become an in-person questionnaire instead of a semi-structured qualitative interview exploring individual experiences. I shortened the guide for the fourth interview and became more comfortable steering an exploratory conversation. Before the final test interview, I removed all sub-questions and relied on impromptu probing to explore participants' experiences and meanings (See Appendix B). The revised guide was only two pages long. The pilot interviews gave me confidence that the interview questions would address the research questions and that I could less dominantly steer the conversation and have participants use the majority of the time to share their experiences. I also continued to reflect on the interview questions during data collection. For example, a question at the beginning of the guide confused participants and data were not meaningful, so it was removed to provide more time for the remaining questions.

Interviewing Mechanics. Each interview was pre-scheduled with participants and a minimum of a 30-minute break was scheduled between each interview, which provided time for reflection on the interview and to write interview field notes (see Appendix C). I used the template to prompt reflecting on the interview, research process, any problems, and the mechanics of the interview—did it go well, how did the interviewee react and so on (Patton, 2002). This time of reflection and interpretation is an integral part of improving the quality and reliability of qualitative research (Patton, 2002).

All interviews were voice recorded, and Silverman (2017) highlighted that the additional sound particles and researcher questions improve the quality of interview transcriptions. Thus, the recordings were transcribed verbatim to retain my questioning and

sound particles such as pauses, ahh, and umm sounds in participants' answers. Voice recordings were transcribed using transcription software. All transcripts were manually accuracy-checked by listening to the audio file while reading the transcript and adjusting as necessary. I added notes and reflections to the interview fieldnotes template during transcriptions. I took notes of interesting aspects, particularly things that might not be apparent during textual coding. For example, when describing one aspect of employee wellbeing in the organisation, a participant changed their tone in contrast to how they spoke during the rest of the interview. These reflections were dated to separate them from my initial fieldnotes written immediately after each interview. I read each transcript a minimum of twice before it was added to NVivo for coding.

Member checking. As indicated earlier, participants were offered a copy of their transcripts to check for accuracy (Candela, 2019) and to clarify any interpretations I had made during transcription (Stake, 1995; Tracy, 2010) before data analysis began. While participants were able to member check, most did not want to read their transcripts and opted not to be emailed a copy. Member checking can enable accurate transcriptions and ensure that participants are happy with what they have shared; however, Candela (2019) cautioned that participants could become distressed during member checking.

Positive and negative outcomes occurred as a result of member checking. Two participants wanted reassurance by reading over their transcripts. One participant asked for sections not to be included in the analysis to ensure they could not be identified. Another asked for a few sentences to be changed where they felt their words had been misinterpreted in a section where the audio recording had not accurately picked up their voice. I made the requested changes to clarify their words, their meaning was not altered, and the outcome of member checking was positive. In contrast, after reading their transcript, a different participant became concerned that their interview was not very good and seemed embarrassed at how they

perceived themselves. While the participant was happy for their transcript to be included in this research, not member checking may have reduced their stress in this instance.

3.4.3 Observation

Wästerfors (2022) argued that social scientists should seek to understand what is happening behind the scenes in an individual's life. Observation is a way for researchers to move more deeply into understanding everyday life, influences, and hidden aspects of an individual's lived experiences (Wästerfors, 2022). Observational data are unique because the researcher becomes part of the data, it is the researcher's observations that are recorded and analysed (Anderson et al., 2006). From this close involvement, researchers can see, feel, and notice for themselves what is happening instead of relying on a participant's constructed meaning of an experience (Anderson et al., 2006; Silverman, 2011). Being part of a participant's experiences allows a researcher to understand aspects that participants do not know or do not notice (Patton, 2002). For example, Schein (2010) argued that organisational cultural values and norms often become so taken for granted that people in an organisation will often not notice them.

Observation of interactions provided valuable insight into the working lives of workplace actors—the way people worked, how some people ate through lunch while working, how they greeted each other in the morning, or included others around a crowded table at lunch time. Observing employees facilitated a view into organisational life not provided through other data sources. Through observing inside of the organisation, I could see beyond the exterior and visitor spaces. For example, the bathrooms presented unexpected instances of employee wellbeing leadership, with large posters on the walls and the doors of toilet stalls outlining domestic violence and suggesting ways to help others or take action for yourself. I was able to see occurrences of organisational action for employee wellbeing that would not have been apparent through other means.

Observations also supported data gathered through the interviews. For example, I observed someone eating at their desk during the lunch break period and negatively perceived the action until an interview participant shared how they ate at their desk to intentionally free up time during their break to leave the office for recovery. The combination of interviewing and observing provided new insight into individuals' actions and helped to challenge my constructions of reality and provided a more comprehensive understanding of employee behaviour.

Observation Mechanics. A fieldnote template was developed and used for each observation (see Appendix D). I wrote the field notes as soon as possible after the observation was complete. The field notes from one observation were written the morning after the observation; however, the rest were written on the same day, most within an hour of finishing the observation, or in some instances, during the observation. Different aspects were observed, including the general work environment, such as how individuals and team members interacted and how people spoke to each other and used personal and collective workspaces. Observations were reviewed and additional thoughts were added to the observation fieldnotes in a new column before being added to NVivo for coding.

3.4.4 Document Reviewing

"Undoubtedly, documents appear rather dead"; however, they are richly associated with social action and can be a social actor by conveying a message to a reader, as documents are "artifacts entangled in social life rather than sealed containers of texts" (Jacobsson, 2022, pp. 771-772). Documents are said to provide a record of events, expectations, directions, policies (Prior, 2011), organisational intentions and narratives (Atkinson & Coffey, 2011); however they are often less utilised in qualitative research to other data collection techniques (Silverman, 2011; L.M. Wood et al., 2020). Despite their usefulness, documents need to be reviewed through a lens of self-reality, as the writer of a text has many purposes, which may

mean the document is not an accurate reflection of events or processes (Atkinson & Coffey, 2011). Despite these drawbacks, documents were significant data sources in this thesis.

Jacobsson (2022) highlighted that organisations produce vast quantities of documents, and 20 were analysed for this thesis, with a mixture of publicly available texts such as annual reports and organisation supplied policies and internal documentation. Documents were vital to developing findings and provided an operational perspective that complimented data from interview participants. For example, participants discussed issues they were facing from a leader missing in an influential position. This information was interesting on its own, as it showed impacts of having an inappropriate structure for effective leadership of employee wellbeing. However, when reviewing the documents, I noticed specific roles were involved in initiating, approving, and implementing practices regarding employee wellbeing. The static document captured a single moment of organisational action and interaction that spanned several workplace actor types and illustrated different types of leaders and the interrelated nature of workplace actors in the leadership of employee wellbeing.

3.4.5 Data Collection Mechanics

Data collection in Ferris Group occurred over eight weeks during August and September 2022, followed by data collection in Apex Group across five weeks from November 2022 to January 2023. The first data to be collected were the organisation documents, which were requested and reviewed the week before the interviews and observations began. Each document (see Table 3.2, p.70) was read, added to NVivo, and early coding undertaken.

Data collection and analysis did not occur in distinct stages. Instead, organisation documents from Ferris Group were read, notes were taken, and the first interview was conducted and transcribed within the first two weeks. This pattern continued where data collection and analysis were carried out almost simultaneously. The close timing between

collection and analysis enabled refinements to my data collection process as I reflected on my practice. For example, after transcribing the first interview, I noticed that I asked a question, but immediately gave what I felt was clarification without providing time for the participant to respond. For example, I asked:

> *Can you tell me what kind of employee type that you think you are? So it could be employee, it could be leader, it could be supervisor. Just, what word would you use to describe what kind of employee you are? (Interviewer, transcript - Jordan)*

Therefore, by transcribing the interview soon after it was conducted and before any others, I was alerted to a practice that I could develop for subsequent interviews. Due to the oscillation between data collection and analysis, I had time to reflect on the collected data and ask my contacts in the organisation additional questions without adding to the time I spent in the organisation.

From the beginning of the data collection, I kept a research diary, which included over 30,000 words of reflective notes on my research process. The diary was a simple Word document where I wrote about how I was feeling and my reflections on my practice, worries, frustrations, and methods for conducting this research. My research diary was one of the most helpful tools for constantly refining my research practice in each step of this project and a core aspect of my social constructivist philosophy that reflected the constructed realities of my research process. The reflexive research diary was also integral to my data analysis process, which is described in-depth in Section 3.5 (see, p.84).

3.4.6 Personal Role in Data Collection

To conclude the discussion on data collection, this section contains reflections on my personal involvement in the data collection. As a researcher with a social constructivist lens, I expect constructions of reality to be individually and collectively constructed from my own

and participants' experiences (Grandy, 2018). I anticipated that participants' constructions may be influenced by national, family, and organisational cultural influences, along with environmental occurrences such as Covid-19. In addition, I view the world and events through an educated, Western, and female lens. I expect that employee wellbeing is important and that people having the ability to thrive at work is valid. However, I am aware that this expectation is not universal. For individuals working in contexts outside of what is common to me—finding and keeping any work, regardless of working conditions, is essential to survival, and employee wellbeing may not be a consideration.

I also had a personal involvement in collecting data for this thesis. I conducted each interview and observation. I sat with non-participant employees in their break rooms, I chatted with reception employees as they signed me in for the day. I was physically present in the workplace and individuals were aware of my presence. During the initial participant information meeting in Ferris Group, employees were discussing working and being sick. Someone commented that they should be careful about what they said because I might be observing what was happening. This early exchange helped me recognise that participants may not always be completely open and honest in their views, particularly in public. The comment also helped me be aware that participants and non-participant employees knew of me and my presence in their workplace. Though I was welcomed in, I was aware of my position as an outsider who was coming for a short time to experience part of their world to investigate work practices that could have positive and negative connotations for employees, regardless of whether they were participants.

It was not clear how my presence impacted individuals, but it was apparent that individuals responded to me in different ways. Participants reacted to being interviewed differently; some were very positive about their role and organisation and quick to share stories and experiences. In contrast, others were more reserved, gave shorter closed answers, were

critical, or seemed nervous throughout. I tried to be open and accommodating to different personalities. Where participants seemed particularly nervous, I spent more time building a rapport by chatting in the beginning and asking questions from the guide in a natural conversational manner to help them feel more at ease and to create a friendly environment. It was unclear how employees saw me, whether it was perceived that I was there to help senior leaders or feed them information. However, some were nervous about the information they shared with me, and several participants asked for reassurance that what they discussed was confidential.

Last, with both interviewing and observing, it was impossible to separate my personality and mannerisms in data collection. Some participants were nervous, and so was I. At times, I misspoke or felt embarrassed. I felt more comfortable observing because I was in the background. It is not clear whether my personality had specific impacts on the data collection; however, I was aware of myself and my personal role in the data collection.

3.5 Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis is the process of transforming raw data into explanations of a phenomenon that represent the whole experience of participants (Neuman, 2014). Stake's (1995, 2006) approach to case study research was helpful in developing the overall research design; however, as a beginning researcher, their guidance on data analysis was too brief and more clarity was required while still aligning with my social constructivist qualitative study.

Thematic analysis was used in this thesis, as it is frequently found in qualitative case study research (see for example Miles et al., 2014; Stake, 1995; Stake, 2006) and is suitable for interview, observation, and document data analysis (Miles et al., 2014). There are several approaches to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Saldana (2016) and Miles et al. (2014) used a structured approach with pre-existing code types, such as descriptive, elemental, and

process, which is somewhat prescriptive. In contrast, Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis takes a more holistic approach and aligns well with the social constructivist philosophy of this research. As such, Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2022) reflexive thematic analysis approach was used.

Researchers using reflexive thematic analysis have been criticised for frequently only casually referring to reflexivity in their work but not adequately including their reflexive practices (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Trainor and Bundon (2021) argued that "it is problematic to conceal our methodological reflexivity as being reflexive means never divorcing this 'products' of the research from the practices of research production" (p.724). As such, the following data analysis discussion (and prior sections in this chapter), contain descriptions of my reflexive practices as I conducted this research. However, reflexivity cannot be contained only in the methodological description, rather, reflexivity is an active practice and is interwoven into the following discussion of the data analysis process, development of the findings, and the final research output, being this thesis.

3.5.1 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis has two sides; first, the data collected from participants, and second, reflections from the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Braun and Clarke's reflexive approach to thematic analysis is supported by Alvesson et al. (2022), who outlined that reflexivity can be built into research intentionally by reflecting on a researcher's work processes, the "everyday craftsmanship of doing the research" (p.37). Or the "explicit reflection of the methods producing knowledge" (Knoblauch, 2021, p. 69), and is said to occur through taking notes while transcribing interviews, reviewing observation notes, and recording the occurrences, while gaining access to organisations and individuals for data collection (Alvesson et al., 2022).

Braun and Clarke (2022) suggested that researchers should include personal, functional, and disciplinary reflexivity, which I did throughout the research process. Various occurances caused me to reflect, such as in response to working with data and conversations with colleagues, which triggered consideration of my inherent cultural values and perspectives. I also reflected on stressors that caused me to consider some of my underlying philosophy, for example, I recorded in my research diary:

> *Wednesday 17 August 2022*
>
> *I had an interesting email exchange with my supervisors this afternoon, which has made me reflect on my perceptions, and perhaps biases, towards sample/participant sizes. … [Supervisor] reminded me that qual research isn't about numbers … So I went back to the research…*

Intentional reflexivity enabled and prompted me to question and challenge myself and, in the process, became more aware of my practice and how I was constructing my perceptions of reality and where necessary to seek guidance and additional perspectives. Functional and personal reflexivity pushed me to consider what I felt and how I was constructing and making sense of the research process. These different aspects of reflection and reflexivity all combined to become the lens through which I view the world and my data.

3.5.2 Six Phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Reflexivity is one defining feature of Braun and Clarke's (2022) approach to thematic analysis; the other are the six phases of analysis. The six dimensions of reflexive thematic analysis shown in Table 3.4, below, and outlined in-depth following, are described as phases; however, the thematic analysis process is rarely linear. A researcher begins in Phase 1 but moves back and forth across the phases as the analysis continues (Braun & Clarke, 2024; Byrne, 2021).

Table 3.4

Phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis Summary (Braun & Clarke, 2022)

Phase	Description
Phase 1: Familiarisation	Becoming familiar with the data from: 1) an immersive perspective of developing a close familiarity, and 2) a critical engagement perspective to challenge and ask questions about the data.
Phase 2: Coding	Developing textual labels that outline the central meaning in a piece of data.
Phase 3: Generating initial themes	Clustering codes together around shared meaning, which form the initial tentative themes.
Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes	Developing and further refining initial themes developed in Phase 3 by reviewing and re-engaging with coded data and initial themes.
Phase 5: Refining, defining, and naming themes	Themes are named and abstract-like descriptions are written to outline and summarise the central meaning and key aspects of each theme.
Phase 6: Writing up the analysis	This phase is one of continual refinement and articulating each theme in a manner consistent with output requirements.

Phase 1 (Familiarisation). The purpose of familiarisation is to develop a "deep and intimate knowledge of your dataset" and to critically engage with collected information as data (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 42). The first step of familiarisation was to transcribe interview audio data into text data, observation and document data were already in text form and could be read immediately. Familiarisation with the data occurred in the same way for each data set, listening, editing, and re-reading interview transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Interestingly, Byrne (2021) explained that they only listened to their interviews and did not take notes in the first stage of familiarisation. However, I found that I could not only listen,

I automatically made associations with other transcripts and data, as such, I took notes to record the thoughts and connections between data sources (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2022). I added notes to a new column on the interview or observation fieldnotes templates so that all of my thoughts were appropriately dated and clearly distinguishable from my initial data for easy and consistent use throughout data analysis. Once data had been reviewed, all data sources were added to Nvivo, which was used as a tool to develop, store, and track codes.

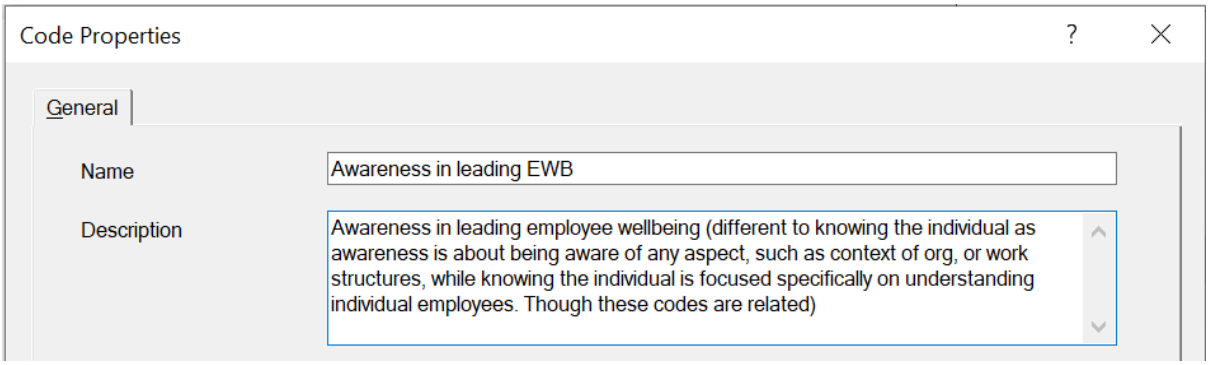
Phase 2 (Coding). Coding is the process of systematically reviewing the whole data set by reading carefully and developing a code label for any data potentially relevant to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The code label conveys one central idea or meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Byrne (2021) emphasised that codes "are the fundamental building blocks of what will later become themes" (p.1399), and these were crucial to the data analysis process.

In line with Braun and Clarke's (2022) approach, coding was completed by reading each transcript, observation, and document and developing a code label for snippets of data, which was a text label that conveyed my constructed meaning. Snippets ranged from single words to multiple paragraphs. In reflexive thematic analysis, coding is not intended to be a finite action of labelling a snippet of data once and not considering it again (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Trainor & Bundon, 2021). Instead, codes evolve as the researcher refines their thinking and constructions progress and develop as data analysis continues (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Trainor & Bundon, 2021). In this thesis, the codes illustrate my abductive iterations as I developed possible, and then plausible, conclusions.

When developing a new code, I wrote an explanation that described the central meaning of a code as illustrated in Figure 3.1, below.

Figure 3.1

Example of Code with Code Description



Including a description for each code was critical for maintaining a consistent meaning when new data were added to a code. Without the description, conflating the central meaning of each code was possible, as code labels were generally one or a small number of words or acronyms. A clear code description provided constant guidance, and I frequently referred back to them to ensure that each new data snippet fit within the code, and if not, a new code was created.

At first, coding was challenging, both methodologically and technologically. I often created broad bucket codes that grouped snippets of data according to topics but provided little of the core meaning. To improve, I tested different approaches such as manual coding, and using the comment function in Microsoft Word documents. These two methods were clunky; however, they enabled me to start thinking about the codes in a different way. I drew inspiration from worked examples by Byrne (2021) and Trainor and Bundon (2021) to move beyond my initial topic labels and develop central meaning that was important for addressing the research question. For example, in my research diary I recorded:

> *I am finding from this example [Byrne, 2021] and Trainor & Bundon (2020) that coding is to develop succinct labels for a piece of data. Before I felt like I kept slipping into identifying themes instead of 'coding' the data.*

Using these examples of Braun and Clarke's (2022) approach enhanced my practical understanding of the coding process, which enabled robust coding for central meaning. I coded in-depth, took time, and carefully read each transcript, document, and observation, resulting in the construction of over 500 codes. Each data source was coded once, though Braun and Clarke (2022) recommended coding each piece of data at least twice. I tested coding twice on one interview transcript and no new codes were created. However, coding was not a finite process that ended with Phase 2, instead coding continued throughout data analysis. When writing up the findings several months after creating the initial codes, I went code by code reading the data snippets refining, developing new codes, and condensing codes. At the end of this process, 320 codes remained in the final analysis (see Appendix E for code book). Not adding additional codes in the second round of coding may have occurred because I was careful with the initial coding, being thoughtful and moving slowly through the data set. Another factor could have been that it was too soon between the first and second attempt at coding to see any differences and construct new or refined meaning. In contrast, when I returned to the codes several months later after reviewing literature and writing up the early findings and discussion, I could refine the meaning I had previously constructed. In this iterative manner, I clarified my thoughts and understood new connections, and conversely, where I had coded too granularly, and then condensed codes with very similar meaning.

Phase 3 (Generating Initial Themes). In reflexive thematic analysis, themes do not emerge from the data; instead, themes are clusters of constructed meaning developed by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2022). There is often methodological confusion over what a theme is and what it is not (Braun & Clarke, 2023). A theme is defined as "patterns anchored by a shared idea, meaning, or concept" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 8). In other words, a theme is a broad pattern of meaning clustered around a central idea (Trainor & Bundon, 2021). Byrne

(2021) emphasised that themes should be distinctive from each other, they can be contradictory; however, themes need to present a cohesive view of the data set (Byrne, 2021).

To begin developing the initial themes, I printed out the code book from NVivo. I cut each code with the description on an individual strip of paper and asked myself, what does this mean? Inspired by Trainor and Bundon's (2021) example of their reflexive thematic analysis, as I read each code, I wrote a broad, encompassing initial theme on a sticky note and laid it on a table. I cut, read, and then placed each code in one of the initial themes, or developed a new theme if a code did not fit into another of the initial themes. This process occurred over three days. I then read over the initial themes and codes to understand whether the initial themes captured the meaning of the codes. By the end of the first round of initial theme generation, I had narrowed the 500 codes into 12 broad themes and a miscellaneous category of a small number of codes which were not relevant to the research questions. I laid out all the codes in their theme groups on a large table to see all the themes together and check whether the themes were a cohesive whole that addressed the research questions, as illustrated in Images 3.1 and 3.2 below.

Image 3.1

Theming Process

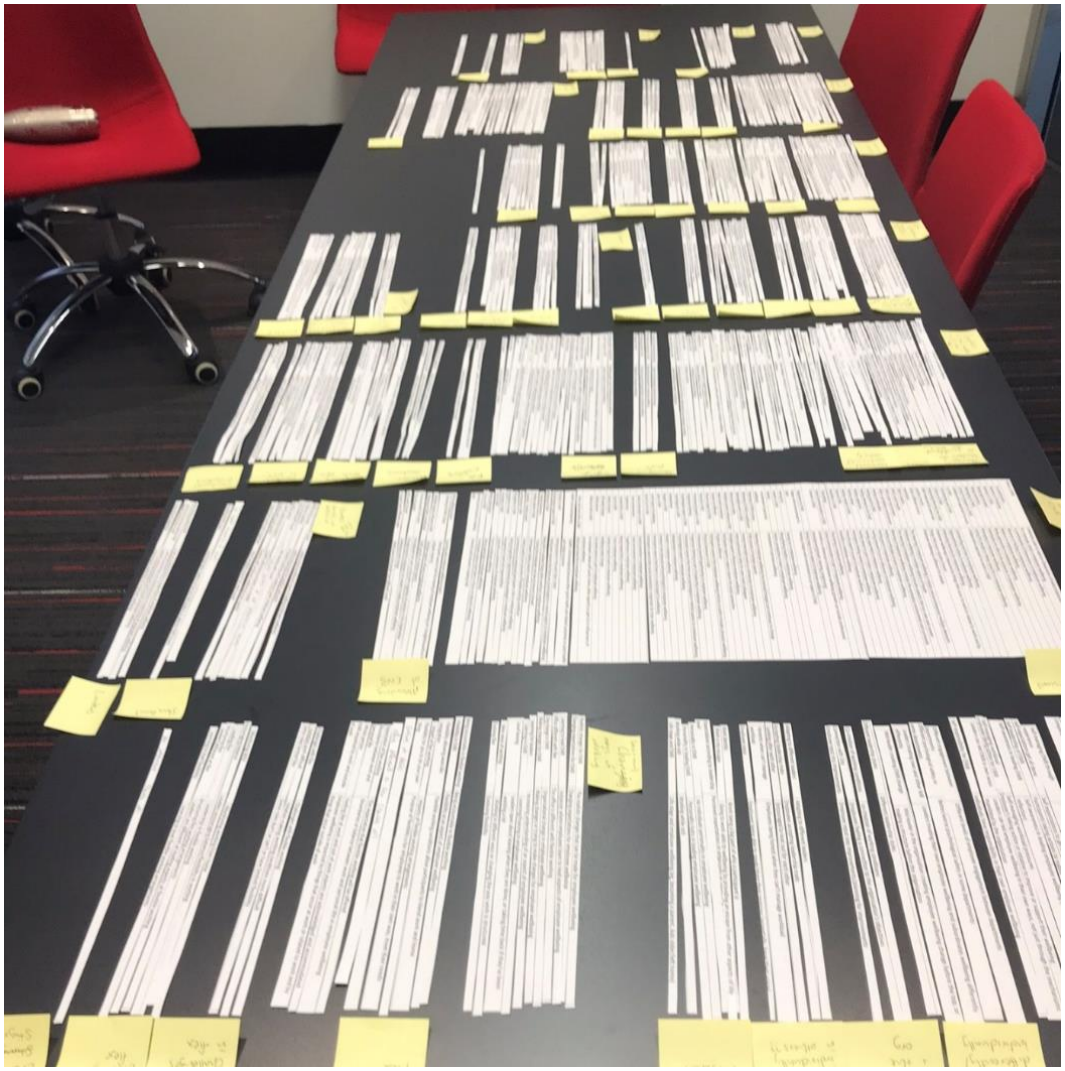
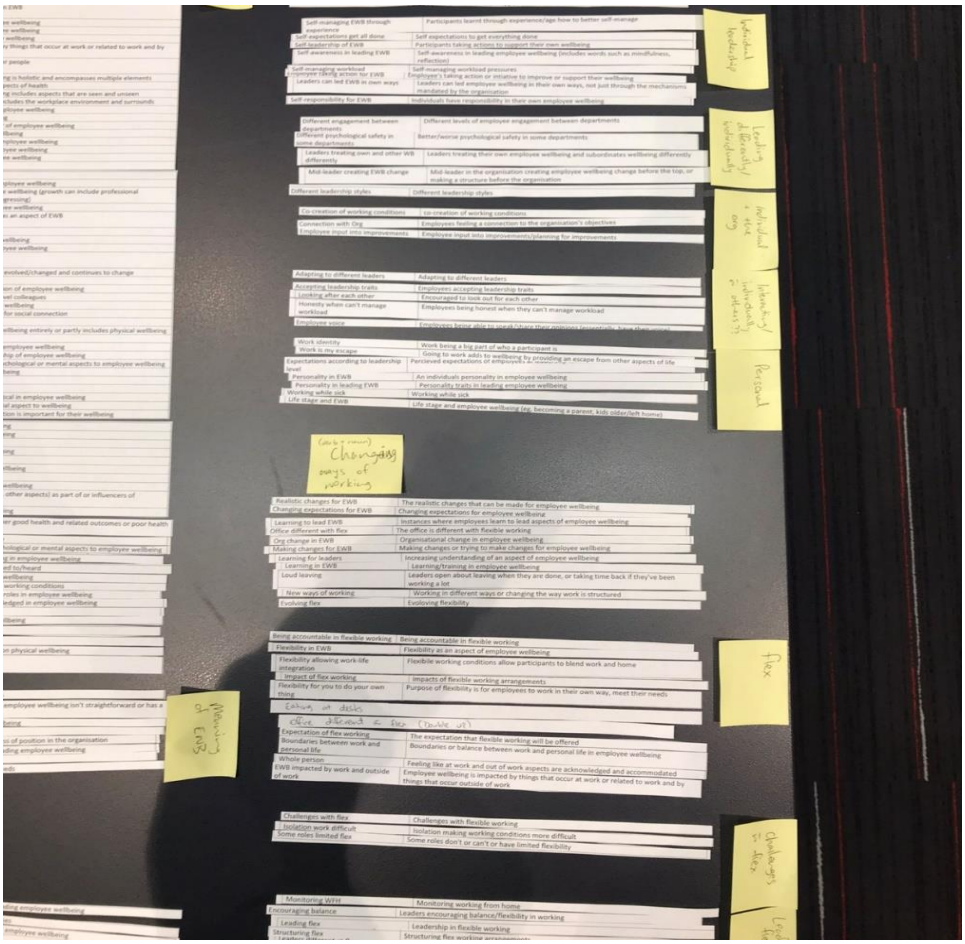


Image 3.2

Theming Process, Continued



Once each code had been placed into an initial theme, a theme map for each of the 12 initial themes was created, as presented in Figure 3.2 below.

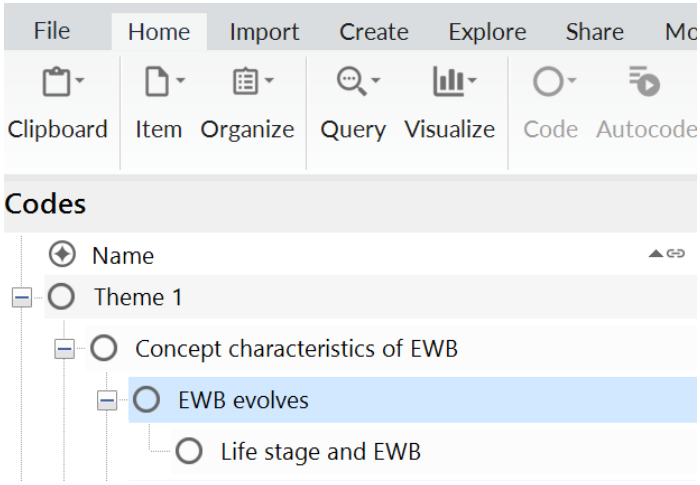
Figure 3.2

Phase 3 Initial Theme Generation (First Theme Map)

Theme maps are intended to help researchers find "patterns of meaning, and possible connections, interconnections, and disconnections" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 86). The initial themes were clustered together, illustrating the early analysis of the whole data set. In Figure 3.2, the solid lines indicate direct links to the research questions and the dashed lines indicate interconnections between the themes. After mapping the themes, the corresponding theme structure was developed in NVivo for continued analysis, as shown in Image 3.3.

Image 3.3

Theme Structure in NVivo



Phase 4 (Developing and Reviewing Themes). Byrne (2021) argued that Phase 4 "requires the researcher to conduct a recursive review of candidate [initial] themes" (p.1404) to understand whether the themes viably address the research questions and to explore whether there are different or better possibilities (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Byrne (2021) highlighted that two functions of analysis occur during Phase 4. First, understanding the relationship between codes and whether they form a cohesive theme, and second, whether the themes together form a response to the research questions.

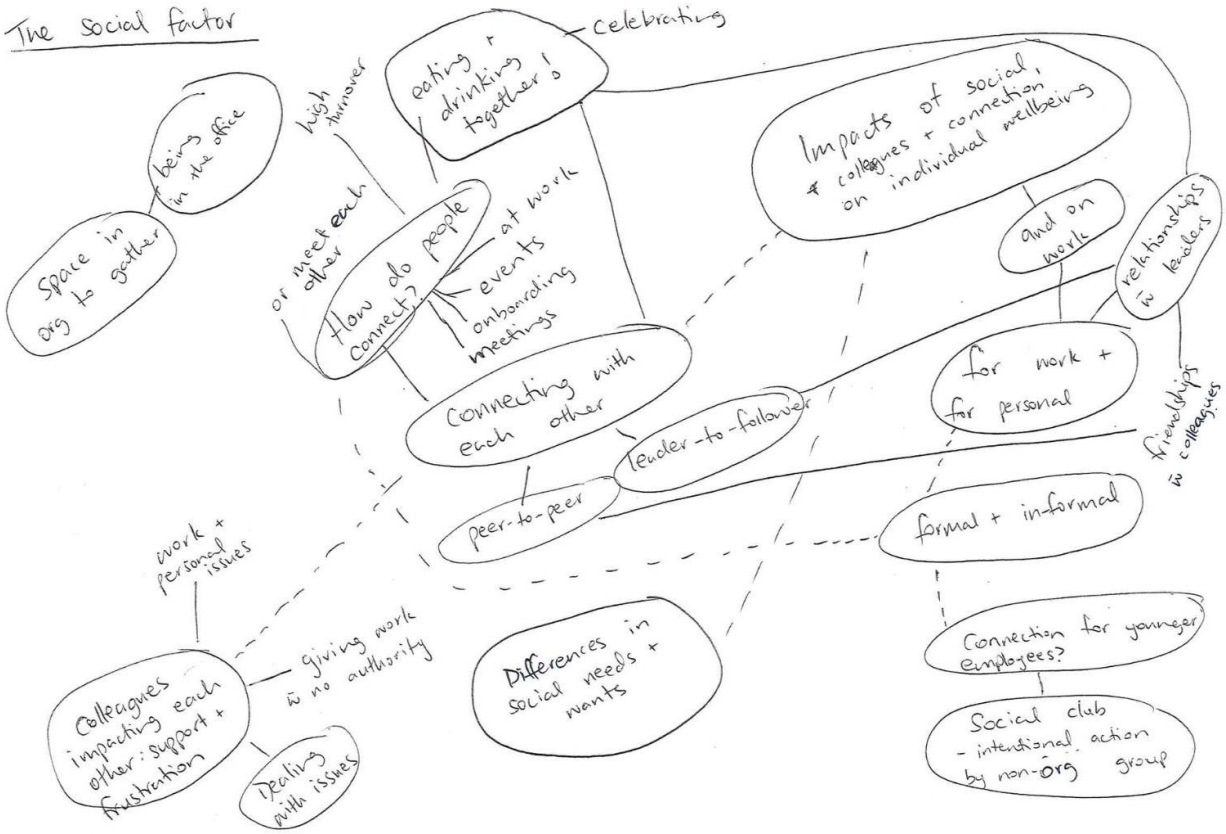
Phase 4 began with reviewing each code and code description to assess whether the codes individually and collectively contained shared meaning that encompassed a cohesive theme (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In other words, I reflected on whether the codes provided evidence and supported the theme I had constructed. The process of reviewing and developing codes and potential themes reflects Sætre and Van de Ven's (2021) view of abductive processes of exploring possible and then plausible explanations to develop research outcomes.

To better understand the content of each theme, an individual theme map was developed, similar to the process followed in Phase 3. These maps illustrated how the codes

that made up the themes related to each other, and when viewed alongside the other theme maps, how each theme fit together to address the research questions collectively (Braun & Clarke, 2022). An example of an early theme map is presented in Figure 3.3 below.

Figure 3.3

Initial Theme 10 Map



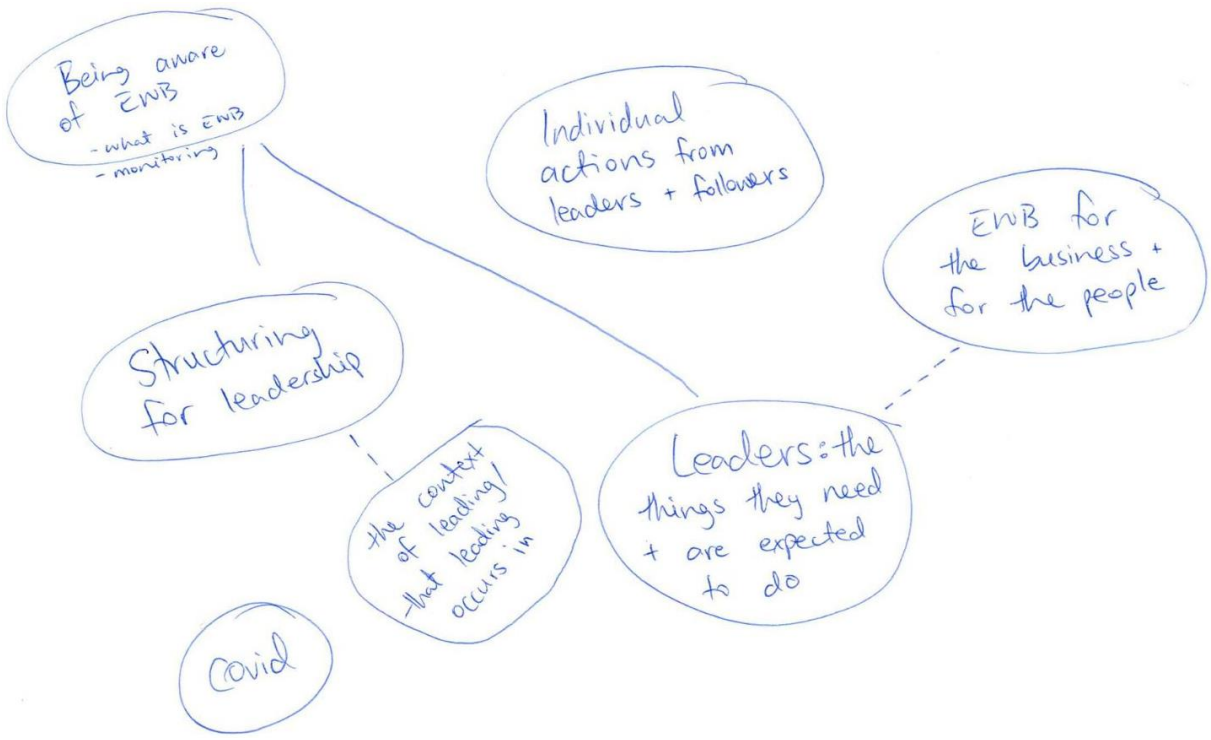
The map is complex, with many direct and indirect connections to the central idea of employees connecting with each other. The process of illustrating the theme was crucial to progressing analysis and developing the findings. While illustrating the themes, I recognised I had created a number of topic summaries, rather than themes. Braun and Clarke (2022) explained that a topic summary occurs when a researcher gathers "all the different responses or meanings around a topic in the dataset" (p.77). In other words, a topic summary does not contain the necessary pattern of shared meaning clustered around a core idea that characterises a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2022). A topic summary and theme appear very similar; however, a

topic summary is more comparable to a bullet point list rather than a family of concepts that link and inter-relate. For example, in Figure 3.4, I had collected all the codes relating to the social aspect of employee wellbeing. However, the central meaning was absent, instead, I had created a group that contained all the codes that included reference to social aspects of employee wellbeing. While interesting, this cluster of codes was a summary and lacked the central meaning necessary for a theme.

Braun and Clarke (2022) cautioned researchers not to get too attached to the initial themes generated in Phase 3, as themes and meanings evolve. The problem here was not a reluctance to evolve, but rather what to evolve these into. I was in a difficult position of realising that some of these early themes were actually topics without being able to understand what I needed to change so that I could evolve the topic into a theme. After a week of drawing theme maps and writing summaries, I returned to Phase 3, taking all codes back to a large table and asking myself, for each of the 500 codes, what does this mean? I then clustered the codes for meaning rather than topic salience, refining the whole-of-data-set theme map and evolved from the map presented in Figure 3.3 above (see, p.96) to Figure 3.4 below.

Figure 3.4

Second Iteration of a Theme Map



The revised themes reduced from 12 to seven and then to six. I condensed and refined for meaning, rather than listing information found in the data.

Phase 5 (Refining, Defining, and Naming Themes). Braun and Clarke (2022) outlined that Phase 5 involves refining the themes, developing descriptive names that encapsulate the essence of each theme, and then defining each theme. An essential aspect of Phase 5 was selecting participant quotes to provide evidence of my constructed meaning and was part of the initial writing processes (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2021) to be used in Phase 6. Initially, selecting quotes was difficult, each quote evidencing a code appeared meaningful and felt indispensable. However, the process of re-reading the quotes and questioning, “How does this quote provide support and evidence of my analysis?”, was an

essential step for refining and crystalising the meaning of each theme. For example, I noted in my research diary:

> *... selecting the quotes has been the most helpful way to really focus on meaning in each theme. Without pulling out the quotes, I wouldn't have as deep a grasp on each theme and it's allowed me to develop the themes in a more meaningful way, rather than just confirm that my themes are themes, not topics, and make sense to me. By selecting the quotes and writing a commentary down the side ... I'm forcing myself to focus on meaning and my construction of meaning as I analyse the data.*

Selecting the quotes was more than randomly choosing any data snippets, and Byrne (2021) argued that the quotes should "provide a vivid and compelling account of the arguments being made by a respective theme" (p.1407). To do this, I created a table and added quotes and wrote brief justification and broader meaning for each entry. This table formed the basis of writing up the findings. Once the quotes were selected, I summarised the core meaning and defined each theme.

Writing in Phase 5 often blurs into the other phases of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and in this thesis, Phase 5 was the least distinct stage of data analysis. There was constant oscillation between Phases 4 to 6 and at times returning to Phase 3 to refine coding. For example, I read and refined codes (Phase 3 and 4), compared meaning of individual codes and initial themes (Phase 4), developed tentative names for each initial theme (Phase 5), and began the first draft of writing up sections of the analysis (Phase 6). Blurring of the phases was necessary and helped to develop a more meaningful and in-depth analysis. For example, to begin, the themes were generically named Theme 1 and on. The lack of a theme name conveying the central meaning prevented a deeper analysis and crystallisation of how each theme singularly and collectively addressed the research questions. Additionally, without

completing the individual aspects of naming, defining, and selecting quotes in Phase 5, writing up for Phase 6 would not have been possible.

Rather than distinct boundaries with a defined start and end, Phase 5 was marked by a wider analytic process of interweaving aspects from multiple phases to facilitate a deeper analysis. I felt that iteration and development was the essence of Phase 5; it was the point in the data analysis that I moved beyond my initial surface construction of meaning to develop a more robust analysis. Consequently, I addressed the research questions in a more meaningful way.

Phase 6 (Writing Up). This phase centres on writing a piece of academic work that "provides a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell[s] - within and across themes" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93). Phase 6 is the last "deep refining analytic work" that provides the flow and overall shape of the analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022) emphasised that writing up is not a detached end process that outlines the analysis; instead, writing up is part of the analysis. Unique to reflexive thematic analysis, instead of being isolated to the data analysis section, writing up includes the full research process beginning with the literature review, detailed methodology, findings, and discussion (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

As outlined previously, the first stages of writing up began in earlier phases as I wrote initial thoughts and themes. Further writing occurred throughout Phase 5 and continued as my analysis stabilised. This lengthy process was the hardest part of data analysis. Developing the codes was fascinating as I immersed myself in the data and spent time thinking closely about an individual participant's words, meaning, and experiences. Developing the themes was challenging, in that I found it difficult to articulate the meaning I had constructed, and at first, I was somewhat prone to developing topic summaries rather than themes; despite this, the

development and refining work was absorbing. However, writing the analysis was particularly difficult, and Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022) provided surprisingly little specific guidance.

Despite the challenges in Phase 6, six themes were developed from this reflexive thematic analysis to address the research questions: 1) having an understanding of employee wellbeing for leadership, 2) structuring the organisation to enable leadership of employee wellbeing, 3) leaders and their practices, 4) individuals and self-leadership, 5) social connection for leadership of employee wellbeing, and 6) changing expectations and workplace practices. These six themes will be discussed in detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the social constructivist philosophical paradigm used as the foundation for this thesis. The research philosophy influenced choosing a case study research design to explore participants' lived experiences and the constructed reality of their social worlds. Data were collected at two Australian workplaces that contained multiple workplace actor types, particularly followers and different leader roles, through interviewing, observation, and reviewing organisation documents. Data containing the rich perspectives of participants and my own observations were combined in a reflexive thematic analysis, which resulted in the construction of six themes that individually and collectively addressed the research questions. The findings of this thesis found in the six themes are presented next in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

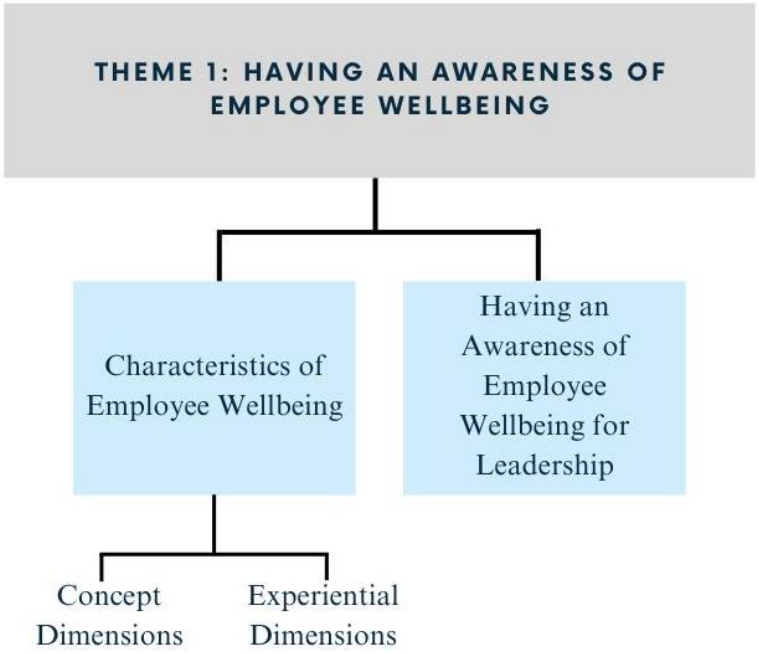
In this chapter, I present the findings, which encompass six themes. Themes one and two present foundational aspects of how workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing; while themes three to five identify the workplace actors and how each is involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. Theme six presents the powerful influencer of external contexts and the corresponding altered expectations for workplace practices. Each theme presents a distinct aspect of the leadership of employee wellbeing, and combined, encompass the complex leadership of employee wellbeing.

4.2 Theme 1: Having an Awareness of Employee Wellbeing for Leadership

The findings in this theme present the foundational practices and understanding required for effective leadership of employee wellbeing. Participants described employee wellbeing as *"a big word" (Jordan)* with abundant meaning that is difficult to fully comprehend, but is necessary to provide relevant leadership of employee wellbeing. Theme 1 has two sections, as outlined in Figure 4.1, below. First, the meaning of employee wellbeing, as described by participants during interviews, is outlined, which provides a foundation for the second section that highlights why having an understanding is necessary for the leadership of employee wellbeing.

Figure 4.1

Theme 1 Map



4.2.1 Characteristics of Employee Wellbeing

As shown in Figure 4.1, concept dimensions encompass core characteristics of employee wellbeing. From the interview data, participants discussed dimensions related to the concept of employee wellbeing. Within these concept-related descriptions it was evident from participant comments that the meaning of employee wellbeing is individually constructed. When asked what employee wellbeing meant, participants quickly aggregated different dimensions to create their own unique definition. For example, instead of describing a single homogenous standardised answer, participants shared different combinations, such as:

> *It's important to be able to be happy at work. Have a good rapport and connection with your co-workers. It's good morale within the office and also within the whole department, between and departments, you know, having that connection with everybody (Cameron).*

[It's] in the workplace and the surrounds. … balance … what happens here. And what happens outside of here that can impact both ways. … it's mental and physical. … it's everything … a safe workplace … physically safe … mentally safe and people being treated with respect" (Blair).

It's kind of that holistic … physical, mental, financial, spiritual. All those, you know, there's probably a few more, but all those different components. … making people who work feel happy. … social connections and all of that stuff (Morgan).

These descriptions of employee wellbeing highlight individual construction where participants combined different aspects to create one broad meaning.

In many instances, there did not appear to be a reason for how individuals constructed their meaning of employee wellbeing. For some participants, the meaning of employee wellbeing was influenced by their work roles. For example, after expressing, *"if you don't have happy, safe, healthy people, they're not going to perform well in their role" (Blake)*, the participant qualified their comments with, *"I guess that's a [role] perspective coming out"*. For Blake, and others, the meaning of employee wellbeing was directly influenced by their work position.

Additionally, throughout the interviews, participants used past experiences, and made comparisons and sense of how they felt, outcomes, and impacts that arose as they discussed employee wellbeing and what the term meant to them. For example, Flynn compared current practices with aspects that were *"really successful in the last company that I was at"*. Likewise, other participants commented, *"I can only compare it to where I've been [in the past]" (Rory). "I [came] from a workplace where they weren't very flexible" (Parker)* and, *"I hadn't received that kind of support anywhere else" (Jordan).* It is therefore plausible that individuals construct

their meaning of employee wellbeing as an outcome, at least in part, from sensemaking and personal preferences for how they want to feel.

In the 23 interviews, participants from both organisations collectively used 58 different terms when describing employee wellbeing (see Code Book, Appendix D) to depict the multifaceted *"combination" (Blake)* of dimensions that contribute to the meaning of employee wellbeing. The dimensions mean *"different things to different people" (Jessie)* as *"different components ... go into making people who work feel happy (Morgan).* Participants discussed some of the same dimensions; however, each participant described employee wellbeing in their own unique way, and no descriptions were identical. Most descriptions were substantially different, as participants emphasised aspects of their work-related experiences that *"triggers people's wellbeing" (Flynn)* positively and negatively, coupled with an individual's personal outlook, perceptions, and perspectives.

The interview data demonstrated that the meaning of employee wellbeing changed for participants due to individual life stages. As participant's lives changed, which dimensions were most vital also evolved to reflect the new realities of their particular career stage. For example, participants described being at *"a stage of life where it's [employee wellbeing] just becoming important again" (Taylor)*, while Morgan commented that they were older and had *"less commitments ... [I am] at a different stage in my working life"* than colleagues who had pressures of having young families.

Societal changes also influenced altering perceptions of employee wellbeing. For example, Charlie explained that previous expectations of what was acceptable and normal in the workplace were:

> *"... you should be doing lots of hours to get ahead. It's all about presentism ... no emotion at the workplace. 'Suck it up princess, get off the mat'. You know, 'we're here*

to get it done. I don't wanna hear excuses, I don't wanna hear about your personal life, when you come into the door, leave it all behind'. Through to evolving and evolving and evolving" (Charlie).

The views Charlie outlined from early in their career had become less acceptable, and instead, more embracing of diversity and inclusion of people, their lives, and their differences. Charlie's perception of employee wellbeing also continued to alter with shifts in management ideas *"... to actually, we get better outcomes if we ask people their views. We get better outcomes if our people are engaged or are satisfied. And then we evolved to ... it's about engagement"*. Societal shifts and organisational management thinking changes influenced how Charlie, as a leader, viewed employee wellbeing and altered their practices to accommodate new ideas.

One surprising finding was that different employee wellbeing terms were used interchangeably by participants. Several participants substituted 'employee wellbeing' for 'wellness' without explanation, with having a *"wellness focus" (Charlie), "wellness issue" (Sam), "wellness piece" (Hayden),* and *"wellness is a safe workplace" (Blair).* Participants who exchanged employee wellbeing for wellness were predominantly leaders. Likewise, organisation documents in Apex Group used differing terms, and wellbeing, employee wellbeing, and wellness were used within a single paragraph. Similarly, Ferris Group used wellbeing and wellness in a single document and even had wellness resources listed under a wellbeing heading.

As shown in Figure 4.1, alongside the concept dimensions, individuals experienced personal employee wellbeing dimensions. The 58 dimensions discussed by participants were clustered into eight groups that encompassed the employee as an individual, physical health and safety, psychological health and safety, subjective (hedonic and eudaimonic) dimensions, having a positive personal impact, social connection and functioning, integration of work and

personal lives, and finally, higher-order dimensions. Each dimension cluster offers a different perspective of what employee wellbeing meant to the interview participants in Apex and Ferris Groups and are outline next.

The Individual. Across participants, there was a consistent identification of the individual and an expectation that *"everyone's different" (Ali)*, with *"different prerequisite dispositions" (Bailey)*. For example, Bailey commented, *"I'm extroverted. So I'm like, great open plan office, we can just be together. I'm like, 'my love cup's getting filled up' ... but other people might have a totally different experience" (Bailey).* Many participants commented that they had specific preferences but recognised that others may want different things. Several participants described employees holistically, as a *"whole person ... not just inside the office, but outside the office" (Bailey)*. Employees were crucially thought of as *"individuals. They are people"* who have *"a home life, they have issues at home, they have issues at work" (Kai)* and employee wellbeing was relevant to the whole person and not just as an employee within the workspace.

Last, it was important for individuals to have some self-determined autonomy and *"involvement in my own personal wellbeing" (Drew)*. Participants described different practices, such as *"things for me" (Reese)*, and taking time outside the office daily to support psychological wellbeing. Individuals were not only recipients of workplace experiences, but wanted to have some input and impact on their work lives and conditions.

Physical and Psychological Health and Safety. Physical and psychological dimensions were consistently important to individuals, with 13 of the 23 participants speaking about psychological dimensions and 14 of 23 participants discussing combinations of physical health and safety as being part of employee wellbeing. Descriptions were often concise, as participants highlighted the need for *"both physical health, as well as psychological health"*

(Ali) for employee wellbeing. Participants wanted to be *"physically safe"* but also *"mentally safe" (Blair)*. The two terms, physical health and physical safety, were articulated separately. Participants discussed health in employee wellbeing, as *"everything transitions into or transforms or presents itself in a health impact eventually" (Blair)*. Physical wellbeing was frequently described in combination with other dimensions, and participants discussed safety in simple terms as *"feeling safe … feeling secure" (Eli), "physically safe" (Blair),* and a *"safe environment" (Riley)*. Participants wanted to be physically healthy. For example, Riley shared that getting enough sleep *"certainly influenced my wellbeing"*. Additionally, participants described their desire for psychological safety and being able to have *"respectful, safe conversations" (Devan)* and to feel *"secure" (Eli)* in their employment. While descriptions of physical and psychological health and safety were brief, these dimensions were relevant to many participants.

Subjective Wellbeing. Closely linked to psychological dimensions, participants discussed many subjective aspects relating to employee wellbeing. Individual subjective dimensions related to a sense of self, achieving at work, being *"able to either develop or be productive" (Parker)*, enabled to bring their *"authentic self to work"*, and *"learning and growing" (Charlie)*. For many participants, employee wellbeing included a feeling of *"just overall happiness" (Drew)*. Subjective dimensions also encompassed numerous positive emotions participants wanted to experience. Participants explained that they wanted to feel *"comfortable to bring their authentic self to work" (Ali)*, *"feeling appreciated and valued" (Blake),* and being *"trusted in my role" (Jordan)* by leaders without being micromanaged. Participants also wanted to feel that positive actions were being taken towards them. For example, being *"genuinely listened to" (Taylor)* and knowing that colleagues *"look out for you" (Cameron)*. In addition to having a perception of flourishing, where employees would be *"relaxed … whatever that personality type was, that they felt comfortable and relaxed and*

were bringing their best self to work, whatever that looks like for them" (Ali). Subjective dimensions were based on individually constructed perceptions of self and desired work-related experiences.

Personal Impact. Some participants wanted more than feeling good and also wanted to positively impact their workplace. Individuals desired to feel like they were *"contributing to the greater good" (Jordan)* through their work and that they were doing *"something that matters"* (Bailey). Riley highlighted the need to have outputs linked to positive organisation outcomes, as this would *"inflate wellbeing"* if individuals saw that their *"output is really being linked to productivity"* and acknowledged by leaders. A perception of contributing to the organisation *"makes you want to come to work"* due to a sense of achieving greater outcomes. Thus, having a positive impact was both intrinsic and extrinsic. There was a personal satisfaction of contributing to something beyond themselves, and participants feeling that they were doing good things and the perception of being rewarded when leaders recognised outputs.

Social Connection and Functioning. Having positive social connection was *"really important" (Devan)* for employee wellbeing, as some participants *"crave that connection and being able to, like, be involved with the team" (Jordan).* Individuals wanted different levels of connection. Some did not need deep friendships, instead wanting a *"level of respect and actually being able to talk to people" (Ash)* to have functional, trusting relationships for effective work and a pleasant work experience. Being inclusive of others was important because *"exclusion of people is just pretty horrible" (Charlie)*. Interestingly, the comment from Charlie highlighted that exclusion impacts the wellbeing of employees who witness such behaviour, not only those who experience social isolation.

Integration of Work and Personal. Part of employee wellbeing was integration or *"a beautiful balance of work and my home life" (Flynn),* where individuals had *"flexibility"*

(Parker) to work where and when was best for them. For example, Rory highlighted that they wanted to not take too much work home and to be able to *"leave it behind"*. The degree of balance or integration was not universal among participants; instead, needs were individual. Jessie outlined that for them, balance related to *"putting some boundaries around work to try and get a bit of separation between work and life. If I can do that … I'm happy"*. However, Jessie added that for other employees, outside of work social activities were *"really important for them"* and their employee wellbeing. It is important to emphasise that there was no standard desire for integration or balance, it depended on the individual and what they wanted from their work experience.

Higher-Order Dimensions. Lastly in the personal characteristics, two participants briefly discussed higher-order dimensions, and explained that employee wellbeing *"for me it's holistic" (Blair)* and included *"spiritual" (Morgan)* aspects. Participants did not expand on their ideas. Instead, individuals described these higher-order dimensions as part of a broader conceptualisation of employee wellbeing and what helps employees feel happy at work.

The final aspect of the experiential dimensions are the work aspects. Participants discussed several dimensions of their work and workplace that were part of employee wellbeing. Individuals wanted a *"happy workplace" (Jessie)* where they *"felt comfortable and relaxed and were bringing their best self to work" (Ali)*. Individuals desired to be *"learning and growing" (Charlie)* in their current role and beyond. Where growth opportunities were limited, employee wellbeing was negatively impacted. Correspondingly, participants wanted *"meaningful work" (Eli)* and had differing desires for their work experience. Some wanted a *"variety of work" (Jordan)* where the *"expectation of what I can achieve is realistic" (Ash)*. Several participants outlined positively experienced stressors. Taylor considered some challenges *"rewarding"* and Parker felt that when they did not have a *"very persistent workload … I just feel like I've done nothing for the day … I always like to have something on*

my agenda". From the interviews, participants differentiated between the need for a positive workload that stimulated satisfying work as opposed to a persistently high workload that became a negatively experienced stressor.

In contrast, participants discussed different work conditions which became stressors that reduced employee wellbeing. Devan explained that there was a *"level of stress"* that accompanied expectations of *"getting it all done"* and having work-related uncertainty, including *"the urgent, urgent stuff … unknown that comes down the line. Or comes up the line, where you go … 'I've already got a full plate, and now I've got to reassess'" (Devan).* Therefore, not being able to plan and structure work or develop processes increased work-related stress. Likewise, *"stressing about the leave I'm using up" (Jessie),* whether from illness or personal commitments, became a stressor for some, particularly where leave use could be addressed through workplace flexibility. Conversely, Jordan shared that having pressures removed *"to not feel … stress at work. It's … phenomenal" (Jordan)*.

Lastly, fair treatment *"financially for their work" (Blake)* and *"financial wellbeing" (Morgan),* were necessary for employee wellbeing. Morgan commented that financial aspects were often the *"one piece of the pie that's missing"* in employee wellbeing, because if employees were *"stressed out about their cost of living and money … that's gonna contribute to other negative traits" (Morgan)*. Linking into the financial dimension, Ash commented that employees and their contributions to the organisation could be recognised through financial rewards.

The findings presented in this section show that employee wellbeing described by participants encompassed individual characteristics and dimensions. Participants emphasised the dimensions that would help them feel good and experience the end-states that they desired based on their individual needs, wants, past and current experiences, and personal traits. With

the characteristics of employee wellbeing explained, attention turns now to the findings that show why gaining an awareness of employee wellbeing is necessary for the leadership of employee wellbeing, and how an awareness was gained by participants in the case organisations.

4.2.2 Having an Awareness of Employee Wellbeing for Leadership

Gaining an awareness or understanding of an individuals' own employee wellbeing was necessary *"because you can't do anything … if they [leaders] don't know what anyone wants or needs" (Ash).* Flynn explained that the core of the leadership of employee wellbeing was *"an authentic understanding of what wellbeing is and how that person will feel" (Flynn)*. Without understanding employees' needs, what dimensions of employee wellbeing are vital to them, and any issues they faced, leaders could not provide individually relevant leadership of employee wellbeing.

Gaining awareness of employee wellbeing occurred through formal and informal mechanisms. Information on employee wellbeing was gathered formally through *"annual surveying" (Drew)* of individuals across the organisation and performance reviews. Understanding employees' issues, fears, and needs helped leaders to *"have the conversation where they needed to" (Blair),* so they could implement appropriate actions to support employee wellbeing. Reviewed documents showed that formal information was also gathered impersonally through employee assistance program reports, which provided leaders with key trends. For example, Charlie explained, *"if I got a stat that came out [from the employee assistance program report] that said there was bullying, and it was work-related … we would then immediately start running extra training wider in the business".* Data gained from formal structured mechanisms enabled leaders to identify issues, trends, and needs throughout the workplace so they could take relevant actions on employee wellbeing.

Leaders also gained information in regularly scheduled meetings as they communicated with followers. These scheduled *"catch ups" (Rory)* were a middle point between a formal and informal mechanism and were a forum where followers could share personal and work-related experiences directly with leaders. For example, Drew conducted *"one-on-ones"* and asked followers *"... how's it all going? How's your work-life balance? Are you managing your workload? Like, anything that's outstanding, anything I need to help with?" (Drew).* Having a scheduled meeting made addressing issues feel less overwhelming for followers. For example, Ali explained that without a regular meeting, it would *"have to be ... a big deal"* to make an appointment to meet with their leader to discuss their problems. Middle leaders used meetings with their leaders to seek guidance on helping followers with employee wellbeing issues.

In contrast to the formal and structured mechanisms, leaders gathered data informally by directly *"checking in" (Sam)* with followers. Quinn invited followers for a coffee, not to *"talk about work"*, but rather, to *"talk about them"*. Getting coffee together provided an informal and impromptu mechanism for leaders to gather information from followers about their employee wellbeing. Other leaders highlighted observation as a mechanism to collect information about employee wellbeing. For example, Sam explained that they watched and listened to followers in their team, and if they saw individuals withdrawing, they would reach out with a text message or a phone call to that person. Employee wellbeing issues were also noticed by leaders or colleagues in *"informal network[s]" (Blair)*, who, where necessary *"feeds it [information] up to the chain" (Quinn)* so that leaders were aware of issues and appropriate action could be taken.

Despite the range of mechanisms used to gain an understanding of employee wellbeing, Blair highlighted that it was difficult to always have a *"finger on the pulse"*. In other words, it was not easy for leaders to always maintain a current understanding of employees' wellbeing. Indeed, participants discussed several different factors that influenced gaining an awareness of

employee wellbeing. First, Flynn highlighted that outside of the formal organisation-wide mechanisms, there were no processes for leaders to gain an understanding of an individual's employee wellbeing. They explained that they only knew *"what triggers the wellbeing of my team by just talking to them" (Flynn)* as their organisation did not have formal practices for leaders that they were aware of. Individual personalities also impacted the depth of understanding a leader could gain about a follower's employee wellbeing. For example, some followers were *"an open book" (Flynn)* and would talk about their feelings. In contrast, some employees were not open communicators, while others wanted to keep their work and personal lives *"a bit separate" (Jessie)*. Leaders needed to adjust for differences between followers and how much they wanted to share about their employee wellbeing.

Second, the work environment and social connection between employees impacted whether individuals would share about their employee wellbeing. Ash explained, *"if I just see you as in very strict employees, I don't care about you, you don't care about me, we're in and out. I'm not going to talk about wellbeing. I'm not going to talk about any of that".* Therefore, individuals without positive interpersonal connections and relationships in their workplace were less likely to be open about their employee wellbeing. Similarly, Blair explained that it was important to ensure that the work environment enabled leaders to feel that they could be *"open to bring issues that are coming up in their team to the table"* so that issues could be addressed.

Third, participants highlighted that *"it can be hard for people to be transparent" (Drew)* and provide honest feedback if the formal mechanisms used in the organisation were not confidential. Drew explained that individuals worried whether comments would reflect negatively on them and impact their progression in the organisation. Correspondingly, on numerous occasions in the interviews, participants sought reassurance that their comments were anonymous and confidential. For example, when speaking about an experience, Ash

interrupted what they were saying and checked, *"I know … and appreciate this is confidential"*. Similarly, other participants commented, *"this is all confidential, right?" (Flynn)*, and *"this does stay confidential though" (Eli)*. Thus, it is essential for the effective leadership of employee wellbeing to have some mechanisms where employees can provide feedback on their experiences anonymously.

Fourth, work structures in the organisation impacted a leader's ability to gain an understanding of employee wellbeing when their workloads intensified. For example, when leaders were too busy and *"stretched pretty thin" (Rory)*, operational matters took priority, and the focus on employee wellbeing dropped *"a lot of the time" (Hayden)*. Additionally, the proximity of leaders and followers influenced gaining an understanding of employee wellbeing. Working in person enabled *"impromptu discussions" (Kai)* between colleagues, and followers and leaders because they were physically near each other. When leaders and followers were together in the office, they could *"talk to people much more freely" (Kai)* in comparison to online communication, as appointments or meeting requests had to be made. Certainly, as the discussion in this section has shown, gaining an awareness of employee wellbeing was not always a straightforward process.

Likewise, Flynn shared that as a leader, there were difficulties with information received from followers. For example, they explained *"sometimes the information that they [followers] come to you with … I don't know if I should be escalating that, or if it's confidential" (Flynn)*. Leaders were then in a difficult position of not knowing whether they needed to act on issues or whether followers were venting and disclosing private information they did not want to be shared.

4.3 Theme 2: Structuring the Organisation to Enable Leadership of Employee Wellbeing

The term ‘structuring’ is used in this theme to encompass how work and the workplace are organised. Responses from participants suggested that work structures directly influenced the leadership of employee wellbeing, impacted stressors, the availability of resources, and how individuals experienced the work environment. Leaders were constrained or enabled by what was *“organisationally allowed” (Drew)* and influenced by norms and stigmas associated with organisational culture. There are six elements in Theme 2, illustrated in Figure 4.2, which encompass differing dimensions of how structuring the organisation occurs, or is necessary, to enable the leadership of employee wellbeing.

Figure 4.2

Theme 2 Map

4.3.1 Organisational Culture and the Work Environment

Participants asserted that organisational culture was *"really important" (Jessie)*, and *"paramount and absolutely central" (Kai)* to employee wellbeing. Likewise, a reviewed policy from Apex Group indicated an expectation that organisational culture was essential to developing as an employer of choice. Indeed, Kai explained, *"You can have all the policies and documents and procedures and stuff, but if you haven't got a good culture, then … nobody wants to come to work"*. Practices occurring in the organisation were influenced by the organisation's culture, the normalised practices, or things *"we actually do every day" (Charlie)*. Participants described the powerful influence of organisational culture and the associated normalised attitudes and values. For example, Charlie shared:

> *"… when I have to make a decision, and perhaps there's not clear rules, or even if there are clear rules, if my culture is one of 'do the right thing', compliance, you know, social responsibility, I'm going to make a decision that's in the betterment of the company. If my culture is, 'it's okay to steal, be dishonest …. Doesn't matter what the policy says', I'm gonna make a decision based on what the everyday customs are. … [organisational culture is] basically what you do when no one's looking, [be]cause you just naturally do it … and you think it's okay … because everybody does it".*

As described by Charlie and Kai, organisational culture influenced attitudes and practices, and was independent of formal expectations found in organisational policies.

Participants engaged in sensemaking of their organisation's culture, with some perceiving their culture as *"pragmatic" (Rory)*. Other participants described elements of organisational culture and desired a *"supportive working culture" (Jessie)*, where there was alignment of an individual's *"values with the organisational values" (Sam)*. If the organisation's culture and personal values did not algin, this impacted employee wellbeing *"in*

a very negative way, because I feel that either I can't be my true self, or maybe I'm doing things that I don't agree with on a regular basis" (Charlie). Thus, organisational culture influenced practices, and participants wanted to work within an organisational culture that aligned with themselves and their values.

Interestingly, organisational cultural values for employee wellbeing were perceived by some to be an influencer that benefited the organisation. Charlie, a leader, explained, *"you need to start driving a wellness focus into your culture. Because of the betterments for the business over time".* From participants' comments, organisational culture was characterised as something active in the organisation—it was supportive of employees, with values, it could be pragmatic, and a positive influencer of organisational outcomes.

The expectation that having an appropriate organisational culture would reduce the risk of employees behaving outside of their code of conduct was evident in a reviewed document from Ferris Group. The document stated that all employees, leaders and non-leaders, played a role in developing such a culture, and each employee type had specific functions in contributing to the desired organisational culture. For example, the document stated that all employees could be aware of the content and take responsibility for themselves, and leaders could role model desired behaviours and support employees. Additionally, specific types of employees such as human resource functions, executive leaders, and board members could contribute to organisational culture through role-relevant actions. Practices could include ensuring the document was distributed in the organisation, and executive leaders could role model and appropriately follow established processes. Board members were responsible for establishing and following mechanisms and processes, role modelling their commitment through appropriate actions. Therefore, there was a belief that at least some part of their organisational culture could be influenced by employee action.

In practice, organisational documents such as the code of conduct were considered culturally important, because this "*sets the expectations for how people interact" (Kai)*. Individuals reinforced organisational cultural values and norms through embracing the principles of the code of conduct and through "*the interactions people have … [it is] having each other's back" (Jessie).* For example, Taylor and Kai described having health issues, and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) met with them individually, and checked how they were doing and whether their families needed any support. Allowances were made so individuals could work from home if appropriate for their health status, and work-based amendments, such as leaving meetings early, as needed.

Participants in both organisations highlighted the importance of employing the *"right people for the organisation. Who match the culture" (Kai).* Individuals who were *"just really honest, good, authentic people that value … other humans" (Flynn)*. When employees were *"the right fit in the team … it's generally … a much, much better environment" (Drew)* in the workplace. Therefore, recruitment was an important stabiliser of organisational culture and associated values and norms. Participants highlighted that issues arose when employees did not fit into the organisation's culture and if serious breaches occurred, such as sexism, those people *"left pretty quickly. They haven't been forced out, but they've, I guess, seen the writing on the wall that if they don't accept the people" (Kai)* then they do not fit with the organisation. Thus, the influence of organisational culture extended throughout the organisation and became a backdrop of expectations for appropriate attitudes, and there were consequences if those expectations were violated.

Normalised attitudes also directly influenced work practices. For example, a flexible work policy had been introduced in Apex Group and less formal expectations were being implemented in Ferris Group so that individuals could work in a way that better suited them. Blake highlighted that employees no longer felt pressured or embarrassed when they left the

office early, because *"it's a normal thing now"*. The stigma and normalised expectations around office working had altered to encompass new flexible practices. Additionally, positive norms of support had been embedded in Ferris Group. For example, Riley explained that regardless of which office someone worked in, *"you're well looked after"*. Taylor offered similar comments, explaining that *"from the very beginning of working here it's been so supportive"*. Despite physical changes in the organisation, the Covid-19 pandemic, and leadership changes, the norm of support endured.

In contrast, negative norms were also present. For example, a participant from Apex Group outlined:

> *"... we're a really nice organisation. ... everyone's nice to each other ... [but it] can be conflict averse with some things. ... if there [is] ... a red flag in an area with engagement or people don't feel safe at work or there's a psychological safety red flag that needs to be unpacked [and] there's a lot of influencing that needs to happen. And sometimes nothing happens" (Hayden).*

Similarly, in Ferris Group, unspoken perceptions negatively impacted how Quinn felt about the time they spent using informal mechanisms to learn more about followers and build relationships. After describing their practice of inviting followers for a coffee, Quinn quickly explained, "*I'm not saying I don't work. I actually do work and I don't go to coffee every single [day]*. Quinn further justified the time spent by adding, "*it could be ... walking down together, ordering your coffee and then coming back upstairs. I mean, a lot of chats can happen in that time" (Quinn)*. Rather than perceiving their actions as a valuable mechanism for gaining information about employee wellbeing and developing connections between a follower and leader. Quinn justified and qualified their words to better align with what they expected appropriate work to entail.

The work environment was closely connected to organisational culture. A document from a Ferris Group intranet page highlighted the importance of the work environment to employee wellbeing. Likewise, in the interviews, participants felt that building a positive work environment was a key leader activity because working conditions directly impacted employee wellbeing. For example, participants commented:

> *What impacts my wellness in the positive way is when you have a group of people who are genuinely trying to work together as a group. We don't play politics. It's a very safe environment (Charlie).*

> *… employee wellbeing is all about feeling comfortable coming to a place that they want to be. It's a place that they feel safe. It's a place they feel valued. It's a place that, regardless [of] what's happening in the outside world, they feel as if they've been … I suppose you could say … given a hug that is not overwhelming or uncomfortable, but it feels right (Quinn).*

> *… I like to feel that the team is functioning and that they're motivated. So, if I feel that's happening, that for me is a stabilising influence. Keel in the water. And if I feel there's any sort of ripple or undercurrent of dissatisfaction that will … impact on my own personal wellbeing (Riley).*

Therefore, the work conditions directly and significantly impacted employee wellbeing. It was important that the work environment enabled *"making it safe" (Ali)* for individuals to say that they were not coping or that they needed help. Part of developing a positive work environment was linked to organisational culture and having positive norms. Kai described, *"embracing diversity and embracing that people are different"* and being inclusive of people with different cultural identities, genders, and sexuality.

An important aspect of the work environment and structuring the organisation which impacted on employee wellbeing was enabling individuals to take breaks where they could detach and recharge. Ash explained that being interrupted during break periods had lingering negative impacts, for example:

> *... it could be a weekend or on leave and I take a phone call because something's happened ... [it] takes 5 minutes ... but as soon as I hang up now, my heads at work. I'm thinking about what's that person doing, what's going on? Is there anything else.*

In contrast, having the ability to detach from work completely meant Ash could *"come back refreshed, and hopefully ... [if] it's a really good break when at the end of it you go, 'alright, I'm ready to go back. Really dive in, I feel good. Let's go'"*. Participant comments highlighted that followers were enabled to take breaks and detach through their leader's practices and the influence of their role modelling.

A safe work environment contributed to the effective exchange of information between leaders and an environment of psychological safety was necessary for an intentional and open exchange of opinions between leader-level colleagues. Devan explained where psychological safety was lacking, *"people aren't forthcoming for whatever reason"*. They added *"[I] just feel like at that level we should all be able to have respectful, safe conversations for the greater good" (Devan).* However, where there was a lack of an appropriate work environment *"you just know that people are kind of holding back and not wanting to contribute" (Devan).* Developing an environment of psychological safety and organisational norms of sharing opinions and issues was an important leader responsibility in the leadership of employee wellbeing.

Interestingly, Charlie highlighted the role of legislation in establishing the work environment, explaining that upcoming amendments *"in the health and safety environment*

reform, which will talk about psychosocial risk. Well, that's all wellness. Workload, no toxic environment". Charlie's perception was that legislation pushed those who lagged behind on employee wellbeing, through establishing new minimum requirements and associated practices, attitudes, and behaviours in the workplace. These changed societal views created new externally driven norms within workplaces. Organisation documents from Apex Group highlighted the important role of legislation on employee wellbeing related practices through a stated expectancy that the business would act in accordance with laws and regulations and directed leaders to be familiar with organisation policies to ensure compliance.

4.3.2 Having a Formal Focus on Employee Wellbeing

It was important for the leadership of employee wellbeing that leaders had *"at the very core, an acknowledgement of peoples' wellbeing … an authentic acknowledgement" (Flynn)*. Blair commented that *"at the end of the day is that you genuinely care about your employees' wellbeing. That … you're just not doing it [be]cause it's one of those things that one of those leadership books tell you that you should do"*. Bailey added that practices in the leadership of employee wellbeing *"can't just be a tick … otherwise it's just optics, which is not enough"*. Instead, a sincere focus was necessary for effective leadership of employee wellbeing.

Participants expected that leadership of employee wellbeing would start at the top of the organisation, *"[be]cause it's top down, right." (Ali)*. Cameron highlighted that it was important for leaders to be interested in and focused on employee wellbeing so that action was taken, because *"… there's only probably a handful of things or maybe less, that are, like, driven down from the business … the culture and … the wellbeing importance" (Drew).* Focusing on employee wellbeing was essential; however, having a formalised focus on employee wellbeing was necessary for sustained leadership of employee wellbeing.

A formalised focus from organisational high-level strategic planning activities provided a structured framework for the leadership of employee wellbeing. For example, Blair explained:

> *"... the structures that we've got in place, the ... strategic plan ... [means] there are people focused on it. It means that there's a budget line focused on it. There are a team of people focused on it. We report back on it on a quarterly basis. So it means, it remains front of mind" (Blair).*

Blair, a leader, described that the focus on employee wellbeing filtered down through the organisation as strategic plans, programs, and activities were implemented. Drew explained that since the emphasis was *"driven down"* from top organisation leaders, the plans had to be implemented. Likewise, the reporting component in strategic planning resulted in an enduring focus on employee wellbeing so that leaders could meet obligations specific to their role. For example, reviewing an annual plan update document from Ferris Group showed that employee wellbeing was a core focus and highlighted the specific activities designed to address the focus were discussed.

With a formalised focus, the central emphasis from the leaders at the top of the organisation was enacted through the functions of different groups or departments. For example, Charlie described how the department leader took *"the overarching picture"* of the organisation-wide strategic plan and developed an *"underpinning strategy"* for the group department's work. Thus, interview participants and reviewed documents showed that a formalised focus began with the hierarchically highest organisational leaders and filtered down to other leaders, who took responsibility for implementation of position-specific functions.

4.3.3 Policy

Reviewed organisation documents highlighted that policies provided structured processes and expectations regarding the functioning of specific aspects of the organisation. From a reviewed policy from Ferris Group, it was clear that policy documents supported meeting legislative requirements, contained the organisation's expected formal actions, broke down necessary practices, and indicated who was involved and the specific functions. Each organisation had a range of policies related to employee wellbeing, such as people and culture, leave, and health and safety policies. These documents provided guidance and a *"safety net" (Kai)* for leaders and followers. Kai explained that if an employee had a significant dispute, *"then you look at what the policies say. What the procedure is for this situation"*. Thus, policies provided a formal framework for leaders and followers to guide and address workplace experiences.

Policies also connected to the organisation's culture through the document acting as a statement of intent. For example, a reviewed policy document from Apex Group stated the specific organisational cultural traits the business aimed to achieve. Policies also reinforced organisational values. For example, Jessie explained that the organisation *"bought in paternity leave. We've bought in a leave policy for same-sex relationships if they have kids"*. The policies created formalised structures for the inclusive treatment of all employees.

Despite the guidance that policies provided leaders and followers, most participants lacked knowledge about policies on employee wellbeing. Several participants expressed that they expected that there would be policies regarding employee wellbeing, though *"don't ask me to name them" (Riley)*; likewise, Taylor commented *"there would be, but I wouldn't [sic] name it for you"* as they are *"not something I read every day" (Jessie)*. Despite the lack of specific knowledge, reviewed documents from Ferris Group showed that an intranet page listed accessible relevant policies related to workplace health and safety. However, Sam commented

that as a leader, they had never used a policy when providing support for employee wellbeing. Drew explained that for policies to be better understood, employees needed to be reminded about the content and where they could be found, as:

> *"… policy gets written, drafted up, sent out, and then shelved … they just essentially sit there and they're accessible easily. But again, [the] majority would never go in and access policies" (Drew).*

Notwithstanding the important role in the leadership of employee wellbeing, policies were treated as an organisational function or necessity that were created to serve their own purpose, rather than a useful document that could guide practice.

4.3.4 Work Structures

Work structures and processes were necessary to enable the leadership of employee wellbeing, as organisations can *"get a bit bureaucratic" (Charlie)*. Structuring work was necessary to ensure *"that your systems actually enable the leaders to do their job, not get in the way" (Charlie).* Ash explained that work structures, the *"day-in day-out work, I'm given the resources I need to do my role, but also the expectations of my role are managed or are accurate"* influenced their employee wellbeing *"at a fundamental level" (Ash)*. In another example, Rory described how high workloads, not having the appropriate hierarchical level, and corresponding level of authority resulted in their leader being "*stretched too thin".* Having too much work directly impacted the leadership of employee wellbeing in the department, as the leader did not have time to spend *"thinking about the wellbeing of the team" (Rory)*. Instead, the leader focused on the operational aspects of their role because they had *"too many other day-to-day things" (Rory)* that occupied their attention and work time.

Several participants discussed the need for leaders to establish priorities from "*the CEO down" (Eli)* so that there was alignment across the organisation. A lack of clarity and clear

work prioritisation detrimentally impacted employee wellbeing, because *"you can't do everything" (Sam).* Without clear prioritisation, individuals and departments worked on what they felt was essential, and a *"disjoint between what's a priority and what's not" (Hayden)* emerged. Correspondingly, the lack poor prioritisation negatively impacting participant employees' wellbeing through increased stressors.

Through structuring work, leaders could address aspects of employee wellbeing. For example, Devan outlined that during a team restructure, they *"as a team kind of thrash[ed]"* out what each team member would do, regardless of whether specific tasks were within a follower's formal role description. The leader enabled *"crossing the boundaries" (Devan)* of work tasks to encourage professional growth and personal fulfilment. However, the leader was still guided by the formal structures of position descriptions *"where everything naturally sits from a role perspective" (Devan)* to help minimise the risk of overloading individuals and ensuring appropriate responsibility for outputs. Likewise, during periods when workloads were concerningly high, Kai was enabled to outsource work for a follower to reduce stressors through organisation structures.

Formalised responsibility for employee wellbeing was necessary and an individual or position within the organisation needed to *"own" (Charlie)* employee wellbeing. Having specific responsibility within defined work roles was required to enable implementation of activities and practices related to the leadership of employee wellbeing. Work roles provided a structured flow of information and action related to employee wellbeing. For example, employees from the human resources department explained about flexible working *"to all the managers. They explained it to all their staff" (Ali).* Structured work processes provided stability for leaders and followers, as there was a clear path for the delivery of employee wellbeing practices, support, and guidance. Formal structures were important, because once an aspect of the organisation became structured or systematic *"it's not something that can drop*

off" (Bailey). Therefore, structuring work minimised the risk of an aspect of employee wellbeing getting *"pushed aside" (Baliey)* and forgotten about.

4.3.5 Organisational Resources and Support

Structuring within the organisation also included the provision of resources that leaders could use as mechanisms to support employee wellbeing. Support was discussed by many participants, who identified different programs, training, services, and individual support provided by their organisations. The impact of support on participants was significant. From the support Taylor received, they explained *"I have no other job things on my radar because I'm very happy working here ... I'm well supported ... if shit things come up ... Other workplaces might not be quite so accommodating".* Having support that accommodated their life at and outside of work was important for *"living life comfortably" (Taylor)* and an individual's employee wellbeing.

The employee assistance program (EAP) was a formal resource provided by the organisation. Participants suggested that the EAP was a mechanism individuals could use that encouraged *"people to look after themselves" (Jessie)* and that leaders could use to *"steer people in that direction" (Sam)* to receive help and support. Reviewed documents and participant comments highlighted that the EAP encompassed many aspects, such as access to counselling for themselves and immediate family members, financial coaching, nutrition coaching, discounts from specific retail outlets, and leadership support.

Many participants were aware of the EAP, though few said they had used the services and discussion from participants on the content of the EAP was limited to primarily listing what was available, with little detail about the specific benefits or drawbacks of the program. Additionally, some leaders did not have a clear understanding of what formal organisational

support contained and had not used services to support a follower or colleague's employee wellbeing. For example, Quinn commented:

> *I don't think I've ever spoken to anyone and then gone and looked up something on the [intranet] to have a look to say, 'oh, I'd probably need help with this'. … to be honest with you, I [have] probably never done it (Quinn).*

There were mixed perceptions towards the EAP, with some feeling it was beneficial, particularly around psychological wellbeing help. Though participants from both case organisations highlighted some reluctance to use the program *"because they're afraid" (Quinn)* that their organisation would be informed that they had used it.

Organisational support in the form of training on employee wellbeing was "*more important than ever" (Flynn)* for leaders and followers. Sam highlighted the need for training in communication, while Flynn and Sam discussed the need for training on emotional intelligence and how to balance the different roles that leaders have. Others explained that leaders needed *"guidelines as to what to look out for if people are not looking themselves, or saying that they're not sleeping, they're not eating like they used to, [they are] withdrawn or whatever" (Ali).* Leaders wanted to better understand the practical aspects of providing leadership of employee wellbeing, particularly *"to have that kind of base understanding" (Devan)* of employee wellbeing.

Participants in Ferris Group highlighted the usefulness of external support. Kai explained that when workloads in their department got too high, they could *"brief out work"* to assist with completing tasks and reduce stressors. Taylor described the *"massively"* beneficial impact of having access to a professional leadership mentor while a follower was having a significant employee wellbeing issue. Participants highlighted that organisation provided leadership development programs gave them practical guidance and confidence as a

leader. Additionally, Flynn underscored that having additional support, such as an on-site professional support person, would be beneficial. However, Eli indicated that any external support would need to be confidential to avoid any *"potential for it to be used against you"*. External support was valuable, but as with EAP use, confidentiality and having separation from the organisation was necessary to avoid the support becoming an additional stressor, and consequently, having a negative impact on employee wellbeing.

Participants and reviewed documents from both organisations highlighted intranets and internal resource centres where employees could gain information on entitlements and available support. Highlighting available support was necessary, as individuals were not always aware of what resources were available for them. For example, Devan shared that they accessed getting a stand-up desk "*because I just asked"*. However, due to a perceived lack of communication from the organisation *"everyone [asked] why did you get one?" (Devan)*. Devan shared that others were unaware that they could request equipment and did not know what processes to follow. Without a clear and communicated process, individuals could not access employee wellbeing related equipment that was available to them. Likewise, Blair shared that for the *"greater good"* across the organisation it was important to have consistency in access to resources and working conditions, because *"we have had ... people in one team over here say, 'Well, how come they get to do that and we don't'"*. Thus, it was vital for appropriate information to be clearly communicated.

4.3.6 Financial

Fewer participants discussed financial dimensions compared to other dimensions of employee wellbeing. A financial dimension was included in the model of wellbeing found in a document from Ferris Group and highlighted the central role that finances play in employee wellbeing, Ferris Group provided resource links from an intranet page for employee use.

Additionally, Charlie explained that an individual's total financial package was a *"tactical"* aspect of leadership of employee wellbeing.

Interestingly, several participants highlighted fair or appropriate remuneration, which included consideration for times when workloads were excessive. For example, Blair explained:

> *… where someone's got so much work because there's pressure points, then you've got to work out, okay, how do I compensate for that? How do … we recognise that, through time in-lieu and other mechanisms that might be of help to us.*

Remuneration was more than the transactional payment for work done by employees. Instead, financial compensation was a mechanism to recognise individuals and for the organisation to *"give back" (Ash)* to employees after periods of intense workloads.

Morgan suggested that aside from appropriate remuneration, financial support could be provided through budgeting and financial planning advice to provide guidance to improve financial wellbeing, particularly for younger employees. However, Morgan explained that *"I think companies tend to shy away from discussions around … this financial support issue, because there's always concern about what's [it] gonna mean"* in terms of *"increased costs"*. The combined comments from the participants showed that financial dimensions of employee wellbeing were closely intertwined with organisation functioning, and both leaders and followers were aware of and concerned about financial matters.

4.4 Theme 3: Leaders and Their Practices

Theme 3 provides key findings about leaders. There are four sections in this theme, and they outline the different types of leaders, their individuality as people, their motivations for addressing employee wellbeing, and their practices involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing, as indicated in Figure 4.3, below.

Figure 4.3

Theme 3 Map

As indicated by Figure 4.3, different kinds of leaders were identified across the data, and each played a vital role in employee wellbeing. This theme outlines each leader type and their practices which were present or required for the leadership of employee wellbeing. Leaders also had their own employee wellbeing, needs, and impacts due to their position in the organisation of caring for others, sometimes to the detriment of themselves.

Though human leaders are the primary focus of this theme, it is important to emphasise that many participants also discussed the organisation from an active anthropomorphic leadership perspective. For example, participants commented:

"I think the business at a high level is trying ... I can see them making an effort" (Ash).

"I think people like having an organisation that actually cares about … everybody's wellbeing and they're like actively trying to improve constantly" (Jordan).

"… how the … organisation looks after its staff" (Kai).

"… the ability for the organisation to go 'Right, we'll get you' …" (Blair).

Thus, at times, the organisation was conceptualised by participants as an animate entity that looked after employees, cared for employee wellbeing, and did things for individual employees. It was evident that some saw the organisation as an entity that had an influence on, or was part of, the leadership of employee wellbeing.

4.4.1 Leaders Across the Organisation.

As noted above, leaders were not one group of employees. In both case organisations, three different types of leaders were noted, and each contributed to the leadership of employee wellbeing in different ways. Policy documents reviewed from Ferris and Apex Groups commenced with a clear outline of expected leadership hierarchy. For example, in a key policy document from Ferris Group, the highest organisation leaders, the Board, had overall responsibility for organisation performance and employee adherence to policies and procedures. The implementation of the policy and associated practices flowed down each hierarchical level to executive leaders, such as CEO and group leaders, and then to leaders who were in any other supervisory capacity. Supporting this hierarchical flow, the Ferris Group organisational chart also showed that the Board of Directors was hierarchically above the CEO.

Despite the clear formal structure outlined in the documents, this hierarchy was not reflected in the interviews, where instead, the CEO was seen as the key organisational leader. Participants described how *"things happen from the top down. If we're observing that the CEO is acting improperly then, then it's like a free for all" (Kai).* This distinction is important, as employees looked to the CEO for role modelling because leadership of employee wellbeing started "*at the top. You can have pockets of [it] in a business, but to get it consistently, you need it from the top" (Jessie).* The organisation documents showed that Board Member authority was necessary to enact specific organisation structures relevant to the leadership of employee wellbeing, which were then implemented by the CEO. Through the CEO's practices, leadership of employee wellbeing filtered down through the organisation according to role

specific responsibilities. Thus, the CEO, who was not technically the highest organisational authority; however, they had the most visibly influential role in practice, from the interview data. Thus, these findings show that a small cluster of hierarchically highest organisation leaders are required to authorise and enact the leadership of employee wellbeing.

Middle leaders were a large group hierarchically lower than the CEO and board members and two different types of middle leaders were identified. The hierarchically higher middle leaders, such as group leaders or executives, often worked with organisation leaders (for clarity these are termed top-middle leaders). Interview data indicated that these leaders provided support and guidance to hierarchically lower middle leaders and acted as a conduit to the CEO or other leaders. For example, when a follower had an issue, Taylor, a middle leader, supported the follower directly while gaining help from and providing information to their top-middle leader. The top-middle leader then provided information to the CEO. Taylor explained that as their follower's employee wellbeing issue escalated *"my boss … stepped in"*. Therefore, Taylor was *"actually managing the employee … [to] make sure that [follower] had access to the employee support programme and so on"*. However, the top-middle leader, Taylor's direct manager *"thankfully managed all the … CEO briefing"*. Likewise, Flynn described working directly with a follower *"just listening and talking"* but taking the follower's concerns and *"escalated [the problem] to our … executive committee"*. From the findings, there was a clear flow of information and support through each layer of leadership, with each providing a specific function.

Middle leaders, such as department leaders, team leaders, or those who managed a single other employee, were a pivot point between top-middle leaders above and followers below. Organisational leaders only had followers beneath them, while followers only had leaders above them. However, middle leaders were unique, having complex conditions of being both a follower and a leader and were a central point of information and action from above and

beneath. The middle leader also often provided a chaplain-type role where they supported, cared for, and guided followers; however, that role came with additional pressures such as feeling the *"weight" (Flynn)* of follower's employee wellbeing issues.

Interestingly, while three different leader types were identified, a participant indirectly highlighted that there was an acceptable order to accessing leaders, particularly hierarchically higher leaders. Ash explained *"I get the impression that if I went to one of their EA's… and said 'Look, I need 15 minutes of [CEO]'s time' … I think that's a meeting [CEO] would take"*. However, Ash commented that as a middle leader they should not *"bypass"* their direct leader *"for the sake of 'I wanna talk to the head honcho'" (Ash)*. Instead, following the path of hierarchical leadership was more legitimate. Overall, the findings show that distinct leader types are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. However, these workplace actors are more than their work roles, they are also individuals.

4.4.2 Leaders as Individuals.

Leaders, as individuals, were not homogenous. Instead, they had *"different mannerisms and personality [sic]" (Drew).* Some leaders were proactive toward followers and their employee wellbeing. These leaders would notice when followers were struggling or needed help and provided support, while others had a *"head down in the sand" (Hayden)* approach. Charlie highlighted that the differences in leadership led to inconsistent employee experiences; some had positive experiences with employee wellbeing, while others had negative experiences within the same organisation.

Leaders also had their own employee wellbeing needs; for example, Riley and Taylor wanted reassurance about their work and leadership choices. Some leader participants worried about their practices, commenting *"you tend to get these thoughts in your head just before you nod off to sleep at night … 'Am I being an effective leader and could I have done that better*

today?'" (Riley). Leaders also worried about *"whether our superiors would look at us"* and question why they made decisions and why they could not manage followers better. Several leaders highlighted that they were negatively impacted when their followers had poor employee wellbeing. For example, Flynn shared that it was *"distressing to see one of your team members in that position … Sometimes you do sort of feel the weight of their problems on your shoulders as well"*. Leaders also acted to protect or shield followers from stressful situations *"to my own detriment to some degree" (Eli).* Thus, the leadership of employee wellbeing was not a simple transaction between leader and follower. Instead, the leadership of employee wellbeing had direct impacts on the leaders involved.

Several leaders treated their own and followers' employee wellbeing differently. Quinn gave *"more time to them than I probably would to myself"*, and Taylor commented that "*what I say to them, I don't do myself. … I say to them, 'We're not saving lives, like, don't stress, don't work overtime' or whatever. But then I work late" (Taylor).* Some leaders justified treating their employee wellbeing differently because they were *"more senior" (Jessie)* in the organisation than followers, or due to their remuneration differences, for example:

> *… they're on a different pay structure as well, so I am quite serious with them. Like you know, 'Don't clock up overtime, you don't need to'. But I'm on a management contract, so it's like you do whatever it takes to get the job done (Taylor).*

Leaders put themselves in a different category from followers; they justified harsher treatment of themselves and provided support to followers, but did not give that same attention to themselves because they held the position of leader.

4.4.3 Leader Motivations for Addressing Employee Wellbeing.

Leaders described dual motivations for addressing employee wellbeing. Interview participants, particularly leaders, discussed their idealised hopes for employee wellbeing and

commented that the wellbeing of employees should be most important because *"that's a human factor" (Hayden)*. Many leaders outlined that they wanted individuals to feel safe and happy and not overwhelmed with work. Leaders desired that followers would have positive work experiences, for example, "*I'm really conscious of trying to be the best leader I can for my team" (Jessie)* and *"it's important for me as a leader to make sure that my team feel safe" (Devan).* Additionally, another participant commented:

> *I hate it when … people feel that, you know, they've got too much work, that their life can't be balanced. … you don't want that to happen. But I think that's a little, it is utopia, but that's what you want to strive for (Blair).*

Many leaders articulated a strong sense of wanting to lead well so that followers would have positive employee wellbeing. Participants provided justifications for supporting employee wellbeing to benefit the organisation. For example, *"if you don't have happy, safe, healthy people, they're not going to perform well in their role …we want the best out of people in order to … do good work for the company" (Blake)*. Leaders discussed the positive impact on performance that they expected to result from positive employee wellbeing. For example, participants commented, *"having employees who have healthy wellbeing means they perform better" (Taylor)* and *"it's [employee wellbeing] actually not about satisfaction, [be]cause satisfaction doesn't drive productivity. So it's about engagement" (Charlie).* Thus, organisational benefit was part of the driving motivation for some participants, and particularly leader participants.

Similarly, participants identified turnover as a reason to address employee wellbeing. Ali explained that it was important to care about employees *"because if you don't, someone else will ... they'll leave" (Ali).* The perception that employees would leave if they were not cared for as a justification for addressing employee wellbeing was particularly relevant in the

context of this research. Leaders highlighted that employees could easily find employment elsewhere in the employee favourable conditions of the post Covid-19 pandemic shift.

4.4.4 Leader Practices

The leadership of employee wellbeing was an active phenomenon. Participants described leaders performing a range of different actions. Being proactive and taking *"the initiative" (Kai)* was positively viewed by participants. The proactive leadership of employee wellbeing focused on *"trying to mitigate" (Flynn)* issues before they began, rather than aiming to fix poor employee wellbeing. Participants highlighted that taking action was how leaders showed that employee wellbeing was important. Leaders needed to *"walk the talk" (Taylor)* and show that they were *"truly invested" (Hayden)* and to put their *"money where your mouth is*" (Ash). Espoused values of employee wellbeing were not perceived to be enough, action was required.

At times, taking action was an iterative process, as leaders implemented practices, gained feedback, and refined actions to support and improve employee wellbeing. Participants discussed the importance of leaders responding to and acting on feedback. When leaders received feedback and *"it gets listened to and then there's action at the end, people go, 'Oh, that wasn't too bad'" (Blair).* Followers watched to see whether action was taken by leaders when they provided feedback; for example, Reese described how their leader received input from a survey on areas that needed to be improved in the department. Instead of defending themselves, the leader expressed, *"I don't take this as a personal attack on me. Like, I can see that these are areas we need to improve on … let's see how we can improve it".* As their leader took responsibility and addressed the feedback, Reese highlighted that *"it was quite encouraging,"* and they felt *"if I do have an issue or a problem, I feel like I can go and say something" (Reese)*. The leader responding to feedback signalled to followers that they took issues seriously, which built trust with followers. However, Reese commented several times

that they would watch to see whether their leader followed through and implemented the discussed changes.

Additionally, leaders were expected to role model desired behaviours and values. For example:

> *They've got to set an example at the executive level. At the CEO level. If they're not setting an example, then there's no incentive. … you know, people are usually decent … but if they see things being accepted as improperly, then they'll think they can get away with more. So they're more accepting of bad behaviour (Kai).*

Participants highlighted examples of leaders' role modelling the importance of employee wellbeing. For example, Devan shared that care packages were sent to employees in an office significantly impacted during Covid-19 and felt that the action was a way of *"demonstrating from a leadership perspective that your mental wellbeing is important. And we can't do anything about your current situation … we are thinking of you, and please take care of yourself" (Devan).* Role modelling was the active communication of espoused values through leader actions.

Leaders needed to practice a range of soft skills such as displaying *"vulnerability" (Sam)* with followers, discussing stressors and their experiences facing personal challenges. Sam felt this practice signalled to followers that it was acceptable for them to be open about their personal lives. The display of soft skills personalised leaders and facilitated building positive working relationships. Likewise, participants highlighted that it was important for leaders to be caring and empathetic, which occurred when leaders "*put [themselves] in my position … what thoughts, what might be the issue for me, concern for me. And they dealt with it" (Kai).* As leaders cared for followers, they demonstrated that individuals were *"valued" (Jessie).* Several participants across both organisations discussed the need for leaders to be

authentic and genuine (Drew, Eli, Bailey), and self-aware through displaying *"emotional intelligence ... when we're talking ... wellbeing" (Flynn),* and being honest (Eli, Blair). Blair explained that leaders showed honesty when they acknowledged their mistakes, and said, *"if you don't get something right, it's being up front and saying, 'Oh, gosh, we didn't get that right. We're gonna have another go at that'" (Blair)*. When leaders did not take responsibility and behaved as though the action did not occur, Blair asserted that followers would perceive that their leaders were hiding from the issue.

Displaying soft skills went beyond transactional leader actions and connected leaders and followers through humanised leadership practices. Leaders' actions had a direct impact on employee wellbeing through influencing how individuals felt, and several participants commented on the lasting impacts of negative interactions with past leaders. The findings discussed above outline the need for leaders to take action, and the sub-sections below present more specific leader practices that were significant for the leadership of employee wellbeing.

Communication. A central practice in the leadership of employee wellbeing was communication with 21 of the 23 participants discussing the topic. Leaders communicated to gain and provide information. Flynn explained that "*wellbeing ... is a discussion"* and supportive conversations occurred where leaders *"unpack[ed]" (Hayden)* workplace experiences with followers, which result in followers feeling *"heard. And wellbeing is impacted positively from that interaction"*. Talking with followers to review in-depth workplace experiences helped leaders understand problems and the experiences followers were having, so they could solve issues, which communicated non-verbally that they cared about employee wellbeing. Listening was intertwined with having discussions and communicating for the leadership of employee wellbeing. Significantly, Eli shared that their leader listening was *"the key"* leader practice that supported their employee wellbeing.

Open communication was necessary for the leadership of employee wellbeing and was characterised by followers and leaders feeling supported to have *"honest conversations" (Flynn)* where individuals *"felt comfortable*" *(Cameron)* to ask how people were doing and whether they were okay. For example, Parker outlined that their flexible working conditions resulted from having open conversation with their leader. They explained to the leader that their work structure was not *"working for me. What solution can we come to?" (Parker).* Their leader had indicated that they were willing to negotiate work conditions and when addressed by Parker, were happy to openly communicate and receive feedback on Parker's working hours and make changes to support their employee wellbeing.

Clear, honest, and open communication was vital so that individuals understood what was happening in the workplace, because people *"fill in the blanks if someone else doesn't … they'll fill them in with the story they're telling themselves" (Bailey).* In other words, when leaders did not clarify and clearly communicate with followers and colleagues, individuals attempted to make sense of their work-related experiences. For example, when micromanaged by a previous leader, Jordan felt they were not trusted to do their work.

Meetings were a key mechanism for leaders and followers to communicate with each other. Participants described weekly, fortnightly, and monthly *"team check-in[s]" (Blair)*, *"Friday catch ups" (Devan)*, or a *"monthly catch-up where we talk about, like, my performance goals, and things like that" (Jordan)*. Meetings were a helpful way for leaders to gain information directly from followers. One-way meetings providing organisation-wide updates and town-hall style meetings were helpful in some instances as *"those online meetings really brought us together" (Riley)* and helped individuals to *"feel connected" (Cameron).* Mass communication was particularly useful for employees who worked remotely, as a mechanism to keep them linked to their organisation. While meetings could *"be overdone"*

(Kai), they were a useful leader practice to support employee wellbeing through gaining, sharing, and exchanging information.

Other static, one-way communication also had some value; for example, Ali discussed non-targeted information, such as posters placed across the organisation that gave individuals information about *"how to have those quick check-in conversations around, are you ok?" (Ali)*. Observations highlighted that both organisations used static mass communication, such as domestic violence posters on bathroom stall doors, stretching posters, and R U OK posters in lunchrooms and other working spaces. Additionally, participants highlighted intranet resource centres *"where everyone goes to access [information]" (Blake)* that contained relevant information on employee wellbeing support.

Dealing with Issues and Stressors. Findings illustrated different types of issues relating to employee wellbeing which leaders had to deal with. Ali explained that when a follower made a mistake, they tried not to *"make a big deal about it, but just quietly address it and … not focus on that in [a] negative way"*. Flynn commented that individuals often just wanted to be heard when they had issues. However, where matters persisted, leaders needed to act and help solve the problem and provide follower support. Some issues warranted being *"escalated" (Flynn)* to top-middle or organisation leaders so that issues could be adequately resolved. Addressing issues quickly was important to avoid issues becoming larger, as:

> *Things can get blown out of proportion very quickly. … what you think might be a minor issue can become inflamed, blown out of proportion ... It gets bigger and people talk start talking, and walls have ears, and [it] becomes bigger than it should be. … Dealing with an issue as soon as it arrives. It settles down the situation (Kai).*

Resolving issues quickly was central; however, at times, organisational cultural norms impacted addressing issues. For instance, as indicated earlier, in Apex Group, the norm of

niceness lead to conflict adverse behaviours, where known issues were avoided despite the negative impacts.

Addressing the root causes of problems, and particularly, *"foundational issues" (Rory)* was necessary. Several stressors were identified from the interviews, including uncertainty, using leave unnecessarily, poor work prioritisation, and known problems related to excessive workloads led to "*a lot of ... fatigue, frustration with that" (Rory).* When known chronic workload problems that could contribute to burnout and fatigue were not addressed, *"a poor message for employee wellbeing" (Flynn)* was sent to employees that leaders did not care about them. Genuine action from leaders, consisting of more than *"a staff survey, a few ... team lunches" (Rory)* was needed to create meaningful change. Similarly, when leaders did not address issues with poor interpersonal behaviours, there was a perception among colleagues that such behaviour was *"allowed" (Rory).* A lack of action dealing with difficult interpersonal conflict, *"ultimately affects ... the wellbeing of the of the group" (Ash).* Likewise, Bailey suggested that rather than *"being a firefighter putting out fires"*, which *"isn't sustainable"*, the root cause or the underlying foundational issue needed to be addressed *"creating a fireproof building" (Bailey)* instead.

Addressing issues also included identifying potential hazards, and one participant highlighted that capturing near miss incidents would be a beneficial leadership practice. Hayden suggested that hierarchically higher leaders were not educated to *"talk about psychological injuries" (Hayden)* and psychological hazard identification may be a useful practice for identifying relevant issues in the workplace. For example, Hayden explained that while physical safety and health was important, "*it's psychological safety and mental health that we see as our biggest safety issues in our company" (Hayden)*. Identifying organisationally specific issues could therefore provide leaders with a better understanding of relevant current and potential work-related stressors and hazards.

Recognition, Development, and Support for Employees. Several participants highlighted a desire for their work and outputs to be acknowledged and recognised by leaders by them *"speaking up and … expressing across [the] organisation, if you've done something well" (Jordan)*. Likewise, Riley explained that where outputs were recognised, their employee wellbeing improved from a perception that they contributed to the organisation. Acknowledgment needed to be genuine though, and not a *"tick box" (Ash)* exercise, where leaders mentioned a piece of work as a formality. Devan shared that once key work milestones were met, "*I usually take them out, you know, for a drink and nibbles,"* specifically to show appreciation to team members, acknowledge the work they did, and *"celebrate things as they happen"*. Participants shared that acknowledgement could come in different ways, such as providing lunch or coffee, sending a gift of appreciation, or financial rewards.

Recognition was linked to positive employee wellbeing because it drove a perception of *"feel[ing] seen and heard or appreciated" (Bailey).* To better facilitate consistent recognition across the organisation, Apex Group were systematising a program where colleagues and leaders could nominate individuals for monthly awards and people in the organisation could vote for someone to win. Bailey explained that *"even if somebody doesn't get the award … they would still get the feedback … 'One of your team members thought you were incredible on this project and you did so well, here, here, here"*. The information about who was nominated and won would be seen by leaders, which Bailey perceived to be an additional positive aspect to the award process.

Leaders and followers also desired professional growth and development opportunities within and beyond their current roles, as participants described that they were *"very career driven … [and] always like to have something on my agenda" (Parker)*. Similarly, Drew shared, *"I'm quite, like, career driven and wanting to … learn more and improve all the time. And if I'm not really, like, learning or something, I want to be".* To facilitate professional

development and growth, Apex Group had formal organisational structures through annual development programs that consisted of multiple leader-follower meetings throughout the year. In Ferris Group, participants spoke about various leadership programs, though it was unclear from the data how these were structured. Overall, structured professional development provided leaders with tools to support and develop followers.

Some leaders developed individuals by enabling followers to participate in aspects outside of the hierarchical level associated with their position; for example, "*We try and bring them up and out of there and say, 'That is your role, but come and try this for a little while' … we try and push them out of their comfort zone as well" (Quinn).* Quinn further explained that encouraging and enabling followers to move out of their comfort zone and beyond their role was positive for some; however, they felt that for some employees being pushed beyond their role was a negative experience.

While organisational support was outlined earlier in Theme 2, support is also a leader practice, because leaders provide support in the leadership of employee wellbeing, especially in terms of personal issues outside of work. Taylor, Cameron, Jessie, and Kai (a mix from Ferris and Apex Groups) each discussed the personal care and support they received during personal health issues. Leaders allowed Taylor and Jessie to work flexibly to accommodate their recovery. Cameron and Kai's leaders gave personal care and attention to them and their families during respective health issues. Taylor commented that it benefited them *"massively"* knowing they were supported at work and Cameron noted the *"huge relief"* in knowing they could rely on their leaders.

Followers also supported leaders and colleagues when workloads were high. Devan explained, *"when my plate is full … we'll need to lean on the other team members and vice versa"*. To give each other support, it was necessary to share information about workloads or

issues. Leaders could also draw on support from hierarchically higher leaders to support followers when needed. The networks of support moved up and down hierarchical levels of the organisation and across teams. While providing support was vital in the leadership of employee wellbeing, Quinn cautioned that support needed to be balanced with accountability and *"letting them be"* so that individuals could deal with issues or employee wellbeing concerns as they felt was appropriate. Similarly, providing support for mental health was sometimes difficult for leaders because they were conscious that they were not trained counsellors. Instead, participants described that they would *"always just be a listener" (Flynn)*. Where individuals required mental health support, leaders could rely on organisation provided support and refer followers to the EAP. These findings illustrate an interplay between individual support provided by leaders and structural support embedded in the organisation for leadership of employee wellbeing.

4.5 Theme 4: Individuals and Self-Leadership

This theme focuses on the individual, both followers and leaders, and how they are individually involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing, as shown in Figure 4.4.

Figure 4.4

Theme Map 4

Despite the frequent descriptions of employees as individuals with differing needs, values, and issues, employee wellbeing was sometimes treated as a communal practice. For example, Hayden shared how their organisation had implemented lunchtime yoga, but the program had been discontinued because, *"it was something that a little group of people wanted to do, but it probably wasn't… what everybody wanted to do, wellbeing means different things for different people. Not everyone wants to do yoga in the park" (Hayden).* Having a program that was used by a few employees was considered unsuccessful, despite the consistent acknowledgement that people will want and need different things. For some, yoga during their break was meaningful, but it was not seen that way because it did not appeal to most employees.

Additionally, employees across the case organisations had different role contexts that impacted them. As outlined in Theme 3, organisation leaders were expected to role model appropriate behaviours and middle leaders had pressures of being a leader and a follower, where *"you've got lots of different people giving you different stuff to do" (Ali)*. Participants with specific roles created expectations about their employee type. For example, Jessie explained that they bought followers coffee or lunch personally, not compensated by the organisation, because they perceived it was more meaningful to individuals. However, they did

not *"expect that from my boss though … I get different things from my boss" (Jessie).* Followers and leaders were different as individuals and in their roles, which added to the complex nature of the leadership of employee wellbeing.

4.5.1 Making Sense of Experiences

Participants were not passive recipients of actions from leaders and colleagues; instead, they made sense of words and actions. For example, after discussing issues about poor interpersonal interactions with a colleague. Ash commented inaction from their leader was perceived by them as a *"message it's sending to me"*. Far from being an inert bystander, Ash actively made sense of and created their own meaning from their leader's actions without any input from the leader. Similarly, during a period of poor health, Jessie's then leader remarked *"you're having a lot of time off"*, which led Jessie to perceive that their leader did not care about them. Interestingly, Taylor construed this research being conducted in their organisation as a display of leader *"commitment to wellbeing"*.

In addition to making sense of leaders' actions, participants also made sense of leaders' reactions. When requesting to work flexibly, Parker and Reese's (different) respective leaders responded, *"do what you need"*, which led them to perceive that they were being given permission to practice flexible work. Reese commented that they felt their leader trusted that they were *"actually working from home"*, rather than taking paid time off. In contrast, middle leaders worried about potential leader reactions. When a follower had a significant workplace issue, Taylor *"worried about whether our superiors would look at us and say, 'Why did you make this … decision?' And 'Why can't you manage this person better?'"* Before their leaders had reacted, anticipated possible future leader reactions became a stressor for Taylor.

Participants made sense of their workplace experiences. For example, the mental health-focused R U OK Day[3] and surrounding initiatives were implemented in Apex Group. However, Flynn shared that they were *"really put off when someone asks me if I'm okay"* because they inferred an underlying negative message of *"Am I not okay? Like, am I not presenting myself?" (Flynn)*. Rather than a positive conversation starter that the R U OK initiative was intended to be, individual sensemaking resulted in an opposite meaning and outcome. The personal sensemaking of being asked if they were okay also resulted in altered leadership actions. For example, Flynn instead asked followers, *"How are things going in your world? What's going on?"* rather than if they were okay. This line of questioning also unintentionally emphasises that individual nature of employee wellbeing and the differing experiences that go on in a follower's 'world'.

As part of sensemaking at work, over half of the participants compared past experiences to form judgements about current workplace practices. When making comparisons, participants often created benchmarks of good or bad practices or whether aspects of the workplace met their expectations. For example, Rory discussed their current organisational culture in a negative way compared *"to where I've been"*. Their present experience did not meet the expectations they had built from past employers, which led to some negative perceptions of their current workplace. Likewise, other participants compared past and current leaders, saying *"I've had a really bad one [leader] … Awful. And the leader I have now is probably one of the best people I've ever worked for" (Jessie).* Leaders also used past experiences to guide their practices. For example, Taylor shared that because they had been micromanaged in the past, as a result, it was a *"natural thing to not be that way"* to their followers. Likewise, Ali shared that they checked in with followers because they wanted them to *"have a better experience"* with

[3] R U OK Day is run by a public health promotion charity who work to prevent suicide through normalising conversations around mental health. RUOk. (2024, May 6). *What we do*. R U OK https://www.ruok.org.au/what-were-about

leadership than they had at the same age. Past experiences often motivated participant action so that others could gain benefits or avoid the negative experiences they had encountered.

Followers also compared their experiences to others. Where individuals perceived unequal treatment, they would question leaders and ask, *"How come they get to do that and we don't" (Blair)*. Likewise, Sam described the negative *"sentiment"* that built during the Covid-19 pandemic from employees outside of the headquarters office. Some felt that employees at the main office had better treatment than those based elsewhere. Making sense of experiences was seen across participants from both Apex and Ferris Groups, with followers of all leader types engaging in, or aware of, the practice.

4.5.2 Self-Leadership

Self-leadership was crucial in the leadership of employee wellbeing, as followers and leaders took intentional and subconscious actions to support themselves. As outlined in Theme 1, participants discussed a desire for self-determination and being able to act positively for themselves to improve and support their employee wellbeing. Participants described their own practices of self-leadership. Reese explained that they *"make myself take 20 minutes and I'll go and sit outside by myself on the grass"* because, taking time during the workday *"changes my mental health" (Reese)* and became a mechanism to positively support their employee wellbeing. To get the time each day, Reese intentionally structured their breaks and ate at their desk, which provided dedicated time to focus on themselves. Parker explained that they *"do things that are good for my wellbeing"* at work and outside of work. Parker spent time in nature or with family, used headphones to concentrate at work where necessary, and asked colleagues *"Can someone help me with this please"* when their workload became overwhelming. Bailey tried to *"keep my inbox clear and I try to get a proper task list together"* to effectively manage their complex work tasks.

To take actions for self-leadership of employee wellbeing, individuals needed to be self-aware. Charlie described that they *"reflect on the way … home"*, particularly when aspects of their work were unexpected. Likewise, Eli exercised to reflect and detach from their workday. Participants also used past experiences to help them be more aware of their stressors and aspects of their work experience that negatively impacted their employee wellbeing. For example, Devan shared how they had previously been *"very much a yes, 'yes, I can do that. I can do that. I can do that', until the point where I've got hives"*. From those negative experiences, Devan attempted, even in small ways, to alter current practices to avoid the same outcome.

Self-leadership also involved co-creation of the work environment, where individuals contributed to redesigning job roles, tasks, and how work was structured through providing feedback when able. Devan explained that coming out of the Covid-19 pandemic and into a hybrid work structure, *"the people leadership team came out and sought people's views on flexible working and that helped shape the policy"*. Leaders enabled employee voice *"where people can speak their truth" (Hayden)* through mechanisms such as surveys. Therefore, for leaders to understand how they can help or what leadership practices would be relevant for employee wellbeing, individuals need to act and provide honest feedback as part of leadership processes.

Participants explained that organisation support and leadership of employee wellbeing were important; however, individuals had some responsibility for their own employee wellbeing *"because you've got to implement it at the end of the day. It's your choice" (Cameron)*. Leaders and followers each had a responsibility in the leadership of employee wellbeing, for example, participants explained:

... you create your own happiness ... if you wanna be happy, you will find ways to be happy. If you wanna be miserable, you'll find ways to be miserable ... the work support is great as well, but, like, outside of work, and just in my own personal life as well, I just do things that are good for my wellbeing rather than that aren't (Parker).

... it's a two-way street ... leaders provide an environment for success and support. But ultimately, if the person is not feeling a hundred percent, they need to also equally go and deal with that ... however they want to deal with it (Sam).

Self-leadership was most effective when combined with organisational leadership to enact a broader leadership of employee wellbeing, creating a synergistic network of action and interaction to support and improve individual employee wellbeing.

4.6 Theme 5: Social Connection for Leadership of Employee Wellbeing

The centrality of social connection to the leadership of employee wellbeing is evident in all other themes discussed in this chapter. However, Theme 5 is necessary to fully outline that social connection was necessary to adequately gain an awareness of employee wellbeing and enable functional leader practices. There are two core aspects of this theme, as shown in Figure 4.5, below.

Figure 4.5

Theme 5 Map

4.6.1 Social Connection and Functioning

Many participants described a desire for positive social interactions and connection to colleagues and leaders. Positive social connection was important to participants for two reasons, for positive employee wellbeing, and for effective leadership of employee wellbeing. Participants described wanting to feel connected to others, where individuals supported each other and felt that others cared about them as people. For example, Cameron shared that it was reassuring and comforting to know they could *"just call for anyone"* on their team and *"know that they're there" (Cameron)*. Likewise, Jessie shared that when individuals had positive social connection with colleagues *"you're probably gonna find it easier to work through"* issues compared to when individuals experienced poor social connection.

In instances where individuals were aware of other's issues, colleagues would be *"straight in" (Drew)* to help and it was *"just an instinct for people" (Sam)* to help and support each other. Leaders were also supported by followers during times of high workloads or other stressors. For example, Drew explained that they *"get support from my staff too. ... if I have to*

take a week off … my team is straight in to say … 'We'll cover ya, whatever … happy to help'". They explained that in their team, supporting each other *"works both ways".* There was a perception of unity amongst individuals and teams when participants spoke about instances of interpersonal support where colleagues, leaders, and followers, watched out for each other. Quinn explained that there was an expectation of, *"one man down, everyone drops pens and goes and helps out one man. So, if we fail in one section of our team, we all fail".* Positive social connection bound individuals together, where individuals thought and acted beyond their own interests and took on additional tasks to help colleagues and leaders in times of need.

Positive social connection was necessary for the leadership of employee wellbeing because *"leadership and relationships are built on trust" (Sam)*. Taking action to develop positive social connection was necessary, as Sam explained that *"getting together on a regular basis in a social environment"* was important for *"people feeling comfortable and open and secure"*. Social connection directly impacted the functionality of work relationships. For example, Ash highlighted an experience of poor social connection with a colleague that led to individuals closing down in collaborative working situations. Ash clarified that when the colleague came into a meeting, *"you can actually feel a tension enter the room with them. … when this person enters the room … people go 'uhp' [participant made a sudden physical shrinking motion and sound]" (Ash)*. Colleagues closed off and were unwilling to contribute and share their thoughts.

Likewise, Rory shared that poor social connection meant the group became *"so dysfunctional"* that employee wellbeing was negatively impacted. Dysfunctionality resulting from poor interpersonal connection with colleagues led to frustration because, *"if you don't feel like you're getting things done. … that's what … you take home with you … you wake up in the middle of night and you're … stressing" (Rory)*. Participants expected leaders to

intervene and stop negative social behaviour that limited collaborative working, and further frustration built when issues were not adequately addressed.

Social connection was necessary for effective leadership of employee wellbeing. Ash explained that poor social connection would lead to limited disclosure of employee wellbeing status, because *"I'm not going to talk about my wellbeing in the office"*; instead, they would keep information about their employee wellbeing to themselves. Likewise, positive social connection helped leaders to be more effective in their role when they moved beyond work focused transactional interactions. Devan described that they would intentionally take time to get to know individuals and attend social events to move beyond work only interactions, because *"all that connection is really important".* Interestingly, Drew felt where leaders were positively connected with followers, they could *"tell if someone's not slept for eight hours"*. Thus, positive social connection between leaders and followers facilitated monitoring and gaining an awareness of employee wellbeing and contributed to more effective leadership of employee wellbeing.

Despite the constructive outcomes associated with positive social connection, participants differed in the amount or type of connection they desired for positive outcomes. For example, Jessie commented:

> *I like my colleagues to know a bit about me and I like to know a bit about them, I think it just humanises people … I've made some close friends through [work], but I'm not a member of the social club because I really don't want to sit around and drink on a Friday night with my work colleagues, to be honest. Love them dearly, but you know, that's my line. But I know for other people that's really important for them.*

Similarly, a question in an organisation-wide survey asked employees if they had a best friend at work. Ash explained "*I don't necessarily think anyone needed to say yes … I have a social*

life outside of work, I don't come to work for a social life. So, you know, [it] isn't critical to me. But I think just the level of respect and actually being able to talk to people" was important. In contrast, Jordan and Devan both spoke positively about the social club and activities they developed to encourage togetherness in their workplace. Like other aspects of employee wellbeing, socialisation was not universal, and participants needed social connection in a manner that suited them for optimal employee wellbeing.

4.6.2 Mechanisms to Enable Social Connection

Several mechanisms were used to facilitate social connection for the leadership of employee wellbeing. Time, proximity, processes, and physical spaces were central. Time was relevant across all mechanisms, because to connect, such as through attending different types of events, leadership and work practices, communicating, and celebrating, all required spending time together. The use of food and drinks was a prominent social connection mechanism. In Ferris Group, the social club had a drinks trolley and new employees were invited to *"jump on the trolley and you go around … with one of the social club members … [to] introduce yourself to the team" (Devan)*. Food and drink were used by leaders for celebrating work and fostering personal relationships. Quinn invited colleagues for coffee to chat, Blake's team had lunch together *"just talking, nothing to do with work"*. Meeting together and eating outside of the office had positive impacts on social connection between colleagues, for example, Drew shared:

> *… as soon as people walk out the door and you go to a cafe and have something to eat, you just amplify relationships so much … all the barriers break down and everyone's like … I'm outta of work and you have really good conversations and it strengthens that … connectivity with the team (Drew).*

Colleagues also initiated social connection through collectively purchasing food to share together on specific days.

Organisation processes directly impacted the development of social connection. Rory highlighted that more effective processes were required to introduce new employees across the organisation to *"integrate them more so that there's … more casual interactions"*. Without effective and consistent induction and onboarding practices for new employees, their workplace experience was negatively impacted, because individuals felt *"like a bit of an outsider coming in" (Reese),* particularly because the team had *"been together for so long" (Reese)*. Structured processes could facilitate social connection and a more effective transition into the organisation and an individual team. Likewise, organisation structures such as the social club were helpful *"particularly for younger workers" (Devan)* to have fun and develop social connection.

Proximity was important for social connection and leadership of employee wellbeing and working in the office *"definitely helped to have that social connection" (Devan),* because working in the same space enabled spontaneous discussion and interaction. Working in the office with face-to-face interaction was beneficial *"because you pick up on things, and you see how people are reacting and how they're responding to different situations" (Kai)*. Having in-person interactions in the workplace also enabled leader awareness of employee wellbeing.

Physical spaces as enablers of social connection were evident in both case organisation. Ferris Group had table tennis equipment set up for employee use and large areas of both organisations were dedicated to eating and socialising together. The eating spaces enabled individuals from across the organisation to meet and gather together, which was noted during observations. For example:

"Lots of people come out of their workstations and eat in the communal area. Small groups formed with people eating together, some sat alone. [There was] lots of chatter as people prepared food and drinks for their lunch. One person was eating alone, but people at the next table still spoke to them and included them in their conversation" (Observation Apex 4).

The physical spaces and equipment, the tables and plentiful seating and kitchens for preparing and storing food, facilitated social connection between employees. The impacts of social connection on employee wellbeing at personal and work levels were significant; likewise, the influence of external contexts on employee wellbeing practices and expectations were substantial, as outlined in the next theme.

4.7 Theme 6: Changing Expectations and Workplace Practices for Employee Wellbeing

External contexts had a significant influence on the leadership of employee wellbeing and participants outlined wider economic contexts, inflation, financial pressures, and employment conditions shifting from *"a multi-decade employer led market to a candidate market" (Charlie).* Different external contexts influenced actions and created specific requirements for the organisations, such as legislation related to employee wellbeing, and Charlie highlighted that as *"society views have changed … legislation has followed"*. Charlie's perception was that rather than legislation being the catalyst for change, these governing documents were altered, in part, due to societal pressures where previous legislation no longer adequately met workplace needs. Charlie further clarified that legislation pushed the *"outliers"* in an industry, as *"the legislation is to get them on board because they're holding the community back"*. The case organisations had industry specific, including legislative, contexts, which meant that that had *"certain statutes that that drive … the basis for our code of conduct … the basis for some of our financial procedures and policies and delegations" (Kai).* Both

organisations, but particularly Ferris Group, had employees working in significantly different geographic contexts with divergent requirements, cultural norms, and expectations. At times, the differing expectations led to conflicting views of leadership styles and how individuals should interact.

The most prominent of all external contexts was the Covid-19 pandemic. Charlie highlighted that societal views towards employee wellbeing had been shifting for some years and asserted that what people considered *"was wellbeing five years ago to what it is now after Covid has changed" (Flynn)*. Employee wellbeing had been *"reinvigorated as an effect of Covid" (Sam)* and expectations towards work practices related to employee wellbeing had altered. Participants shared that individuals now considered and prioritised aspects of employee wellbeing more, and Flynn explained, *"my team alone are putting their work-life balance on a pedestal … that's what they value the most"*. Flexible working, which was a requirement during Covid-19, became an enhanced mechanism that individuals could use to better integrate their work and personal lives.

Prior to Covid-19, both case organisations had been taking some *"tentative steps" (Morgan)* towards flexible working. However, before the pandemic, flexible working was rigid, and individuals *"had to discuss the reason why you needed to work from home and have that approval on each case-by-case basis" (Taylor)*. Since returning from mandated working from home during the pandemic, the case organisations adopted flexible working policies or expectations because individuals desired greater freedom in choosing when and where to work. Hayden highlighted that employee expectations for flexible working conditions are *"a given now, it's not a 'nice to have'"* and there was a perception that if employees did not get the flexibility that they desired, they would seek employment elsewhere.

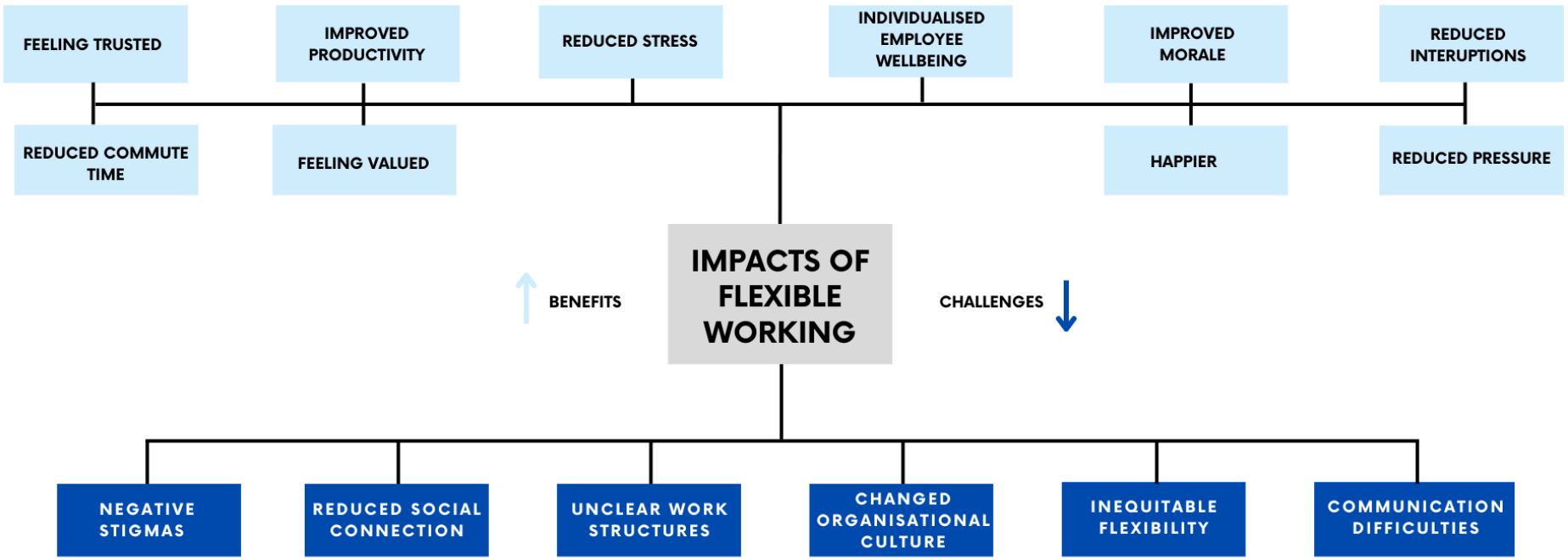
Flexible working was discussed in interviews by over half of the participants and was a *"massive contributor to wellbeing" (Jessie)* that *"saved my sanity" (Taylor)* and *"alleviated all sort of stress" (Jordan)*. Flexible working made *"everything ... a lot less stressful" (Parker),* because *"you don't feel pressured" (Reese).* Flexible working allowed participants to structure their work in a way that better fit their life, enabling more balance, integration, or separation, as was best for the individual. For some that meant:

> *… working outside of hours, but that doesn't mean that I'm burnt out or ... [be]cause it's crazy. It might have been because I left at three o'clock to pick my kids up and take them swimming and then I'm doing my paper at 10 o'clock at night (Hayden).*

There was no one single way that flexible working was practiced; instead, this reflected the individual employee and their needs. Overall, many positive outcomes were related, as shown in Figure 4.6, below.

Figure 4.6

Impacts of Flexible Working



While there were many benefits of flexible working, Figure 4.6 also illustrates that there were also challenges. When individuals worked from home, it was *"hard"* for leaders *"to pick up on" (Kai)* and be aware of employee wellbeing. Additionally, implementing new flexible working arrangements was not a linear process; instead, adopting flexible working required trying, learning, and refining. To be able to learn and refine, participants commented that leaders needed to communicate with followers to understand employee needs. For example, Blair explained that with no guidelines on when to work from the office, employees said they were *"spending my whole day on Teams, because my other team members aren't here" (Blair)*. The organisation then *"tweaked that to saying we'd really like everyone to come in on a Wednesday and Thursday, [individuals can] pick the one other day we can be flexible with" (Blair)*. Similarly, Morgan highlighted that when they attempted to work with colleagues across the organisation, there was confusion over *"whether the person was actually working from home or whether they were actually on a day off" (Morgan)*. Colleagues were reluctant to interrupt others and poor work outcomes occurred. In their team, Reese, a follower, developed a calendar system so *"our team can know where everyone's at"*. Team members could then easily know who was working from home or on leave and contact the appropriate colleague.

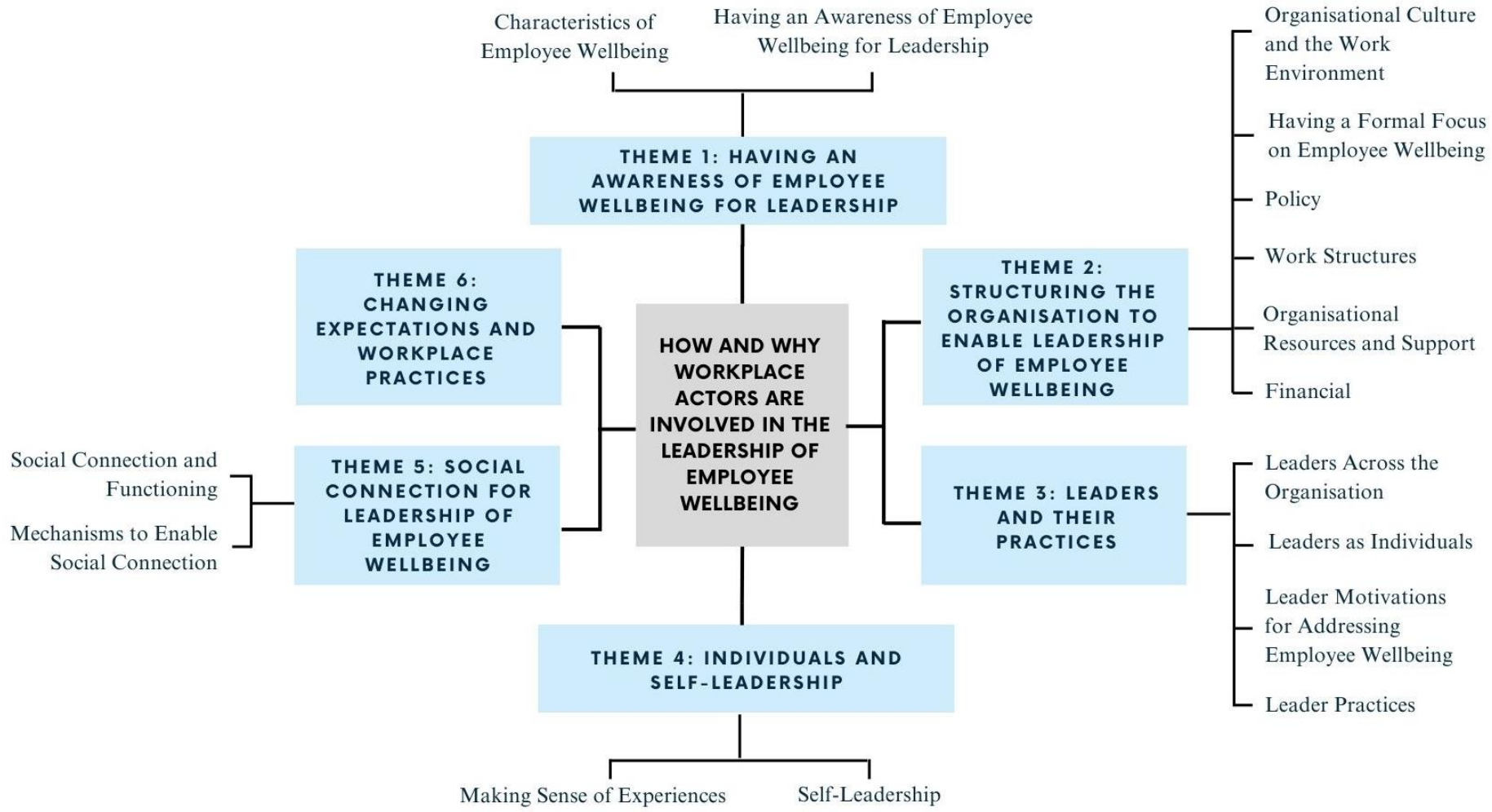
Flexible working was not always straight forward in practice. Sam shared that flexible working occurred to *"varying degrees depending on the leader"*. Additionally, there was a sentiment from Taylor, that if children *"depending on their age"* were also at home, *"you can't really get any work done"*. The comments from Taylor highlighted that at least some leaders felt the home working environment was not always ideal for effective work. Learning to adapt to new ways of working was a *"bit of a journey … I don't think we're quite there yet" (Morgan)*. Ferris and Apex Groups were continuing to adapt to new flexible ways of working to establish functional organisation-wide and individual flexible working practices.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the six themes that make up the findings of this thesis. Each of the six themes in this chapter provide a distinct perspective of how workplace actors and why workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. First, leaders need to have an awareness of employee wellbeing to enable relevant leadership and appropriate organisational structuring. Three distinct leader types, organisation, top-middle, and middle leaders played connected, but diverse, roles in the leadership of employee wellbeing with their distinct practices. Positive social connection was vital, as interactions between leaders, followers, and colleagues impacted employee wellbeing and the leadership of employee wellbeing. The external context that the case organisations operated in influenced employee wellbeing and expectations for work, necessitating adaptation to new ways of working. These findings are collectively illustrated in the full theme map in Figure 4.7, below and are discussed further in Chapter 5 in conjunction with literature to answer the research questions.

Figure 4.7

All Themes Map



Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

Due to the recognised wide-reaching and significant impacts that poor employee wellbeing can have on individuals, this thesis examined two research questions:

1) *How are workplace actors involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing?*
2) *Why are workplace actors involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing?*

This discussion chapter extends the findings presented in Chater 4 by linking with, and exploring, possible and plausible explanations for *how* and *why* workplace actors are involved in the of leadership of employee wellbeing. First, I build on the meaning of employee wellbeing from the findings and present an extended conceptualisation and definition. Next, I present a model outlining the distinct workplace actors and how they are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. To conclude the chapter, I discuss the motivations of why workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing.

5.2 Redefining Employee Wellbeing in an Australian Context

The purpose of this section is to unify the concept of employee wellbeing as part of addressing RQ1 by offering an extended definition and model of employee wellbeing. Unifying the term ‘employee wellbeing’ is necessary because the findings show that understanding the concept is vital for providing relevant and effective leadership of employee wellbeing. However, leader participants indicated that they lacked and required a foundational understanding of employee wellbeing. Compounding, and perhaps contributing to, the lack of consistent understanding of employee wellbeing in the findings is an absence of a universally accepted definition in the literature (Chan et al., 2021). Instead, various definitions exist that have consequently made “employee well-being … difficult to comprehend”, resulting in divergent perspectives on what employee wellbeing means (Pradhan & Hati, 2022, p. 387).

Adding to the ambiguity in the findings, participants were inconsistent in how they referred to employee wellbeing, and frequently substituted employee wellbeing with other terms, such as wellness, without acknowledging the differing terms and any divergent meanings they intended. Chatman and Choi (2022) argued that without a clear unified definition, a domain "is at risk of stagnating and failing to advance" (p.93), and the findings of this study demonstrate that without a more precise conceptualisation, employee wellbeing is indeed at risk of stalling and failing to provide necessary guidance in practice and theory.

Therefore, an extended definition of employee wellbeing is required and is provided in this chapter. The definition below was developed using elements from Suddaby's (2010) construct clarity framework, which includes explicitly addressing four boundary conditions: linking to other concepts and fields, space, time, and values; each of which are discussed below. This discussion is vital, because a definition is highly dependent on the "scope conditions" or "boundary limitations" in which research is conducted to provide the limits of a construct so that others understand what the concept is or is not, and in what contexts the construct is relevant (Suddaby, 2010, pp. 348-349).

Linking to Concepts and Fields. The connections between different concepts and fields need to be understood and made explicit to facilitate construct clarity (Suddaby, 2010). There is considerable theoretical breadth in research on employee wellbeing spanning many fields, including psychology, human resource management, health, and business (Chan et al., 2021). In this study, interview participants provided descriptions of employee wellbeing based solely on their perceptions. These dialogues tended to be descriptions of each participant's desired outcomes, as they verbally clustered meaningful or desired dimensions rather than discussing a stable and complete concept. Surprisingly, even participants with links to human resource fields did not appear to use any theoretical conceptualisations in their response to what employee wellbeing meant to them. The lack of theoretical foundation reflects the complex

discordant field of employee wellbeing, where meaning of the concept skews to a researcher's perspective (Rook et al., 2021), rather than a general foundation of employee wellbeing (Chan et al., 2021; Fisher, 2014). Unfortunately, this fragmentation is coupled with researchers using one or a small number of variables to represent the whole concept (Bachman et al., 2023), which the findings of this study show is inappropriate, as over 50 dimensions were discussed by participants. Thus, more emphasis needs to be placed on the whole concept, rather than isolated elements.

Space. Space refers to the "fact that constructs may apply differently in different types of organisations, at different levels of organisational analysis, under different cultural conditions, or in varying environmental circumstances" (Suddaby, 2010, p. 349). For clarity in this section, the current research was conducted in two Australian organisations with similar numbers of employees, organisational structures, hierarchies, and values regarding employee wellbeing.

Linked in the space in which a study is conducted, Suddaby (2010) emphasised that cultural conditions are also relevant contextual factors for establishing construct clarity. According to Turner (2016), there are three levels of social reality: macro, meso, and micro. The macro-level represents societies; the cultures, values, beliefs, and representations of a group (Turner, 2016); while the meso level represents smaller social units, such as a family, locality (Jaspal et al., 2016), laws, or organisations (Roberts, 2020). The micro level is concerned with individuals, who are encompassed in the previous levels as "smaller structures [levels] and their cultures will always be constrained by the more inclusive structures and the culture in which they are lodged" (Turner, 2016, p. 125). In other words, the macro values present in a national culture influence meso cultural values, which both impact the individual.

Likewise, it was impossible to divorce the findings and this discussion from the Australian macro values and norms evident in Apex and Ferris Groups. Eisenberger et al. (2020) argued that macro-Western cultural values skew to value the individual and their autonomy. As a Western society, the core national Australian values are said to be based on "freedom, respect, fairness and equality of opportunity" (Department of Home Affairs, 2024, n.p). In an Australian context, there is an underlying expectation that the individual is valuable, and the findings reflect these contextual norms. For example, leaders sought individuals' views on their employee wellbeing and scheduled employee surveys and one-on-one meetings with followers. Leaders described wanting individuals to have positive wellbeing and desired individual happiness and flourishing as a valid aspect of developing a productive business, and because humans have inherent worth. The embedded macro-cultural norms meant that it was taken for granted that employee wellbeing was good at the meso and individual levels. Significantly, no participant offered divergent views regarding the worth of employees or the organisational values towards employee wellbeing or leaders supporting and improving employee wellbeing. Even participants who shared negative opinions about practices or aspects of their organisation did not offer views that employee wellbeing was not a worthwhile pursuit.

Last, Suddaby (2010) emphasised that the unit or level of analysis needs to be clear, but is frequently overlooked. In this thesis, the unit of analysis was the individual level. The organisation represents the level in which individuals carried out their work as employees; however, the individual and their perceptions, actions, and interactions provided the level of analysis.

Time. Time is an essential boundary condition due to the fluid nature of organisational phenomena, which many management scholars overlook (Suddaby, 2010). Interestingly, a key finding from this study emphasises the changeable characteristic of employee wellbeing. Participants described how their perceptions of employee wellbeing changed at different career

and life stages, as societal norms evolved, and in response to individual, organisational, and macro-level influences. For example, participants shared that the Covid-19 pandemic had reinvigorated employee wellbeing and changed individual perceptions of what employees wanted and expected from their work experience.

In this research context, data were collected over a broad timeframe from August 2022 to January 2023 during the latter stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, and employees had recently returned to office-based working, though few were working on-site full time. Like others throughout Australia, employees from Ferris and Apex Groups experienced significant changes to their working conditions due to government mandates requiring individuals to work from home. Covid-19 necessitated downsized workforces to meet demands brought on by the pandemic. These were not former stressors in the context of this research. Participants experienced a reduction in employees, knew individuals affected, or were dealing with the impacts of increased workloads as the organisations transitioned out of the pandemic induced shutdowns.

At the time of data collection, it was unknown that the lockdowns and most severe restrictions of the pandemic had passed. This was particularly evident in Ferris Group (the earlier data collection period), where there was a perception that participants were waiting for the next round of disruptions. Individuals were not relaxed and looking back to reflect on their experience; they were still in the current experience of working in the pandemic. Due to the time context, it is possible that the stressors and strain induced by the pandemic led to participants emphasising and discussing certain dimensions of employee wellbeing over others.

Values. In the context of boundary conditions for construct clarity, values are the complex "conditions of a theoretical construct that arise as a result of the assumptions or world view of the researcher", consequently, critical reflexivity is necessary and found throughout

this thesis (Suddaby, 2010, p. 350). An in-depth discussion was presented in the Chapter 3; however, at a foundational level, my personal values have influenced this research. The background and state of employee wellbeing described at the beginning of this thesis outlined the significant negative impacts that poor employee wellbeing has on individuals. I consider that my desire to improve employee wellbeing and mitigate the negative impacts is a valid pursuit, as employees are human, and should therefore be valued for their inherent worth.

The philosophical foundations of this research align with Grandy's (2018) view of social constructivism. Thus, there is an underlying expectation that participants' perceptions are the product of an individual's own and collective construction based on their experiences in specific individual, meso, and macro-level environments (Grandy, 2018). Instead of an individual's experiences having one finite meaning of truth, it is expected that individuals perceive the same situation in different ways. Individual construction is particularly significant and a defining characteristic of employee wellbeing from the findings. Participants did not present standardised homogenous descriptions of employee wellbeing; instead, they described specific dimensions that were meaningful to them, emphasising their most important and individually relevant aspects which reflects the underlying expectation of constructed realities.

5.2.1 Characteristics and Use of the Term Employee Wellbeing

With the boundary conditions explained, the focus now shifts to the characteristics of employee wellbeing. Suddaby (2010) outlined that constructing a sound definition must encompass the core characteristics and essential elements being conceptualised; thus, several clarifying points are required. First, acknowledging who is an employee is necessary because a central tenet of employee wellbeing is the status of an individual as an employee. As established in Chapter 2, in Australia, a person is considered an employee if they work "in someone else's business. The employer controls how, where and when they do their work, and pays them a wage" (Business, 2024). Therefore, employee wellbeing in this study relates

specifically to those working in someone else's organisation and excludes self-employed and volunteers, including individuals those who perform household and child rearing duties. To provide the final aspect of construct clarity, in the next two sub-sections, I clarify how the term 'employee wellbeing' is used, followed by outlining the dimensions of employee wellbeing.

When defining a concept, how a term has been previously used needs to be thoroughly outlined (Suddaby, 2010) and such an invitation is essential for employee wellbeing, because the concept has many different academic and colloquial terms. The conceptual boundaries of employee wellbeing blurred, because participants used differing terms for employee wellbeing. Participants' substitution of terms reflects the theoretical context of employee wellbeing, where researchers have swapped the terms general wellbeing and employee wellbeing (Inceoglu et al., 2018; Wright et al., 2017), whole-of-life wellbeing (Ryff, 2023; Tov et al., 2022), worker wellbeing (Wijngaards et al., 2021), workplace wellbeing (Cooper & Leiter, 2017; ILO., 2023c), and wellbeing at work (Bachman et al., 2023).

In Apex Group, leaders and followers used the terms employee wellbeing, wellbeing, and particularly, wellness. Ciziceno (2022) suggested that wellness conceptualises "all the positive attributes of health … it exalts the harmony of the mind, body and spirit" (p.13). Theories on wellness tend to include six wellness dimensions: physical, psychological, social, intellectual, spiritual, occupational, and environmental (Ciziceno, 2022). These wellness dimensions have several similarities with employee wellbeing, but tend to be more holistic or "way of life oriented" (Myers et al., 2000, p. 252) rather than fully work-related related. Of concern for wellness to be used as a substitute for employee wellbeing, the work-related dimensions were only vaguely described as "several aspects of the relation between the individual and their work" such as job satisfaction, autonomy, competence, and work-life balance (Ciziceno, 2022, pp. 17-18). The findings of this study show that employee wellbeing is strongly work-related with working conditions, financial dimensions, and other personal and

work related such as work-life integration. Therefore, wellness is likely not an adequate substitution for employee wellbeing. Interview participants in this research did not explain why they substituted employee wellbeing with wellness; however, it is clear that ambiguity exists in theory and practice.

The same ambiguity is also present within governing bodies, where there is a divide between employee wellbeing and health and safety. SWA (2023b) stated that "initiatives to improve workers' wellbeing, (e.g. meditation classes or encouraging healthy eating and regular exercise) can have positive impacts. However, they do not protect workers from harm from psychosocial or physical hazards" (n.p). This statement unhelpfully presents health and safety and employee wellbeing as two different concepts, employee wellbeing as the soft side with pleasant initiatives, and workplace health and safety as the strong practices that protect workers from harm, which is incongruent with the findings of this study. For example, over half of the participants discussed physical and psychological dimensions as being part of employee wellbeing and did not make functional distinctions; instead, employee wellbeing encompassed the whole person.

The divide between employee wellbeing and workplace health and safety is apparent along legislative lines. In practice, workplace health and safety legislation has been at the fore, with employee wellbeing sidelined to pleasant initiatives which have been as perceived as unrelated to harm reduction. Legislation is necessary because "despite significant progress in occupational safety and health over the years, the reality remains that workers continue to suffer from work-related injuries and diseases, with some even losing their lives due to exposure to a range of occupational hazards and risks" (ILO., 2022). Health and safety legislation ensures that a minimum standard is being pursued in organisations. However, limiting employee wellbeing to initiatives and excluding psychological and physical safety is additionally inappropriate in light of the recent legislative changes in Australia that require workplaces to

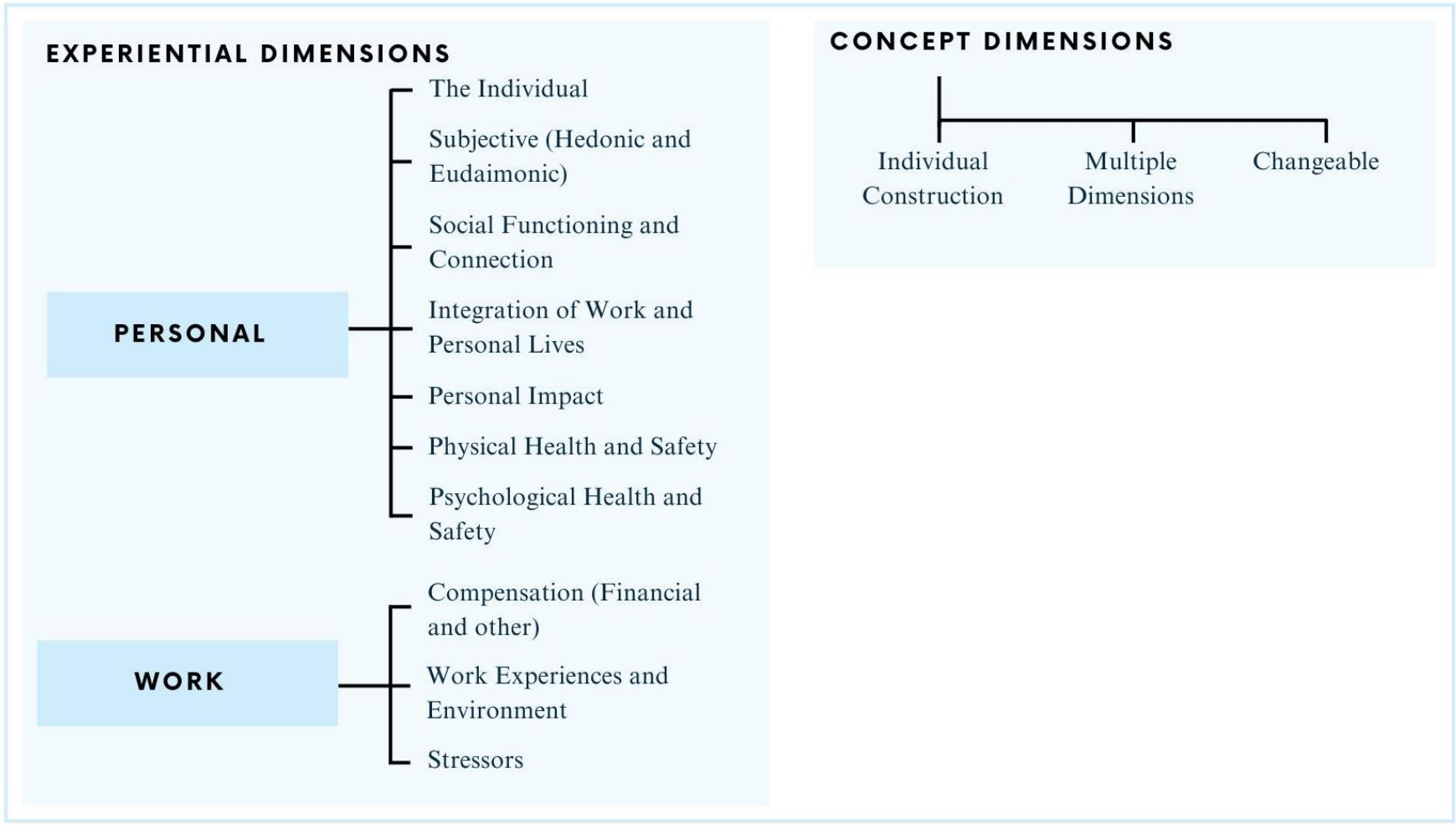
monitor and mitigate psychosocial hazards that negatively impact psychological health (Comcare., 2024). The divide between employee wellbeing and workplace or occupational health and safety may have been strengthened because there has been no consensus on what employee wellbeing is, what it means, and what outcomes are applicable. Consequently, in the literature, in practice, and in governance, employee wellbeing suffers concept proliferation and presents a confusing, ambiguous abstraction littered with individualised theories, rather than offering a clear and concise construct that is useful for academics and practitioners.

5.2.2 Dimensions of Employee Wellbeing.

As shown in the previous section, the poorly distinguished characteristics of employee wellbeing limit establishment of a clear and unified concept. However, the findings of this research provide a foundation for establishing the core aspects of employee wellbeing, as illustrated in Figure 5.1, below.

Figure 5.1

Concept Characteristics of Employee Wellbeing



As shown in Figure 5.1, from the findings of this research, there are two sides to the concept of employee wellbeing, experiential and concept dimensions. It is important to clarify that the model represents the concept of employee wellbeing and does present the end state of what all employees would consider positive employee wellbeing for them, because the meaning is individually constructed, as detailed next.

Concept Dimensions. Figure 5.1 contributes important additions to prior conceptualisations of employee wellbeing. The unique addition of concept dimensions encompass the foundational elements of the term. The first, and fundamental, concept dimension is that the meaning of employee wellbeing is individually constructed. Prior literature indicates that dimensions of employee wellbeing are subjective to individual perceptions (for example, P. Grant & McGhee, 2021; Ilies et al., 2015; Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009). However, individual construction is not explicitly part of any reviewed definitions. This absence is significant, as interview participants from this study did not provide static homogenous representations of employee wellbeing. Instead, every participant described employee wellbeing in a different way, using their own experiences, language, and different combinations of dimensions to construct individual narratives of what the concept meant to them. The finding of individual construction is critical to establishing a broader conceptualisation and provides the foundation for the extended definition of employee wellbeing presented at the end of this section, and is therefore one of the novel contributions from this thesis.

Second, participants were explicit in their expectation that employee wellbeing encompasses the aggregation of multiple dimensions and is not a singular state. Likewise, prior definitions also highlight the multifaceted nature of employee wellbeing (for example, Bachman et al., 2023; Cooper & Leiter, 2017; Inceoglu et al., 2021). However, the interview findings offer evidence of a broad multi-dimensional concept as participants discussed over 50

dimensions under the umbrella term of employee wellbeing. These interview findings also contribute distinct dimensions, rather than a vague description that the is concept is multifaceted. Significantly, findings from this study indicate that aggregation of employee wellbeing dimensions is closely linked to individual construction of meaning and is an underlying element of the concept. Consequently, the multi-dimensional nature of employee wellbeing needs to be explicitly retained in future definitions of the concept.

The final concept dimension of changeability nests into individual construction and the multiple dimensions, because the findings strongly show that employee wellbeing is not one static entity. Instead, employee wellbeing is a collection of individually clustered dimensions that are changeable. The findings show that dimensions of employee wellbeing move in and out of importance in response to internal and external influences. From interview data, 'within person influences' include family status (having children, age of children), career stage, age, and personal experiences. External influences instead came from 'outside of person influences' and include evolved societal norms and altered expectations for employee wellbeing. The reviewed definitions presented earlier (see pp.10-12) overlook the fluid potential within the concept of employee wellbeing; however, some prior literature does indicate changeability (for example, Inceoglu et al., 2021; Mäkikangas et al., 2016; Sonnentag, 2015). Significantly, Mäkikangas et al. (2016) highlighted changeability and reported from their review of longitudinal studies that "relative levels of [employee] well-being changed more often than remained the same" (p.60). Their study showed that development of employee wellbeing for individuals could increase, decrease, or remain stable; however, instability was more prevalent in younger employees or those changing their job. Mäkikangas et al.'s (2016) conclusions support the findings of this research and help illustrate the important capacity for change within the concept of employee wellbeing. The combination of the three concept dimensions highlights the need for explicit inclusion of foundational concept dimensions in a definition of

employee wellbeing in order to present a more comprehensive conceptualisation that can then be used as a sound basis for the leadership of employee wellbeing.

Experiential Dimensions. Two experiential dimensions are shown in Figure 5.1; personal and work. These are distinct, because the personal dimensions relate to the intra-individual elements, while work dimensions are the inter-individual aspects, though the two areas are also linked. According to Beckmann et al.'s (2020) description, intra-individual characteristics relate to how an individual feels inside; that is, the employee as an individual with their distinct personality and traits. While the term inter-individual relates to the outside of an individual factors, such as stressors that an individual experiences but, are in part or entirely, outside of an individual's control (Beckmann et al., 2020). The distinction algins with the argument from Leiter and Maslach (2023) that it is necessary to recognise the aspects outside of a person that are "within the work environment or in the conceptual space between people and their work" that consequently impact an employee's wellbeing (p.138). Instead of viewing employee wellbeing as only a 'within person' concept, the divergent inter- and intra-perspectives allow for impacts and causes to stem from self and the work environment and for remedial action to also necessarily arise from the workplace and not only individual action (Leiter & Maslach, 2023). Conceptualising employee wellbeing through intra- and inter-individual experiential dimensions enables a more thorough understanding of what contributes to the concept.

As shown in Figure 5.1, personal characteristics of employee wellbeing encompass eight dimensions that relate to the individual, how they feel and want to feel—their current and desired state of employee wellbeing. Interview participants described a spectrum of positive feelings and states they wanted, such as to be physically and psychologically safe and healthy, and for their workplace and leaders to care about them. Participants desired meaningful work experiences where they felt connected to others, involved in positive functional work

relationships, felt happy, and perceived that they could flourish and contribute beyond themselves. Personal dimensions of employee wellbeing had both tangible factors with actual safety or not, and subjective perceptions as a constructed outcome of work-related experiences. Many of these personal dimensions are found in prior definitions of employee wellbeing, particularly the triad of psychological, physical, and social wellbeing (Bachman et al., 2023; Fisher, 2014; Guest, 2017; Inceoglu et al., 2021). Some definitions also include subjective employee wellbeing dimensions of satisfaction and growth (Ilies et al., 2015; Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009). However, the findings from this thesis contribute the distinction of three experiential dimensions to the conceptualisation of employee wellbeing, beginning with the individual employee.

First, the findings emphasise that employees are different; they have their own needs and perceptions of what employee wellbeing is and what is important to them. Reviewed prior definitions emphasise the technical aspects of the concept, beginning definitions with "the starting point for defining the term accepts its multi-faceted nature" (Cooper & Leiter, 2017, p.1). Others describe the "main facets of work-related well-being" of psychological, physical and social dimensions (Guest, 2017, p. 27), that "well-being at work is a multifaceted construct" (Bachman et al., 2023, p.74). The individual is not the lead factor and becomes somewhat lost to technical descriptions, which are necessary, but without the individual employee, employee wellbeing would be a different concept.

Second, the findings show that having integration or balance between work and home life is a vital condition for employee wellbeing. Having boundaries between work and non-work domains helped individuals develop balance, and for some, establishing a separation between the two aspects of a participant's life was necessary. For example, some individuals attempted to limit the work they took home or attempted to minimise the level of interactions they had with their workplace during non-work time. In congruence, research highlights the

impacts of work-family conflict which occur when "work and family needs mutually interfere with each other … sometimes creating an important, daily internal conflict, as some activities of these domains are incompatible" (Pascucci et al., 2022, p. 239). Conflict stemming from an individualised desire for work-life integration are evident in the findings, and it is clear that what occurs surrounding working hours impacts employee wellbeing at work. However, the broad concept of work-life balance or integration also moves beyond the work-family dyad to include other life demands relevant to an employee, such as chronic work demands and inadequate organisational or individual resources (Brough et al., 2020). Thus, work and non-work domains cross boundaries and directly impact each other in an inter- and intra-personal exchange.

Despite the importance of balance and work-life integration in the findings, integration of work and personal lives did not appear in any of the reviewed definitions. Instead, prior definitions of employee wellbeing include the non-work environment (Warr, 1999) and how work experiences influence an employee's broader life (Ilies et al., 2015), but not the reverse. These existing definitions allude to a crossover influence of the work and non-work domains, while lacking explicit inclusion of this vital dimension. Including the presence of work and non-work influences as a distinct element to the definition at the end of this section expands prior conceptualisations and provides a broader understanding of what contributes to employee wellbeing.

Third, the findings highlight that individuals want to contribute to the greater good of the organisation through their work, and to participate in work that is meaningful beyond delivering the tasks related to their role. Additionally, participants wanted the outcome of their work and how they contributed to the organisation to be recognised by leaders. Having a positive personal impact on the workplace was not explicitly found in prior reviewed definitions. Instead, authors offered tentative descriptions of "how workers feel about their

work" (ILO., 2023c, n.p.) or the quality of an employee's experiences (A. Grant et al., 2007). These definitions again allude to employee wellbeing encompassing perceptions of work and work-related experiences. However, they miss the vital role of the individual exerting their own positive influence and impacts on the workplace—contributing to, rather than only being a recipient of workplace experiences. These three aspects collectively contribute to a broader and more clarified conceptualisation of employee wellbeing and are part of the extended definition offered at the end of this section.

Work Characteristics. Prior definitions of employee wellbeing describe work dimensions as relating to the "quality of an employee's experience and functioning at work" (A. Grant et al., 2007, p.52) and having more positive than negative affect and attitudes towards work (Cooper & Leiter, 2017). The work dimensions discussed in this section are distinct from the experiential dimensions outlined above, as they are the inter-individual facets that occur outside of the employee. These inter-individual dimensions link with Ilies et al. (2015) argument that employee wellbeing "is influenced by both personal and situational factors" (p.828). Correspondingly, three inter-individual work-related dimensions are shown in the findings and represented in Figure 5.1: work experiences and environment, stressors, and compensation.

First, work experiences and environment have been found in some prior definitions. For example, the ILO (2023c) and Warr (1999) included the work environment in their definitions. Similarly, Ilies et al. (2015) discussed the negative impacts of excessive work demands, alluding to impacts from the work environment. Retaining a explicit work environment dimension is necessary, as interview participants in this study reported that their working environment was the catalyst for making sense of whether they would feel comfortable disclosing about their employee wellbeing. In alignment, Leiter and Maslach (2023) argued

that the work environment needs to be considered when attempting to understand the causes and remedies for burnout (p.138).

Second, in the findings of this research, participants described several working conditions that negatively impacted their employee wellbeing and become stressors. Of the reviewed definitions of employee wellbeing, only Ilies et al. (2015) directly referred to the negative impacts of excessive work demands that may result in strain and conditions, such as burnout. Identifying working conditions that could become stressors as a key dimensions of employee wellbeing was important to participants, but also legislatively. Employers in Australia are now required to identify and mitigate potential psychosocial hazards that pose a risk to employee's psychological health and safety (Comcare., 2024). This is necessary because psychosocial hazards are said to result from or relate to the work environment, including work design and management, workplace interactions and behaviours, and any work-related equipment (SWA., 2022). Outside of reviewed definitions, the broader idea of negative wellbeing corresponds to the findings of this study. Negative wellbeing provides a more complete understanding of the work-related conditions and experiences such as job strain, stress (Inceoglu et al., 2018) and hinderance stressors (Podsakoff et al., 2023) that result in negative impacts to an individual's employee wellbeing. This discussion highlights how stressors, and the work environment are closely linked, and it is crucial that the work environment and stressors are firmly connected to employee wellbeing and need to be explicitly present in a conceptualisation.

The third and final work dimension is compensation. There is a notable omission of financial and non-financial compensation in the extant employee wellbeing literature, which is inappropriate, as this dimension contributes an important tangible element to the conceptualisation of employee wellbeing. The findings of this study show that compensation impacts an employee's life in and outside of work and participants highlighted the associated

cost of living pressures such as mortgages, inflation, and rising interest rates. However, participants in this study also discussed a broader idea of compensation fairness, extending the traditional transactional process of remuneration to consider the work done, the stressors experienced from completing work, and the amount of overtime an individual worked. Interestingly, in broader literature on compensation, Xu et al. (in press) found that employees engage in salary comparisons, inside and external to their organisation, and these impact their sense of distributive justice or perceptions of whether they are fairly compensated. Thus, individuals experience the compensation they receive from their organisation, but also engage in sensemaking to decide whether their total compensation (remuneration, their workload, comparisons to others) is fair. The findings point to the fundamental importance of financial matters through remuneration and fair compensation and the employee process of compensation sensemaking highlight the impact that broader compensation has on employee wellbeing. Therefore, including compensation in a definition of employee wellbeing is essential, and also signals to practitioners that this dimension should not be overlooked in effective leadership of employee wellbeing.

Extended Definition of Employee Wellbeing. The findings discussed in this section have been combined with elements of Suddaby's (2010) construct clarity framework to develop the extended definition of employee wellbeing offered below. The definition contributes and responds to the need for a more unified conceptualisation of employee wellbeing (Pradhan & Hati, 2022). Therefore, based on the preceding discussion, employee wellbeing is defined as:

> The employee specific, individually constructed, fluid phenomenon resulting from an individual's positively and negatively experienced intra- and inter-individual work-related conditions. The concept is multi-dimensional and encompasses a combination of subjective dimensions; social functioning and connection; having a positive personal

impact; physical and psychological functioning health and safety and is influenced by both work and non-work domains, compensation, the work environment, and stressors.

Despite potential future evolution in meaning, this definition contributes a broader and more unified concept and provides a clear foundation for the research and practice of the leadership of employee wellbeing. With employee wellbeing defined, the next section turns to more specifically addressing RQ1: How are workplace actors involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing?

5.3 The Workplace Actors Involved in the Leadership of Employee Wellbeing

To answer RQ1, a model of how workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing was developed from the findings of this study and is presented at the end of this section. However, as the model and answer to RQ1 are complex, this discussion is broken into two sections (Sections 5.3 and 5.4). In this first section, I outline the workplace actors involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. Second, in Section 5.4, I discuss how those workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing and the distinct roles each actor plays. Throughout this discussion, part models (such as Figure 5.2, below) are provided to explain and discuss how workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. The models (i.e. Figure 5.2) only include the elements that are being discussed in the specific sub-section and culminate in the complete framework presented in Section 5.4.3.

5.3.1 Leader Types Involved in the Leadership of Employee Wellbeing

This section discusses the three leader workplace actors: organisation leaders, top-middle, and middle leaders identified in the findings. These actors are illustrated in the partial model presented in Figure 5.2, below, using a triangle to conceptually indicate the organisation. Within the blue triangle there is space for four types of workplace actors and the triangle shape

indicates that organisation leaders are hierarchically highest and that there are less of them in comparison to top-middle and middle leaders within a workplace. Followers are not included in Figure 5.2 as this subsection, 5.3.1, pertains specifically to leaders; however, followers are included in the subsequent sub-section, 5.3.2.

Figure 5.2

Leader Workplace Actors involved in the Leadership of Employee Wellbeing

To adequately address RQ1, it is vital to separate out the leader types, because prior research often homogenises leaders and categorises them as a singular group (Hu et al., 2023; Inceoglu et al., 2021). Unfortunately, there is a danger in grouping all leaders together and overlooking the "distinct job characteristics, such as the demands and resources of leadership positions across different levels and neglects the potential influences of a leader's individual characteristics at different levels of leadership" (Hu et al., 2023, p. 325). Additionally, without distinguishing between leadership levels, it is difficult to accurately understand the influence that hierarchical levels have on the leadership of employee wellbeing (Inceoglu et al., 2021).

Though the employee wellbeing leadership literature is often lacking in regard to levels of leadership (Inceoglu et al., 2021), some researchers have made distinctions. For example, Hu et al. (2023) distinguished between hierarchically high "strategic" level leaders and mid-level leaders (p.325), while Wallis et al. (2021) differentiated between senior leaders and team leaders. Horstmann and Remdisch (2019) isolated leaders and their leadership from organisational leadership, and Inceoglu et al. (2021) highlighted senior leaders, leaders, and organisational influences. In their work, Inceoglu et al. (2021) extended the idea of an organisational influence to recognise entities such as organisational culture. Though this literature indicates the presence of various leader types, the descriptions remain ambiguous, particularly around the organisation leader. The model in Figure 5.2 and the following discussion contributes evidence of three distinct leader workplace actor types and clarifies the previously murky understanding of who is involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. The clarification also contributes to understanding that each leader type performs specific tasks that enable effective leadership of employee wellbeing.

Organisation Leaders. The findings presented in Chapter 4 show that organisation leaders are a small group of the hierarchically highest leaders, including the CEO and Board Members. In the literature, Hu et al. (2023) characterised high-level leaders "as those who mainly supervise others" and who have greater ability to define the demands of their work and control job resources (p.326). Interview participants indicated that leadership began with the CEO and was driven down through the organisation from their example. However, Board Members were noted in some reviewed organisational documents as having the official highest organisational authority but were only mentioned sporadically by participants and were associated with authorising practices. Despite the limited view of Board Member involvement, participants shared that the CEO's behaviour established acceptable behaviour throughout the organisation.

The distinct functions of the organisation leader in the findings differs from the ambiguous characterisation in prior literature, where in employee wellbeing and leadership research, the organisation leader is a complex aggregation of authority and practices linked to other leaders. For example, Horstmann and Remdisch (2019) described an organisation leader as one who has the final authority to allocate organisational resources and "any aspects within the context of the organisation" (p.316). They discussed management teams and leaders of management teams, indicating the potential for multiple leadership levels to be included in the actor group (Horstmann & Remdisch, 2019). Bakker and de Vries (2021) argued that an organisation-type leader includes human resources functions, or leaders who provide job resources, enable appropriate job design, and manage job demands to enable other leaders to care for employees (Eriksson et al., 2011; Klug et al., 2019). While Efimov et al. (2020) argued that "the greatest potential for change" occurs from the organisation (p.10). While the literature outlined here offers some insight into this important leader, the descriptions above (for example, Bakker & de Vries, 2021; Horstmann & Remdisch, 2019) are too vague and do not provide a clear foundation of who this actor is. Most importantly, the literature does not clarify what they specifically do in the leadership of employee wellbeing.

Significantly, the findings of this study show that the organisation leader set a focus on employee wellbeing through structuring the organisation. Through their actions, the organisation leaders used their authority to establish working conditions such as implementing policies. Organisation leaders showed that employee wellbeing was important, and more than an espoused value, instead, it was something that would be practiced. Through their structuring and other practices, employee wellbeing and the leadership of employee wellbeing were directly impacted, which enabled leaders and followers to enact their distinct roles within the leadership of employee wellbeing.

Middle Leaders. Hierarchically beneath organisation leaders are the middle leaders, who are unfortunately not well conceptualised in the literature, where they tend to be clustered together. Middle leaders are defined as those "whose job includes similar amounts of responsibilities in supervising others and being supervised" (Hu et al., 2023, p. 326). In other words, middle leaders are a diverse group who share characteristics of being a leader and follower. This "sandwiched middle" position between sometimes multiple layers of leaders above and followers beneath plays a vital role in an organisation's operations (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020, p. 124). Prior literature suggests that middle leaders have a difficult position in the organisation, frequently having high job demands, but lower ability to control work resources; consequently, their employee wellbeing is negatively impacted (Hu et al. (2023). Interestingly, Hu et al. (2023) found that middle leader wellbeing was lower than both followers and higher-level leaders, and female middle leaders were particularly vulnerable and reported the lowest general health conditions of any group in their study.

Despite the lack of clarity surrounding middle leaders described above, the findings contribute two distinct types of middle leaders, termed in Chapter 4 as middle and top-middle leaders. The finding or two types of middle leaders from this study aligns with Gjerde and Alvesson's (2020) argument that middle leaders are not one homogenous group. Instead, middle and top-middle leaders each have different functions within the organisation and work with different types of subordinates.

Spagnoli et al. (2021) argued that middle leaders "perform an important liaison and mediation function between the strategic vision of top management and the line" (p.2). In other words, middle leaders act as a strategic pivot point between followers hierarchically beneath and higher leaders above. These leaders transfer information and practices from higher leaders to other middle leaders and followers. They then transfer information and practices from

followers to leaders hierarchically above; however, the findings show each middle leader type works with specific groups hierarchically above and below them.

Based on the findings of this study, top-middle leaders encompass executive leaders (exclusive of the CEO and Board Members) and group leaders. These top-middle leaders work directly with the CEO and implement strategic plans within their organisational function. For example, the human resources group leader may contribute to the annual plan, which sets out the strategic purpose and deliverables for their functional portion of the organisation. Retaining employees may be a key strategic imperative, and the human resources group leader develops relevant plans and initiatives to meet the aims set by the CEO. The findings presented in Chapter 4 showed that top-middle leaders worked closely with middle leaders and provided individual support and guidance. They transferred information from middle leaders to organisation leaders to solve problems and provide feedback and organisational knowledge.

In contrast, the findings highlight that middle leaders work directly with followers hierarchically beneath, and with top-middle leaders above. This description is similar to Hu et al.'s (2023) broad definition (they did not distinguish between middle leader types) of middle leaders as having responsibility for leading others while also being supervised by hierarchically higher leaders. For example, Taylor, a middle leader, helped a follower with a serious employee wellbeing concern and reported the information to their leader, who relayed the information and actions taken to the CEO. Additionally, the findings show that the complex role of the middle leader includes supporting followers' employee wellbeing through problem-solving, providing resources, listening, empathising, and role modelling. Adding to the findings on middle leaders, Horne and Lupton (2019) argued that middle leaders spend more of their time in facilitation and operational aspects rather than working on policies, plans, and objectives. This distinction aligns with the role of middle leaders, but not for top-middle leaders, and consequently reinforces the necessary distinction between the two middle leader types.

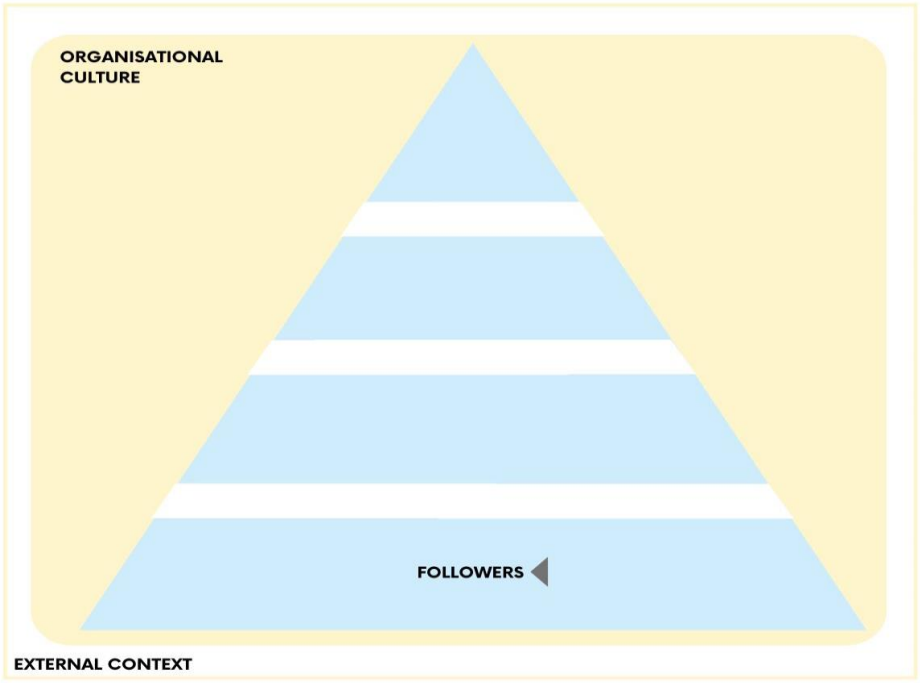
The functional differences just described provide the distinction between organisation leaders, top-middle leaders, and middle leaders in the leadership of employee wellbeing. Each leader type plays a distinct role and contributes to the overall leadership of employee wellbeing. Thus, when a leader type is missing, leadership of employee wellbeing is limited. For example, in Apex Group, a middle leader was filling their own role and the role of the top-middle leader. The middle leader was not given the same authority that a top-middle leader would usually have. In addition, their workload increased due to filling two roles; consequently, their focus shifted to operational functions, leading to the development of dysfunctional leadership of employee wellbeing. In their findings, Stein et al. (2020) highlighted that it is not enough to have adequately trained leaders. Instead, leaders' workloads need to be optimised "to enable them to engage in supportive behaviour toward their followers" (p.840). The multi-functional roles of different leaders in this discussion highlight that the leadership of employee wellbeing occurs within, not adjacent to, the operation of the organisation. Thus, working conditions need to be understood and amended as appropriate for effective leadership of employee wellbeing.

5.3.2 Follower and Non-Human Workplace Actors Involved in the Leadership of Employee Wellbeing

With the leader workplace actor types established, this sub-section discusses the non-leader followers and non-human actants involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing, as represented in Figure 5.3, below.

Figure 5.3

Followers and Non-Human Actants Involved in the Leadership of Employee Wellbeing



Followers are often overshadowed by leaders in research, and more follower perspectives have been necessary for some time (Kaluza et al., 2021). This discussion responds to this need and provides evidence for the employee wellbeing leadership literature that followers are distinctly involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. While the findings show that followers are different and are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing, literature tends to assume that employees are essentially homogenous (Jorgensen et al., 2024). The sameness is particularly evident in models of employee wellbeing, where researchers "do not acknowledge that there may be significant differences in the ways employees make sense of their workplace experiences" (Jorgensen et al., 2024, p. 9). Instead, it is important to start from an assumption that "employees are not blank slates" and expect that they bring with them prior experiences that span their lifetimes and that impact how they make sense current experiences (Jorgensen et al., 2024). Therefore, it is critical for the leadership of employee wellbeing to acknowledge the role and active participation of followers.

Oc et al. (2023) argued that followers are a "particularly critical actor in influencing leaders and shaping leadership outcomes" (p.1), reinforcing this idea, Matthews et al. (2021) asserted that followers present a crucial boundary condition in leadership. The findings of this study show that followers are an integral part of the organisation and are not passive recipients of leadership. Instead, followers practice self-leadership through taking actions that support and improve their employee wellbeing. Followers are also involved through intra-individual processes of sensemaking, taking actions through providing feedback to leaders on their work-related experiences, and their current state of employee wellbeing. Followers also exert an influence on leaders' employee wellbeing. However, it is important to acknowledge that the findings show that the followers' involvement was different to the various leaders. Hu et al. (2023) and Inceoglu et al. (2021) emphasised that hierarchically higher levels of leadership have more control over work resources, which corresponds with the findings just described, where followers are limited to predominantly intra-personal leadership practices and influencing others.

Non-Human Actors. Leaders and followers are treated as "the main actors of leadership processes" (Oc & Carpini, 2023, p. 359); however, two non-human actants were identified in the findings: the external context and organisational culture (the yellow curve-sided square and yellow box, respectively, in Figure 5.3). These two actant types are complex and both meet the actor-network theory definition of an actant, as any thing that makes a difference; however "if it has no figuration yet, [it is] an actant" (Latour, 2005, p. 71). Both external context and organisational culture exerted an influence on the case organisations, which made a difference to employee wellbeing. However, as neither are tangible, or as Latour describes—have no figuration, these are actants instead of actors.

Additionally, the non-human actants do not function in the same way that human workplace actors do. Critically, they do not meet the definition of leadership as something that

has an “intentional influencing of ideas, meanings and emotions of others” (Alvesson et al., 2023, p. 459). Organisational culture as an influencer of the leadership of employee wellbeing is not an active participant because, as a non-human, it does not have the capacity to be intentional. Likewise, external contexts also exert a powerful influence on employee wellbeing and the leadership of employee wellbeing; however, it is an involuntary influence. The context cannot choose to participate in the leadership of employee wellbeing. Thus, this study contributes evidence of the involvement of two non-human workplace actants as intangible influencers on the leadership of employee wellbeing.

The location of the curve-sided yellow box behind the leaders and followers indicates that aspects of the organisational culture is a backdrop to the leadership of employee wellbeing. The findings from interview participants show that organisational culture was a significant influencer of employees within the workplace. Leaders are also involved with organisational culture (see p.210); however, it is important to clarify that the influence of organisational culture also exists outside of them and reflects the pervasive nature of the concept. For example, Chatman and Choi (2022) asserted that cultural norms “can act as a social control system in organisations because norms translate into observable behaviours and attitudes which are relevant, and because informants can report on and articulate them” (Chatman & Choi, 2022, p. 93). Human workplace actors contribute to embedding norms into an organisation’s culture that persist once they are no longer working in the organisation (Chatman, 2021). However, Williams (2022) argued that underlying values and assumptions found embedded within an organisation’s culture are “difficult to discern, relatively stable over time and … difficult to change” (p.17). Consequently, the established organisational culture acts as an encompassing backdrop influencer within the organisation that is not entirely dependent on current human workplace actors for its continuation.

Organisational culture can influence employee action through embedded norms and values due to the inherent nature of the concept, which has been defined in many ways; however, the most widely accepted conceptualisation (Williams, 2022) defines organisational culture as:

> The accumulated shared learning of that group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration; which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, feel, and behave in relation to those problems. This accumulated learning is a pattern or system of beliefs, values, and behavioural norms that come to be taken for granted as basic assumptions and eventually drop out of awareness (Schein & Schein, 2017, p. 6).

Descriptions of organisational culture in the findings align with Schein and Schein's (2017) definition and several normalised behaviours and attitudes, functional and dysfunctional, were identified in the findings. Participant Quinn described taking followers for coffee to build positive relationships with individuals. At the end of their description, they justified the time they spent building social connection with followers and quickly explained that they also used out of work time or minimised the amount of time spent on the practice so not to encroach on what they considered was their actual work. There was no indication that Quinn had been reprimanded over their coffee catch-up practices, but they had a strong normalised attitude toward what was appropriate use of work time and informal leadership practices did not appear to be part of that ideal.

The pervasive influence of organisational culture in a workplace (Williams, 2022) is perhaps due to being found at three levels within an organisation. Schein and Schein (2017) argued that the top most visible layer contains artefacts; the second, less noticeable, though still

overt values and beliefs; and finally, the underlying assumptions that are the implicit beliefs that guide practices and tell employees how to think and feel. Williams (2022) suggested that artefacts include organisation documents that represent and may reinforce organisational culture. The reviewed documents outlined in the findings showed that the case organisations used texts in an attempt to embed and reinforce their values and explicit desires for their organisational culture. However, Williams (2022) cautioned that organisation documents do not always accurately reflect the culture in action. Thus, the enacted values are instead a "manifestation of the underlying basic assumptions that commonly, and often implicitly, guide the decisions and behaviours of individuals within the organisation" (Williams, 2022, p.8). The descriptions from Schein and Schein (2017) and added to by Williams (2022) on the underlying assumptions align with the findings where participants described that the existing organisational culture influenced employee action and how individuals felt about going to work. Thus, the organisational culture, in part, acts an influencer beyond human actions.

Next, the findings in Chapter 4 showed that the external context as an actant was constantly intertwined with human workplace actors. Together, the actors and actant created a complex impact on employee wellbeing and the leadership of employee wellbeing as individuals responded to what was happening in the world around them, which exerted within-organisation pressures and responses. The literature helps to expand this finding, and Oc and Carpini (2023) argued that leadership does not occur in isolation, rather environmental and contextual factors need to be considered. The broad omnibus context of leadership includes "*who* is being led, as well as *where* and *when* is leadership occurring" (Oc & Carpini, 2023, p.360). Importantly, in their conceptual work, Inceoglu et al. (2021) suggested that macro external contexts influence the leadership of employee wellbeing and include economic conditions and macro-cultural norms.

Significantly, the findings of this thesis show that external contexts can be enablers or constrainers of the leadership of employee wellbeing. For example, the legislative context in which Ferris and Apex Groups operated, promoted the leadership of employee wellbeing through establishing minimum working standards and guidelines for workplaces. Interview participant Charlie felt that legislation pulled those who were lagging in adopting social trends towards better care of employees. Conversely, Mason (2019) highlighted the role of "deeply rooted cultural norms" found in the macro-cultural norms in Japanese working context contributed to karoshi, the phenomenon of death by overworking (p.882). Thus, the various external contexts in which an organisation operates is a powerful influencer of action that occurs inside of organisations, but at times, directly impact the leadership of employee wellbeing.

Interestingly, contexts also change. Inceoglu et al. (2021) suggested that "even in 'normal' times, changes in context can happen", but are often underestimated (p.463). Contexts exerting an influence on employee wellbeing were clear in the findings. Some changes occurred gradually over time in response to societal shifts; for example, Charlie described how employees were previously expected to leave their personal lives at home and to hold in any issues when they began in the workforce. Over time, those expectations shifted to be more accepting of individuals and their whole selves. Major changes occurred in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, where there were swift and enduring alterations to working conditions as a result of work from home mandates. Barrero et al. (2023) explained that Covid-19 "triggered a mass social experiment in working arrangements. … Many workers were favourably surprised by their ability to work remotely, and those favourable surprises led to a large, lasting shift to work from home" (p.25). Prior external contexts, particularly improvements and innovations in technology, enabled the wide-spread effective shifts in working patterns required through Covid-19 (Barrero et al., 2023). However, altered work patterns from Covid-

19 resulted in divergent changes. For some, social connection was negatively impacted as work became isolating when working from home. In contrast, some felt that employee wellbeing was reinvigorated, and leaders noted that followers correspondingly adjusted their expectations of work-life balance to one of their highest priorities, effectively putting balance on a pedestal. Across the findings of this study, flexible working became a key driver of balance, as employees experienced many benefits of hybrid working, with some days in the office and some days at home.

Regardless of negative or positive impacts, the work from home mandates, a consequence of the external context of the Covid-19 pandemic, caused employee perceptions about where individuals could work to enduringly alter. Participants stated that flexible work was no longer something that the organisation could consider using as an incentive, it was a minimum expectation. Consequently, if desires for flexible working were unmet, employees would seek employment elsewhere and as the employee market had correspondingly shifted, the perception was that employees would easily find new employment. Inceoglu et al. (2021) highlighted that Covid-19 caused a significant impact on leaders and the leadership of employee wellbeing and drew "attention to the importance of time and temporal dynamics in leadership and health/well-being" and showed how swiftly contexts and associated uncertainty change (Inceoglu et al., 2021, p. 463).

Providing leadership though engaging in structural change within the organisation was necessary as a result of the external contexts; however, the findings show that change was not a linear process. Instead, leaders had to learn new practices to effectively lead flexible working conditions; for example, organisation leaders in Ferris Group implemented organisation-wide changes to acceptable work locations that were communicated to employees. However, as people worked different days in the office and at home, employees gave feedback that they were spending much of their day on video calls. The organisational leader iterated on their

initial change to flexible working, and set days were implemented that required employees to be on-site on specific days for face-to-face work. Apex Group implemented a flexible working policy, and likewise encountered unexpected issues. For example, in response to a lack of clarity in their team, Reese developed a calendar system showing who was working from home and who was on leave so colleagues knew who should and should not be contacted.

The findings from this study showed that learning to change in response to external contexts was difficult. Likewise, findings from Gratton (2023) showed that only 2% of participating senior executives in their study felt they had reached the final redesign of hybrid work conditions, with the majority still making changes to their organisation's flexible work design. Redesigning for flexible work is difficult, in part due to the traditional normalised cultural perceptions of how and where work should be done (Gratton, 2023). As noted in the definition of organisational culture presented earlier, organisational culture is predicated on underlying assumptions that become so ingrained they become taken for granted attitudes and beliefs about the correct way something should be done (Schein & Schein, 2017). Thus, altering work patterns can be slow and difficult.

The discussion throughout Section 5.3 has presented four distinct human workplace actors and two non-human actants who are involved in or influence the leadership of employee wellbeing. This discussion on the actors and actants clarifies and extends prior literature and provides evidence of their separate roles and functions. Therefore, future research can explore the leadership of employee wellbeing with an understanding that leader types are distinct, followers do contribute, and attention needs to be given to external contexts and the pervasive influence of organisational culture.

5.4 How Workplace Actors are Involved in the Leadership of Employee Wellbeing

With the workplace actors who are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing outlined, I now turn attention to more specifically addressing RQ1: How are workplace actors involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. This section is divided into three parts. First, in Section 5.4.1, I present the leader initiated or dominant functions and practices that show how leaders are involved in enacting and enabling the leadership of employee wellbeing. Next, in Section 5.4.2, I discuss the intra-individual processes and self-leadership practices involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. Following this discussion, in Section 5.4.3, drawing on each of the partial models presented throughout Sections 5.3 and 5.4, I present the complete framework depicting how workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. Finally, I reflect on healthy leadership theory in comparison to the findings and discussion.

5.4.1 Leader Initiated or Dominant Functions in the Leadership of Employee Wellbeing

In this section, I discuss leader initiated, or dominant, functions and outline the practices and roles specific to workplace actors with formal leadership positions, as shown in the simplified model in Figure 5.4 below. Combined, these leader practices partly answer RQ1 by addressing how leader workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing.

Figure 5.4

Leader Practices in the Leadership of Employee Wellbeing

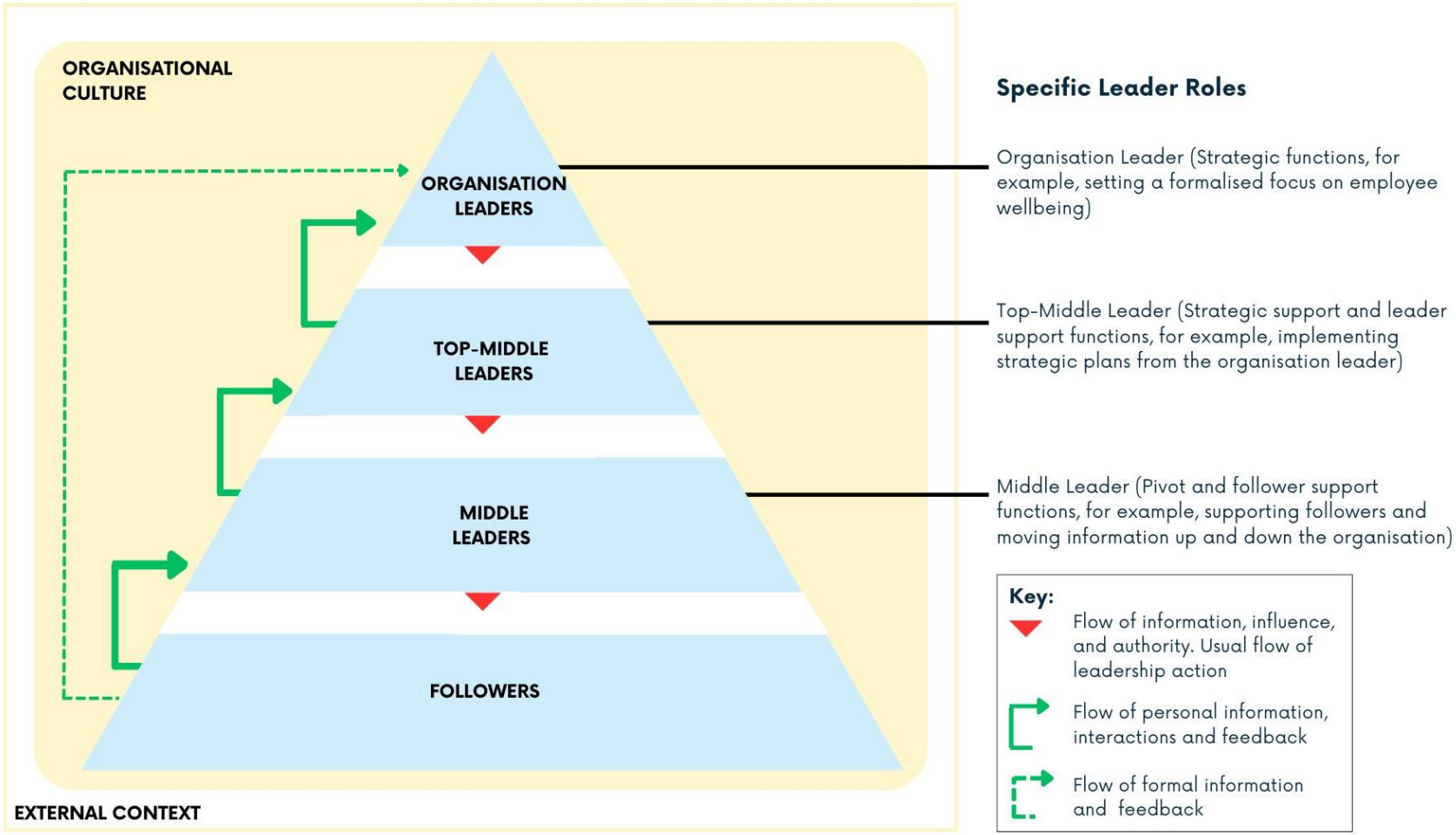


Figure 5.4 illustrates the leader functions, which are varied and inter-relate, but importantly, the findings of this study and Inceoglu et al. (2021) show that leader practices exist within the non-human external context. Significantly, leader functions are also encompassed within the pervasive influence of organisational culture, which according to the findings of this research and Schein and Schein (2017), impact the day-to-day attitudes and practices of organisation members. The red arrows in Figure 5.4 indicate the findings that show authority, information, influence, and leadership practices usually flow from organisation leaders at the top, down through each leader type, throughout the workplace. As highlighted in Section 5.3.1, one leader function often interrelates or depends on another or several others for implementation, feedback, support, and other activities to enable or enact leadership. Hu et al. (2023) likewise highlighted the interrelatedness of different types of leaders who have differing functions in the organisation.

The directional flow of the green arrows in Figure 5.4 are meaningful because they illustrate legitimate interaction paths. Reitzig and Maciejovsky (2015) suggested that "hierarchies—layers of sequential authority—are ubiquitous in organisations and are introduced to solve two key design problems: enabling coordination and fostering cooperation among employees" (p.1979). Likewise, the green arrows in Figure 5.4 illustrate how workplace actors are involved in moving information about employee wellbeing through the organisation along hierarchical lines so that leaders have the information they require to lead employee wellbeing. While the green arrow stems from followers indicating that information comes from them, the practice of gaining the information is initiated by leaders. For example, formal meetings to discuss professional development and employee wellbeing were set by leaders.

The broken green arrow indicates formal paths identified in the findings of this research where mechanisms such as surveys were used. In contrast, the flow of information and feedback indicated by the solid green arrows is less formal, where information flowed between

a leader and individual follower through scheduled meetings, informal coffee catchups, social events, and other instances of individual interaction. In the findings, information and feedback moved from followers to their direct leader, up through the organisation one hierarchical level at a time, ending with the organisation leaders. This flow of information following hierarchical lines aligns with employee voice theory, which was recently defined as the "upward communication" individuals take to achieve their personal or work-related goals (Pfrombeck et al., 2022, p. 4). Interestingly, findings presented in Chapter 4 show that employees of any hierarchical level could theoretically interact with any leader; however, there was an expected interaction order. Participant Ash explained that skipping a direct leader for a hierarchically higher leader without an appropriate reason would be viewed negatively. The expectation for individuals to speak within the hierarchical structure was unexpected. Though perhaps should not be surprising, given research on employee voice argues that hierarchies can negatively impact individuals from speaking up because of the power difference between the employee types (Pfrombeck et al., 2022). It is important to note that the green arrows, particularly the solid arrows, link closely with inter-individual connection which is discussed further later (see. p. 227).

Though this section relates specifically to leader initiated or dominant practices, followers are included in the model above, first, in the sense that any employee beneath the organisation leader are followers to those hierarchically above them. In this view, the leadership of employee wellbeing is not an isolated phenomenon, rather, it is a joint eco-system of many workplace actors within an organisation. Second, followers, the non-leader employees, are involved as recipients of leader practices and through providing information.

Analysis of leader practices resulted in identification of three major leader functions in the leadership of employee wellbeing, and as shown in the pull-out text in Figure 5.4 above, they have role specific involvement. For example, organisation leaders set strategic plans, top-

middle leaders implemented the plans in their portion of the organisation, and middle leaders further implemented plans within departments and teams and supported followers directly. The three crucial leader initiated or dominant functions are: establishing a foundation of employee wellbeing within the organisation, structuring the organisation to enable leadership of employee wellbeing, and establishing and enabling interpersonal connection and practices. These three core leader functions each have multiple embedded practices that enable or enact the leadership of employee wellbeing and are discussed in the following sub-sections.

Establishing a Foundation of Employee Wellbeing in the Organisation. The first leader function is to establish a foundation of employee wellbeing. This is achieved through gaining an understanding and awareness of collective and individual employee wellbeing, in addition to developing organisational culture and the work environment, establishing a formalised focus on employee wellbeing through strategic planning, and developing policy.

Having an Awareness of Employee Wellbeing. The findings show that a foundational aspect of the leadership of employee wellbeing is having a genuine understanding of what the concept means to individuals and how an employee feels. Without understanding the individual, leaders are at risk of implementing practices not relevant to employees. For example, participants felt that leaders could not do anything if they did not know what employees wanted or needed. From the findings, there are three facets to having an awareness of employee wellbeing—understanding the concept (discussed in Section 5.2), having a collective organisational understanding of employee wellbeing, and having an awareness of individual employee wellbeing. These last two aspects are discussed here. It is important to note that in this study, gaining a collective and individual awareness of employee wellbeing was intertwined with formal and informal mechanisms and these were not practiced as two distinct activities.

Despite the importance of gaining an awareness of employee wellbeing, Pradhan and Hati (2022) reported a surprising lack of suitable tools and measures in the literature. Of the mechanisms available to gain an awareness of employee wellbeing in the literature, Wijngaards et al. (2021) outlined four measures. First and second are closed question and word measures related to surveys. In this study, formal organisation-wide surveys were used by both case organisations as their primary information gathering practice on employee wellbeing. The reliance on this mechanism is consistent with the literature, which suggests that surveys are the "preferred instrument for measuring employee wellbeing" (Wijngaards et al., 2021, p. 797). In the findings, surveys were used to gather broad anonymous information from employees, which leaders then used in strategic planning and other organisation-wide practices. For example, participant Blair explained that surveys were run and issues identified during Covid-19, and corresponding action was taken. Additionally, top-middle and middle leaders used survey data to address issues in their team or group. For example, Reese described that their leader acknowledged issues and sought in-person feedback on ways to address the problems.

Though organisational surveys were widely used to gain an awareness of employee wellbeing, there were some limitations surrounding the questions asked. For example, participant Ash described a survey question that asked whether they had a best friend at work. They commented that they did not need a best friend at work and did not come to work for such an intense social connection and had those types of relationships outside of their workplace. Instead, for Ash, poor social wellbeing included colleagues who withheld information and would not work effectively with others. The social wellbeing dimension was not made specific to the context of the work situation they faced. While the creator of the survey deemed having a best friend at work as necessary, this was not relevant to the individual employee. Consequently, the broad question in the survey did not provide leaders with the information required to address Ash's social wellbeing problem. Therefore, it is perhaps not

surprising that despite the systematic use of surveys in the case organisations, Flynn felt that as a leader, they lacked processes for gaining an understanding of individual follower's wellbeing. Instead, leaders relied on less formal mechanisms to gather information from people in their team.

The third tool outlined by Wijngaards et al. (2021) are behavioural measures and include observing employees, which was also highlighted by leaders in this study. However, observation requires leaders and followers to be in the same working space, which is not always possible in some organisations, such as when employees work in a hybrid style at home and from the office. Indeed, participant Kai discussed the difficulties of gaining an awareness of followers' employee wellbeing when they were not in the same physical location. Thus, while observing followers can be useful, other mechanisms are likely required to provide wider relevant information. The fourth measure discussed by Wijngaards et al. (2021) involves understanding physical markers from an employee, such as cardiovascular activity. Physiological measures can involve using intrusive wearable devices and are likely only be appropriate for specific organisations or roles where understanding the physical state of an employee is necessary.

Though the findings and discussion above show that formal mechanisms can be useful, there are also limitations. The findings of this study also show that less formal mechanisms can be used to gain an awareness of employee wellbeing. Less formal, though still structured, measures include on-on-one meetings between a leader and their follower. Efimov et al. (2020) found that meetings are a valuable tool for leaders to provide and gain information from followers. Likewise, in this study, scheduled catch-up meetings were a forum where followers could share information directly with leaders. Though significantly, the findings of this research show that reoccurring and pre-booked meetings reduced follower anxiety because they did not have to contact their leader and arrange an appointment.

Leader communication is an essential practice and is discussed in more depth in a coming section (see p.233); however, speaking directly to followers was an essential informal mechanism, and participant Flynn explained that talking to followers was the only mechanism outside of surveys they felt they had to gain an understanding of employee wellbeing. Likewise, further informal mechanisms included the surprising use of ad hoc, and at times, impromptu checking in with followers through getting coffee to chat. Such personal contact is important because "a lack of personal contact with the employees can hinder the managers' ability to understand the individual working situations and limits of his or her employees" (Horstmann & Remdisch, 2019, p. 316). Thus, literature and this study show that without personal contact with followers, leaders are less able to effectively understand a follower's employee wellbeing.

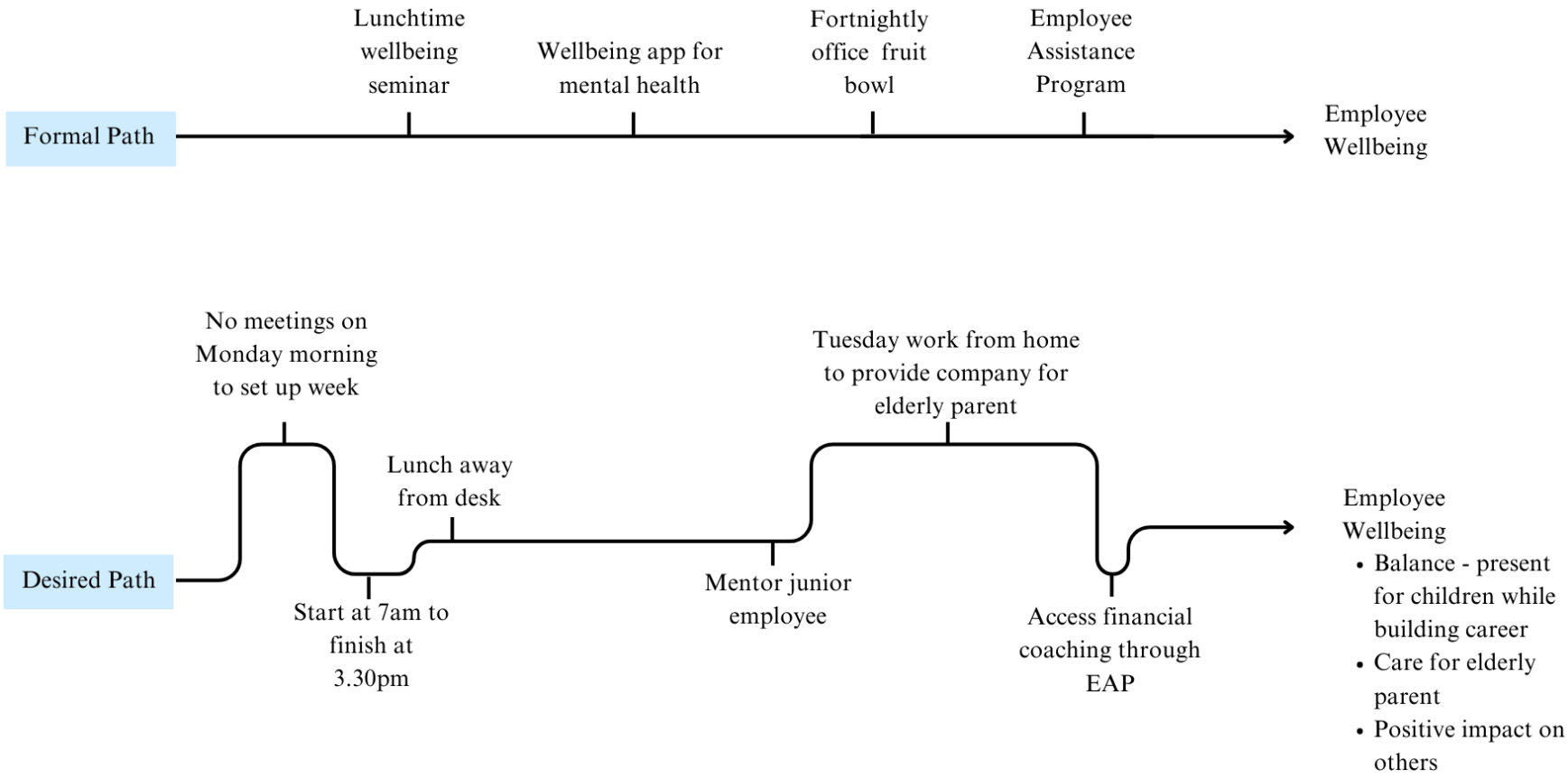
Understanding the purpose of gaining information is vital so that the data gathered are relevant for the intended end use (Wijngaards et al., 2021). Despite the mechanisms identified, the findings show it is difficult for leaders to always maintain a current understanding of employee wellbeing. Leaders outlined that they required additional support and training in identifying followers' needs and understanding what signs and symptoms of poor employee wellbeing they should be watching for. Therefore, gaining an understanding of individual employee wellbeing may require a different approach from the most common mechanisms already outlined.

To extend the findings of this study, literature from urban planning literature presents the concept of desire paths describes the processes of people, individually and collectively, forming routes that take them from where they are to where they want to be without regard for formal structures (Nichols, 2014). Desire paths often "signal that formal paths and sidewalks are not ideal for at least some pedestrians and that they want a different, better, and often more expedient route" (Nichols, 2014, p. 648). In other words, individuals take and make desirable pathways to reach an outcome that better meets their needs than what is offered through formal

structures. Figure 5.5, below, conceptually illustrates the difference between a formal path to employee wellbeing and a desired path to employee wellbeing. Interview participants shared that as part of leading employee wellbeing, top-middle leaders take the overarching objectives from strategic plans (within their organisational function) and develop specific activities and initiatives. Thus, a leader may determine that providing a lunchtime seminar on wellbeing, a wellbeing app, a fortnightly fruit bowl, and an EPA will improve employee wellbeing across the organisation.

Figure 5.5

Conceptual Formal Path and Desire Path to Employee Wellbeing



The findings show that a fortnightly fruit bowl was available in one organisation, yet the only participant who mentioned the initiative was in a human resources-related role. The participant indicated that fresh fruit was important for people to eat, but did not discuss how the deliveries helped employee wellbeing; instead, they enthusiastically shared that the practice had been implemented. There was no indication that the fruit bowls were unwelcome; rather, participants did not discuss a desire for the service, any benefits from the initiative, or even indicate that the practice existed. Additionally, as this research has shown, employee wellbeing extends beyond physical health, encompassing the whole person. In this instance, the formal path to employee wellbeing highlights an inappropriate expectation that employees are homogenous and will respond to a set of initiatives similarly with an outcome of positive employee wellbeing. Jorgensen et al. (2024) highlighted that this incorrect assumption is pervasive in human resource theory and models, particularly related to employee wellbeing.

The end-state in Figure 5.5 highlights the key difference between the formal and desire path approach. In the formal path, the individual-specific meaning employee wellbeing and what is important them is unknown. Conversely, a desired path to employee wellbeing may reflect an individual's family or personal commitments, desired opportunities for professional development, and other relevant factors that could direct leader attention to relevant leadership practices that can support individual employee wellbeing. Similarly, Brooks and Wilkinson (2022) argued that employee voice (expressing dissatisfaction or a desire for change) is "a critical mechanism for employees to improve working conditions and enable them to change situations which may lead them to feel exhausted or to withdraw from the workplace" (p.352). Therefore, developing a desired path mechanism is likely beneficial for the leadership of employee wellbeing so that individuals can establish what is important for them and aspects that need to change or be refined.

Despite the benefits, Nichols (2014) highlighted that it is difficult to establish desired paths in organisations due to the necessity to balance competing desires and values. The findings clearly showed that employees are not homogenous, they certainly have differing, and at times competing, demands. For example, two participants found the social club and social connection beyond at work interactions valuable, while another wanted colleagues to know something about them, but specifically did not want to be part of the social club and spend time outside of work socialising. Alvesson and Einola (2019) likewise highlighted competing priorities and demands that exist in organisations between different shareholders: employees, customers, colleagues, owners or the organisation itself. Thus, establishing desired paths to employee wellbeing is unlikely to be straight forward.

Indeed, Brooks and Wilkinson (2022) asserted that employees can be reluctant to voice their concerns due to fears about negatively impacting their career or being embarrassed. This caution regarding individual fears is important as two different incidents in the findings demonstrated participant hesitancy. First, Quinn shared that they felt employees did not use the EAP because they were concerned that leaders would find out. Second, Drew explained that it was difficult for some followers to share their opinions in employee survey and be transparent about their experiences if the mechanism was not anonymous. It was not clear from the findings why this was the case; however, several participants paused in their interviews seeking reassurance that information shared would be kept confidential, suggesting a reluctance to be transparent about workplace concerns. While this conceptual model arose from the findings of this research, there has been little previous exploratory research on how employee voice can be encouraged for employee wellbeing (Brooks & Wilkinson, 2022). Thus, future research is necessary to understand how a desired path could be enacted as a mechanism to gain awareness of an individual's employee wellbeing needs within the leadership of employee wellbeing.

Such future research would also address Brooks and Wilkinson's (2022) call for more research on the links between employee voice and employee wellbeing.

It is important to emphasise that the discussion presented throughout this section reflects my worldview from an Australian context. Leaders gaining information about employee wellbeing through followers providing feedback, which may include negative information about leaders and an individual having poor employee wellbeing, may not be universally normalised or accepted. For example, Schein and Schein (2017) described that the Japanese division of an American organisation rolled out a program with face-to-face feedback from leaders to followers. While a whole-of-organisation feedback implementation was considered to be complete, leaders from Japan commented "of course we don't do that, it would not work in our culture, we have other ways of getting things across to our subordinates, never direct face-to-face!" (p.182). The discussion in this section and model representing the flow of information, the specific roles of workplace actors, the mechanisms they use, and the potential for developing an individual desire path for employee wellbeing reflect the macro-Australian context relevant to the data from this thesis. Thus, exploring beyond an Australian or Western context would be helpful in future research to expand contextual understanding.

Shaping Organisational Culture and the Work Environment. Organisational culture was outlined earlier; however, the focus there was on the influence of organisational culture as a non-human workplace actant. Here, attention shifts to human workplace actor involvement related to organisational culture. Participants highlighted that organisational culture is paramount to employee wellbeing and the leadership of employee wellbeing, because the culture influenced the normalised behaviours of leaders and followers throughout the organisation. This includes what employees perceived were acceptable practices and attitudes as "organisation culture is socially constructed, learned behaviour and beliefs that are shared between members of the organisation" (Williams, 2022, p. 9). There was an expectation from

organisation documents that organisational culture could be influenced by individuals in a workplace, and in congruence, O'Reilly et al. (in press) argued that there is "almost universal agreement that leaders define and shape organisational culture" (p.1). Correspondingly, from participant interviews, there was a general expectation that the leadership of employee wellbeing started with the hierarchically highest organisational leaders, because the CEO set an implicit expectation for what was acceptable. In their recent work, O'Reilly et al. (in press) found that a CEO's personality and values, their "relatively stable patterns of thought, emotion, and behaviour that are consistent over time and across situations" are likely important contributing factors to organisational culture (p.21). This occurs because a CEO's behavioural patterns are expected to flow down through the organisation and establish cultural elements (O'Reilly et al., in press).

Interestingly, Schein and Schein (2017) agreed that consistency is paramount; however, they argued that multiple types of leaders are involved in influencing organisational culture rather than only the CEO. Instead, they included "founders, leaders, managers", thus, multiple types of leaders are likely involved in influencing, embedding, and continuing organisational culture (p.184). Additionally, Schein and Schein (2017) offered six primary mechanisms that leaders could use to embed beliefs, values, and assumptions in organisational culture:

1) What leaders pay attention to, measure, and control on a regular basis
2) How leaders react to critical incidents and organisational crises
3) How leaders allocate resources
4) Deliberate role modelling, teaching, and coaching
5) How leaders allocate rewards and status
6) How leaders recruit, select, promote, and excommunicate (p.183).

Of the mechanisms Schein and Schein (2017) discussed, they asserted that the most crucial mechanism leaders have "for communicating what they believe in or care about is what they systematically pay attention to" (p.184). In Ferris Group, a participant described the ongoing norm of caring for individuals. Organisation leaders reinforced espoused values of caring for employee wellbeing by personally checking in with employees experiencing health issues and being flexible to accommodate personal requests. Participant Devan described leaders (though not the specific leader type) sending a care package to employees at an international office who were heavily affected by Covid-19 to show employees in that office that their mental wellbeing was important and other colleagues were thinking of them and aware of their situation. The espoused values of caring and employee wellbeing were reinforced through leader actions.

In Apex Group, leaders reinforced negative cultural norms of conflict avoidance, which resulted in serious issues remaining unaddressed. Conversely, in the same organisation a participant shared that having flexible working conditions had become normalised and people felt more comfortable with the practice. Corresponding research highlights the importance of organisational norms and stigmas associated with employee wellbeing. For example, in their recent work, Pischel and Felfe (2023) argued that organisational stigmas impact the leadership of employee wellbeing through negatively or positively influencing employee willingness to disclose about psychological ill health. Therefore, monitoring organisational culture norms and associated stigmas may be part of Schein and Schein's (2017) idea of "systematically paying attention" to provide effective leadership of employee wellbeing (p.184). For example, becoming aware of and shifting perceptions about using informal mechanisms to embrace leaders catching up with followers during work time as a positive practice to build social connection and gain awareness of employee wellbeing. Instead of the practice being perceived as an improper use of work time.

Additionally, Williams (2022) argued that "the behaviours and norms in organisations are a representation of shared values" and such shared values are often explicitly stated in formal organisational documents such as annual reports and on organisation websites (p.8). Therefore, organisational documents may serve as mechanisms for leaders to influence organisational culture. However, the values found in organisation documents may vary from enacted values (Williams, 2022). This caution again suggests that leaders need to be aware of the embedded underlying assumptions driving attitudes, beliefs, and values in their organisational culture that are driving behaviours to ensure leadership of employee wellbeing is enabled and embedded.

This discussion has emphasised the foundational role of organisational culture in the leadership of employee wellbeing and provides evidence that organisation leaders, their traits, and most importantly, their consistent behaviours are crucial for influencing organisational culture. However, top-middle and middle leaders and their consistent behaviours and focus are also necessary. Despite what is known, future research exploratory research would be beneficial to gain a more comprehensive understanding of leader and follower involvement with organisational culture specifically related to effective leadership of employee wellbeing.

Next, linked closely to organisational culture was participants' desire for a positive work environment with a supportive culture and psychological safety so that individuals could be open with colleagues and leaders. Edmondson and Bransby (2023) defined psychological safety as "a belief that an environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking" (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023, p. 57). Literature suggests that having psychological safety contributes to the development of a positive work environment, because "candour is expected and possible, psychological safety helps to encourage open and authentic interpersonal behaviours, increase job engagement and satisfaction, cope with stress and strain on the job, and create a supportive and inclusive team climate" (p.66). Participants in this study outlined that the work

environment directly impacted whether they would discuss their employee wellbeing with leaders or colleagues. It was not enough to have employee wellbeing support and programs that individuals could access, participants required an environment where they were comfortable sharing how they were feeling, experiencing the workplace, and any work-life impacts or conflict.

Significantly, Loh et al. (2020) argued that that a psychosocial safety climate is a fundamental antecedent to developing psychological safety. A psychosocial safety climate is the psychological wellbeing specific concept (Loh et al., 2020) that encompasses "employees' shared perceptions of whether the management has developed and enacts policies, procedures, and practices for the protection of employees' psychological health, well-being, and safety" (Bakker et al., 2023, p. 43). Findings from interview participants highlight that addressing psychosocial safety is important due to recent changes in legislation (for example, Comcare., 2024) and participant Charlie anticipated that these changes would impact leadership of employee health and safety.

Extending this discussion, Loh et al. (2020) highlighted four leader practices for implementing a psychosocial safety climate: 1) prioritising psychological health, 2) commitment to and support of stress prevention, 3) organisational communication that encourages employee voice regarding their psychological health concerns, and 4) participation of employees, or representatives, leaders, and organisational members in dealing with psychological health concerns. Each of these practices are seen within the findings, and despite the narrow focus on psychological wellbeing, they reinforce these useful leader practices for the leadership of employee wellbeing.

The discussion above on psychosocial safety climate is likely also relevant to organisation culture. For example, literature suggests that an organisational climate is

associated with, but different from, organisational culture, in that a climate applies "to a specific aspect of the work environment that might be required to achieve a specific outcome … for example, to address legislative requirements or reduce accidents" (Williams, 2022, p. 17). Therefore, despite the narrow focus on psychological wellbeing, practices associated with developing a psychosocial safety climate are likely more widely useful in embedding positive behaviours in organisational culture as part of the leadership of employee wellbeing. Interestingly, Williams (2022) asserted that organisational climate is easier to change, direct, and control than organisational culture because it focuses on tangible structures and systems instead of the embedded beliefs, values, and norms. Therefore, it may be particularly beneficial to establish a psychosocial safety climate in organisations where the key hazards are related to psychological wellbeing.

The discussion on a psychosocial safety climate also highlights an important tangential leader practice. Participants discussed legislation, referring to the updated psychosocial requirements as an important external influencer of change and practices towards employee wellbeing. Thus, it is important for leaders to keep up to date with evolving legislation or new codes of practice and have organisational functions that monitor and incorporate updated requirements into the practices of the organisation.

Developing a Formalised Focus on Employee Wellbeing. A formalised focus on employee wellbeing is a novel contribution arising from this research. The interviews showed that for sustained leadership of employee wellbeing, leaders need to value and focus on the concept, which starts with organisation leaders and is then driven down through the workplace. Participants emphasised that focusing on employee wellbeing must be more than words or routine practices; instead, it is necessary for actions to be genuine, authentic, and sincere. Loh et al. (2020) expected that leaders who "who exhibit high concern" for aspects of employee wellbeing will develop associated practices that support that focus (p.398). Having a focus on

employee wellbeing is therefore crucial. However, maintaining that emphasis is necessary for continued attention and practices relevant to employee wellbeing, which was achieved in the findings through organisation leaders developing a formalised focus.

A formalised focus is different than espoused values of employee wellbeing coming from the organisation leader. In the findings, formalising a focus on employee wellbeing occurred through developing formal strategic documents, such as the annual plan. From the findings, establishing the focus in strategic documents means that specific employees are focused on certain elements of employee wellbeing, a budget line is assigned, and individuals are required to report back on their responsibilities at set points throughout the year. Having a formalised focus from organisation leaders aligns with line of sight theory, which suggests that moving strategic goals into practice "requires development of a 'line of sight' among employees about what the strategy involves and how to contribute" (Boswell, 2006, p. 1489). Likewise, and more recently, Gill et al. (2018) suggested that having a line of sight "provides clear messages to employees on what the organisation needs from them" (p.304). In the context of this research, leaders embedding employee wellbeing in strategic documents such as an annual plan creates a formal line of sight that provides individuals' with an understanding of what part their role plays in enacting elements of the leadership of employee wellbeing.

Without a formalised focus, enacting leadership of employee wellbeing lacks the necessary resources and practices. It is critical that financial and other resources are allocated to employee wellbeing, and importantly, that leaders in different functions and departments have responsibility for specific aspects. For example, a participant was responsible for taking the annual plan and developing specific initiatives relevant to their function and other leaders were then responsible for implementing applicable practices. The formalised focus creates a chain of action and responsibility from the top of the organisation down to followers with

defined accountability associated with a particular role to maintain a consistent organisation-wide focus.

Interestingly, the practices associated with a formalised focus in this study align with Schein and Schein's (2017) six primary mechanisms model; in particular, three specific practices: 1) what leaders pay attention to, measure, and control on a regular basis; 2) how leaders allocate resources; and 3) deliberate role modelling, teaching, and coaching. Thus, developing a formalised focus does not only help to establish a sustained emphasis. According to Schein and Schein's (2017) model, it is a likely mechanism that leaders can use to embed beliefs, values, and assumptions regarding employee wellbeing into their organisational culture.

Developing Policy. The findings show that developing and implementing policies are essential formal mechanisms for structuring the organisation to enable the leadership of employee wellbeing. Both case organisations had a range of policies on employee wellbeing, for example, leave entitlements and health and safety. The findings from participants and documents showed that policies were structural documents approved for implementation by organisation leaders who developed the documents with relevant top-middle leaders and these were implemented by top-middle and middle leaders. Literature on the development and use of policies in the leadership of employee wellbeing literature is scarce. Though, Samad et al. (2022) expected that policies and those who develop them can influence leadership and positively impact dimensions of employee wellbeing through promoting appropriate leader behaviours.

In the findings, policies formalised and reinforced organisational values of inclusion and support, for example, paternity leave and leave policies for same-sex couples who have children. Likewise, the findings highlight that policies function as a safety net, to catch issues

and provide leaders and followers with clear guidance on steps to move forward and address challenges and to clearly outline entitlements. Participant Kai outlined that when there was an employee dispute, followers and leaders could go to the dispute resolution policy and follow the steps in the document to create a solution. The functional importance of policies is reinforced by Loh et al. (2020), who stated that policies and procedures are essential to the development of a psychosocial safety climate and establishing psychological health and safety. In their view, policies, procedures, and practices influence each other to create the structural framework of an organisation for positive psychological wellbeing outcomes (Loh et al., 2020). In contrast, Ferris Group used informal expectations when establishing flexible working. However, as the expectations had not been implemented for long at the time of data collection, it was unclear whether this informality impacted the structural framework of the organisation in contrast to a formal policy document.

Surprisingly, despite the usefulness of policies for leaders, followers, and employee wellbeing outcomes, many participants were only vaguely aware of them and could not name or locate them. Participants tended to view policies as an organisational function or necessity, rather than a useful document that could guide practice and inform leaders and followers on steps to follow for effective functioning within the workplace. These findings highlight that employees need to be constantly reminded of policies, because they were perceived to be written, sent out, and then shelved, with few employees accessing and therefore using them. Future research exploring the important role of policy in the leadership of employee wellbeing and the barriers to leaders and followers' use of the documents in their practice would be beneficial in this important area.

Structuring and Designing Work. The second key leader practice involves structuring and designing work. Organisational structuring is defined as "the way in which work activities are divided or assigned, as well as to the integration and control mechanisms of these activities"

(Chión et al., 2020, p. 1446). Loh et al. (2020) argued that the "hierarchical nature of team, departments, and organisations influence the occurrence of stress through the way top management decide, assign, and set goals and job tasks" (p.399). In other words, organisational structuring is paramount to employee wellbeing and a necessary element in the leadership of employee wellbeing. Structuring work across the organisation includes all human workplace actors; however, it is initiated by, and more prominently involves, leaders who have the authority to enact work structuring and designing.

Work Design. The "content and organisation of one's work tasks, activities, relationships, and responsibilities" (Parker et al., 2017, p. 404) is linked to "almost every end goal that is of concern to an organisation" (Parker, 2014, p. 662). The findings importantly emphasise that poor work design, particularly a lack of prioritisation, increased stressors and for some participants, and had significantly negative impacts on their employee wellbeing. Bakker and de Vries (2021) suggested that it is critical for organisations to constantly monitor and optimise job characteristics to avoid high-stress work environments that can lead to enduring burnout, because job design and redesign can help reduce stressors (Jimmieson et al., 2021). Many work design theories are predicated upon a belief that "certain physical, social, or psychological facets of the job and the organisational environment influence employee well-being and may indirectly affect employee health, behaviour, and performance" (Bakker et al., 2023, p. 32). Therefore, work-related issues and stressors can be addressed through the proactive and reactive work design. Correspondingly, Australian work health and safety legislation requires organisations to monitor potential workplace hazards that could damage an employee's physical or psychological health (SWA., 2022).

According to the findings, participants felt that organisation leaders were responsible for establishing clear work priorities and associated work design, which would then filter down through the organisation. Top-middle and middle leaders facilitated work redesign to reduce

stressors in their teams. For example, Devan shared how a team-wide work redesign was initiated by the middle leader after their department had staffing changes to support employee wellbeing and the individual needs of their team members. The whole team was bought together, and individuals chose the tasks they wanted to work on for different reasons. For some individuals, this included having the opportunity to grow and work on tasks that were technically beyond their hierarchical position in the organisation. The process was fluid, and the leader facilitated individuals indicating their preferences and worked to accommodate individual desires, while not having followers overload themselves and retaining appropriate responsibility.

Connected to leader facilitated work redesign, job crafting is the theory of a "bottom-up" approach to work design (Sarmah et al., 2022, p. 55). Job crafting occurs as "individuals make changes to certain aspects of their work or work roles, on their initiative, to better align their job with their skills, abilities and preferences" (Tims et al., 2022, p. 55). Different dimensions contribute to job crafting, including reducing stressors and increasing positive challenges, increasing job resources, improving social connection, and altering work type or volume (Tims et al., 2022). Individuals on Devan's team were enabled to practice job crafting as they opted into tasks they were passionate about and provided them with an opportunity for growth. Other participants, such as Reese, intentionally designed their workday to ensure they had time each day during their formal break period to go outside and spend time in nature to support their mental health.

While job crafting focuses on individual actions, findings from Sarmah et al. (2022) suggested that leaders positively influence job crafting through autonomy supportive leadership. Correspondingly, the findings of this study illustrated the involvement of leaders in enabling and normalising the job crafting practices described in Devan's team and with Reese. Furthermore, Vakola et al. (2023) suggested that leaders can role model and develop an

environment where individuals can practice job crafting. Therefore, a leader-follower interaction is required to enable and practice job crafting.

Work design also directly impacts the leadership of employee wellbeing, as the findings show that dysfunction arises where leaders have an inappropriate work design that does not reflect the work requirements and contextual circumstances. For example, as outlined earlier, Rory described their leader's complex role, which combined their continuing middle leader position with an acting top-middle role. The leader lacked appropriate authority to take action and had too many followers reporting to them, which severely reduced their ability to effectively practice leadership of employee wellbeing. Consequently, operational concerns superseded attention and action on employee wellbeing. Hayden unknowingly reinforced Rory's comments, saying that when workloads were high, employee wellbeing was frequently dropped, and operational matters took precedence. Consequently, work design cannot be ad hoc; instead, it is critical for leaders to intentionally review workloads and conditions and identify hazards, and as appropriate, redesign work and enable job crafting for effective leadership of employee wellbeing.

Dealing with Issues and Stressors. Participants from this study outlined many issues and stressors arising from a range of different work-related experiences, including socially linked interpersonal conflicts and poor work conditions, such as uncertainty, poor prioritisation of work, and high workloads. Podsakoff et al. (2023) outlined that employee stress is one of the most significant issues in organisations and highlighted recent research suggesting that workplace stress has reached epidemic levels. In the findings presented in Chapter 4, participants were frustrated when leaders overlooked foundational issues that were stressors and instead focused on less important matters that were perceived as easier to address. For example, rather than providing team lunches, participants expected leaders to take meaningful

action to reduce stressors. Unsurprisingly, Bakker et al. (2023) asserted that leaders are central to addressing job demands that contribute to the development of stressors.

It is important to address stressors and issues, because depending on the frequency and severity, job demands lead to individuals exerting greater effort, deleting the within person resources required to cope with the demands, which can lead to poor health and exhaustion (Bakker et al., 2023). Negative stressors that contribute to poor employee wellbeing include role ambiguity and conflict, organisational politics, inadequate resources, administrative hassles, interpersonal conflict, and job insecurity (Podsakoff et al., 2023). Similar stressors were identified in these findings, particularly interpersonal conflicts, role clarity, and a lack of prioritisation, and these aspects negatively impacted employee wellbeing. Addressing these issues and stressors is therefore a key leader task, and the findings of this thesis show that leader urgency is crucial to preventing them from worsening. Importantly, the findings from this research highlight that leaders address issues from within a chain of authority, as leader practices move up the organisation hierarchically.

The literature suggests that leadership interventions in the context of employee health and wellbeing occur at a primary, secondary, and tertiary levels (Gulseren & Lyubykh, 2023; Kelloway & Dimoff, 2017). Primary interventions focus on "changing the workplace, whereas secondary interventions focus on mitigating the effects of workplace stressors on individuals. Tertiary interventions adopt the approach of 'healing the wounded', offering support and counselling to those experiencing strain" (Kelloway & Dimoff, 2017, p. 439). Work and job design (Jimmieson et al., 2021), increasing motivational job resources and reducing health-impairing job demands (Bakker et al., 2023), and developing beneficial employee health and wellbeing leadership (Gulseren & Lyubykh, 2023) can help reduce stressors as primary interventions. Providing leadership support, training, EAPs, or counselling services can support employees to mitigate work-related stressors and provide support after experiencing stressors

as secondary and tertiary interventions (Gulseren & Lyubykh, 2023). In both Apex and Ferris Groups, a limited number of participants discussed using the EAPs, and most often, participants outlined that the program existed but that they had little to no personal experience using them, and was viewed by some participants as a tool for leaders to assist individuals with supporting themselves. Therefore, there is a leader crossover influence on self-leadership utilising organisational resources such as the EAP as an intervention when individuals are experiencing poor employee wellbeing.

As shown above, implementing primary, secondary, and tertiary interventions is helpful; however, understanding organisation or context specific factors is necessary for effective prevention of stressors and issues. For example, Apex Group did not have any processes for capturing psychological near misses, instead their organisation focused on physical health and safety, which while important, was not viewed as the predominant hazard in their workplace. Instead, participant Hayden felt that psychological health and safety was most relevant to their workplace, but they perceived was not understood or discussed enough by leaders. The findings emphasise that top-middle and organisation leaders need to have a sound understanding of the context specific hazards and issues in their workplace to implement effective practices. Indeed, Yao et al. (2021) argued that the internal contexts of an organisation, such as the industry, are important factors in leadership because they create different dynamics and influences in the workplace.

Despite the above discussion of stressors and the correlating negative impacts on employee wellbeing, some stressors were positively experienced by participants. Taylor described the enjoyment of being challenged in their role and found it to be rewarding. Likewise, Parker preferred a very persistent workload because they disliked feeling like they were not achieving anything at work. These positive experiences correspond with challenge stressors described by Podsakoff et al. (2023) as the work demands that "promote the

accomplishment of job tasks and the personal development of the individual" (p.169). According to established literature, challenge stressors may be part of individual motivational processes that lead to increased positive attitudes and emotions towards work (Podsakoff et al., 2023). This discussion reemphasises the importance of understanding individual employee wellbeing, with specific needs and issues and the corresponding work conditions that employees find rewarding and enhance employee wellbeing.

Combining the findings from this thesis and the literature outlined above, all workplace actors are involved in addressing work-related issues and stressors; however, leaders are central. The organisation leader is critical to enabling appropriate work structures that improve and support employee wellbeing. Organisation leaders work with other top-middle leaders to develop practices that improve job demands and resources, such as processes to identify potential and current hazards related to employee wellbeing and develop practices to address these problems. Middle leaders work directly with followers to support them through stressors, facilitate feedback, and identify potential and current hazards to their employee wellbeing, which is then relayed to top-middle leaders, who pass on or address these as appropriate. There is an interrelated network of workplace actors who initiate and approve, and then implement, monitor, and gain feedback on workplace structures and how work experiences impact an individual's employee wellbeing.

Developing and Providing Organisational Resources. Resources are essential in the leadership of employee wellbeing; the findings show that they were by used by participants to support their own employee wellbeing and by leaders to support followers' wellbeing. In this research, resources included physical programs, services, or practices provided by the organisation through leaders that were used by individuals. The findings also highlight intangible resources, such as the psychological support given to followers during times of ill health or other issues. Literature suggests that resources are necessary as they "regulate the

impact of job demands, and that stimulate learning and personal growth" (Bakker et al., 2023, p. 32). Resources have such significance to employee wellbeing that Bakker and de Vries (2021) stated that as job strain increase, there is risk of burnout when access to organisational and personal resources is limited. The provision of job resources encompasses many factors and needs to be constantly managed because "employee strain is dependent on *daily* job demands and resources" (Bakker & de Vries, 2021, p. 5). Bakker et al. (2023) considered skills, social support, leadership processes such as feedback, and cultural aspects such as a safety climate, as job resources. From this lens, having positive organisational cultural norms such as flexible working and using EAP services could be resources for employees to use to support their wellbeing, and they are also aspects of structuring the organisation to enable the leadership of employee wellbeing. Bakker et al. (2023) highlighted that employees' demands and resource needs will differ according to the context of the organisation in which individuals work; thus, leaders need to be aware of specific organisational conditions.

Aside from the practical application of resources, which are important mechanisms to manage employee stressors and strain (Bakker & de Vries, 2021), the perception of organisational support is also important in the leadership of employee wellbeing. According to organisational support theory, employees make sense of their treatment at work "as a reflection of the extent to which they are valued and cared for by the organisation" (Rogers et al., 2023, p. 34), and whether their organisation cares about their employee wellbeing (Eisenberger et al., 2020). Correspondingly, individuals' perceptions of organisational support impact employee wellbeing through reduced strain and increased positive emotions (Eisenberger et al., 2020).

Interestingly, organisational support can also be perceived negatively. As outlined earlier, when Devan received a stand-up desk, the process was simple. However, the process was not well known and there was a lack of general understanding of what was available to individuals, which led to perceptions of unfairness and inequity. According to perceived

organisational support theory, when some employees have more resource availability than others, negative perceptions of distributive justice may arise (Eisenberger et al., 2020). Distributive justice relates to the fair distribution of resources and interactional justice, as well as fair access to information about organisational processes (Eisenberger et al., 2020). In the context of this study, the perception of distributive injustice could likely have been solved by leaders' communication of the structured processes.

Perceived organisational support also has an important leadership flow-on effect where "supervisors who perceived support from the organisation, or their manager passed on supportive treatment to subordinates" (Eisenberger et al., 2020, p. 106). Therefore, it is important for organisation leaders to provide support. Their practice sets expectations and flow-on impacts down to top-middle leaders, then to middle leaders, and on to followers.

Providing Remuneration and Financial Resources. As identified in the interviews, remuneration is a sensitive, though tactical, aspect of the leadership of employee wellbeing. It is a tangible work structure that directly affects employee wellbeing through the impacts on an employee's non-work life, particularly when coupled with external pressures stemming from macro-economic conditions. Fair and appropriate remuneration was outlined by several participants, and this extends to times when workloads are particularly high to ensure that individuals are rewarded for their actual work and additional stressors they experience.

In their review of research on compensation management, P. Patnaik and Suar (2019) found that financial resource allocation impacts employees' perceptions of organisational justice, and "shapes their attitudes and behaviours and influences organisational productivity" (p.69). The authors found that employees compare their inputs to their outputs and make comparisons to gauge whether they are being compensated fairly (P. Patnaik & Suar, 2019). The findings of this study show that a leader participant used their higher leadership pay scale

as a justification for working overtime in comparison to their followers. From this perspective, remuneration is more than a static transaction, as employees engage in sensemaking to decide what their compensation means and develop benchmarks and justifications from their constructions. Importantly, Eisenberger et al. (2020) argued that employees make sense of the procedural fairness, the decision-making processes on how resources, including rewards, are distributed in the organisation. In this study, despite sensemaking by employees and leaders' intentions for fairness, remuneration and other forms of compensation did not appear to be openly canvassed within the organisations. Thus, the financial area of the leadership of employee wellbeing is tangible, but elusive.

Despite the findings presenting the strategic importance of compensation on employee wellbeing and the leadership of employee wellbeing, there is a notable gap in the literature compared to other dimensions of employee wellbeing. Additionally, it was unclear from the findings of this study how workplace actors are specifically involved in financial dimensions in the leadership of employee wellbeing. However, from an understanding of organisational authority and responsibility presented elsewhere, it is likely that organisation leaders are the primary workplace actor. It is plausible that these leaders authorise the allocation financial resources for remuneration and other benefits and the use of non-financial benefits such as time in-lieu as compensation for overtime. Further research is required to better understand this aspect of the leadership of employee wellbeing, particularly exploring any processes relating to how fairness can be compensated.

Establishing and Enabling Inter-Individual Connection and Practices. The final leader dominant function is to establish and enable positive and functional social connection and practices which is depicted in Figure 5.6, below.

Figure 5.6

Inter-individual Involvement in the Leadership of Employee Wellbeing

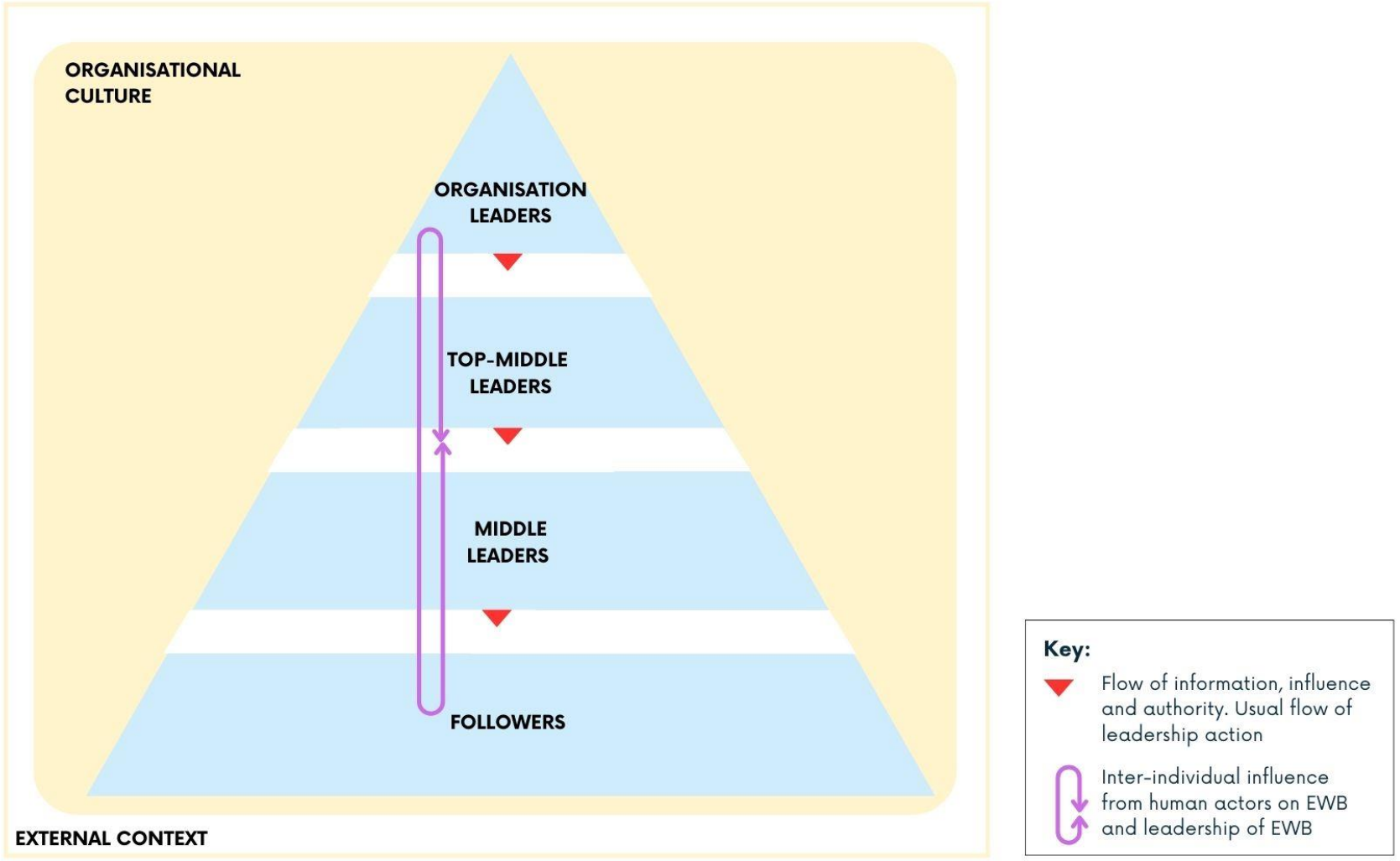


Figure 5.6 illustrates that inter-individual involvement occurs in several different ways, as outlined in this section. The red arrows, which have been previously described, indicate that leaders and their practices influence and enable inter-individual connection. The yellow box and curve-side square indicate that inter-individual connection occurs within the external context of the organisation and is influenced by the organisational culture. The magenta loop in Figure 5.6 indicates the inter-individual influence that followers, leaders, and colleagues have on the leadership of employee wellbeing which is evidenced by the findings from this research and reinforced by literature which confirms that workplace actors affect each other (for example, Inceoglu et al., 2021; Kaluza et al., 2020; Y. Zheng et al., 2022). The identification of inter-individual influence illustrates the complex entangled nature of the leadership of employee wellbeing.

Social connection was deeply connected to work experiences, and the findings emphasise the positive impacts stemming from team members swiftly offering support to colleagues and leaders and providing assistance with the exclusive purpose of helping a colleague. Positive social connection facilitated effective leadership of employee wellbeing, and Drew explained that positive connection helped leaders to more easily recognise when followers were not coping in some way, such as a lack of sleep. Literature likewise recognises the benefits of positive social connection, with several definitions encompassing some form of socialisation (for example, Bachman et al., 2023; Guest, 2017; Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009). Similarly, in their review, Inceoglu et al. (2021) highlighted that individuals can have a physical reaction, such as the release of oxytocin, where relationships have positive social connection.

In contrast, multiple participants shared examples of poor inter-individual connection. Rory and Ash described how negative social connection led to frustration and ineffective working, which adversely impacted their employee wellbeing. Jessie shared poor interpersonal instances with a pervious leader and their resultant perceptions toward them, while Jordan also

discussed a previous leader micro-managing that eroded their trust. Significantly, gaining awareness of employee wellbeing can be negatively impacted by social connection, as Ash explained that if they did not feel others in their workplace cared about them, they would not talk about employee wellbeing. Likewise, in their conceptual model, Jorgensen et al. (2024) suggested that incivility in the workplace could reduce employee wellbeing. They proposed that when incivility occurs, individuals attribute reasons for the incivility, at times self-blaming for poor interpersonal behaviours directed at them, and importantly, draw on personal resources which influences their employee wellbeing and ability to cope (Jorgensen et al., 2024). Likewise, in other literature interpersonal conflict is viewed as a work-related stressor that negatively impacts employee wellbeing (Brough et al., 2021; Podsakoff et al., 2023). Importantly, interpersonal conflict varies contextually and can include workplace bullying, which is linked to lower self-esteem, stress disorders, and psychological illnesses such as depression (Suggala et al., 2021).

This discussion also underscores the important interpersonal condition of trust. The findings show that trusting relationships between leaders and followers need to be built, and those trusting relationships then enable continued positive leadership of employee wellbeing. Correspondingly, literature treats trust as "a key variable in the leadership process" (Legood et al., 2021, p. 13). Descriptions of trust in the findings were simple and brief; limited to a desire to be trusted by leaders. These practices often centred on actions that led to followers perceiving that their leader had confidence in them to make correct choices, such as allowing individuals to work from home and expecting work would get done without oversight. Conversely, poor trust between leaders and followers was linked to negative practices such as micromanagement. Trust was also necessary between colleagues for functional work that positively impacted employee wellbeing. Legood et al. (2021) described different forms of trust stemming from cognitive (rational judgements based on previous experiences or qualifications) or affective

(perceptions of motives influenced by emotion and interactions) processes. However, Legood et al.'s (2021) findings differed regarding which of the two trust forms were more influential within leadership. Despite these inconsistent results, building trust with followers and facilitating trust between colleagues is an essential interpersonal practice for the leadership of employee wellbeing.

Literature on the mechanisms that enable and facilitate social connection in the leadership of employee wellbeing is limited. However, despite the limitations in the literature, Jorgensen et al. (2024) suggested training to build self-efficacy and resilience and building positive social networks in the organisation, as this may assist victims of workplace incivility. However, rather than intra-personal interventions focused on individual resilience, training, and other organisational processes, participants expected leaders to intentionally act to stop and solve instances of workplace incivility and other occurrences of interpersonal conflict and dysfunction. When leaders did not address openly known issues, participants' views of leaders diminished.

The findings from this thesis and the literature clarify several formal and informal mechanisms that leaders were involved in to enable social connection and building interpersonal relationships related to the leadership of employee wellbeing. Indeed, Holt-Lunstad (2018) asserted that leaders in workplaces need appropriate organisation structures to facilitation social connection, such as developing strategies, policies, and procedures. However, the leadership practices Holt-Lunstad (2018) discussed were not distinct and were instead grouped into activities an employer could take, without regard for which workplace actor would carry out a particular function. In the findings of this study, multiple workplace actors were involved in facilitating social connection. Top-middle leaders from human resource functions needed to develop consistent onboarding and early socialisation processes for new employees to meet colleagues and assimilate into the organisation. Effective onboarding was

expected to prevent employee isolation from colleagues and their workplace. The findings of this study show that face-to-face interactions helped leaders to better understand the state of employee wellbeing, enabling them to effectively monitor how followers appeared in relation to employee wellbeing. It is important to note that in-person contact in the findings did not occur daily, employees generally worked from the office three days a week, and at times, less. Additionally, the discussion here regarding face-to-face interactions relate exclusively to the leadership of employee wellbeing, with no consideration of the merits or challenges of flexible working.

The physical work environment in the findings was a mechanism through which colleagues were bought together during break times to eat and socialise with each other. Likewise, Holt-Lunstad (2018) highlighted that physical organisational structures were important for facilitating social connection because they provided opportunities to increase social support structures. The findings of this study show that in addition to physical spaces, social events were planned and implemented at organisation and team levels. Participants saw these occasions as opportunities for bringing colleagues together to socialise and build positive relationships. At the team and individual level, social occasions were less formal, with direct leaders taking team members for food and drink to celebrate milestones, having lunch together off-site, or a leader getting coffee with an individual follower to learn more about them.

Leaders seeking to use mechanisms for social connection may need to be aware of the macro-cultural context of their workplace, employees, or colleagues. Jolly et al. (2021) importantly highlighted that employees from Asian collectivist contexts may forego seeking social support where there is a perception of burdening others. Significantly, Jolly et al. (2021) argued that individuals who work such macro-cultural contexts can have increased psychological stress from receiving social support. Therefore, it is important for leaders to be

cognizant of the context in which they are leading employee wellbeing and reemphasises the need for future research in differing macro-cultural contexts from Australia.

Communication. The findings emphasise the centrality of communication, as employee wellbeing was perceived as a discussion. E. H. Liu et al. (2023) highlighted that communicating is one of the most important things a leader can do, because "communication signals a leader's values, vision, character, and conscience. It is the vehicle through which leaders transmit who they are and what they want to their followers and other stakeholders" (E. H. Liu et al., 2023, p. 13). The outcome of communication can influence individuals and whole organisations (E.H. Liu et al., 2023) and specific forms of communication such as a lack of feedback from leader to follower is linked to burnout mitigation (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). Significantly, communication is central to a leader's effectiveness (E.H. Liu et al., 2023) and cannot be separated from other leadership behaviours or functions. For example, communication is necessary to provide information on available resources, reduce perceptions of distributive and procedural injustice, gain information on employee wellbeing, and for leaders to assist followers to solve problems.

Indeed, a leader's communication attempts are "the textual, verbal, and embodied signals that leaders deliver to others, both purposefully and unintentionally" that transmit a message to a follower (E.H. Liu et al., 2023, p. 2). The findings highlight a range of leader communication practices, including one-on-one leader-follower meetings and team meetings where leader's check-in with followers collectively. Meetings are a helpful mechanism that enable leaders to gain information and awareness of a follower's employee wellbeing, and Efimov et al. (2020) found that meetings, whether in person or via video call, were useful for gaining relevant employee wellbeing information from followers. However, as outlined previously, findings suggest that in-person contact, rather than virtual, made it easier for leaders gain employee wellbeing relevant information.

One-way communication from leaders to a wide organisational audience, rather than specific teams or individuals, was surprisingly useful for a range of outcomes, particularly for remote workers, and helped them to feel connected to the organisation when they could not be physically present. However, Shockley et al. (2021) caveated this finding, arguing that communication quality is related to reduced burnout, while communication frequency showed minor correlations to increased burnout. Thus, when establishing communication for remote or hybrid workers, leaders should be aware of "the individual social and work-related needs of the employee and the supervisor" to build quality communication in the leadership of employee wellbeing (Shockley et al., 2021, p. 1475). This argument again reemphasises the centrality of the individual and their employee wellbeing needs for effective leadership of employee wellbeing. The findings also show that other static communication was useful and reminded leaders to check-in with followers, and sensitive information such as domestic violence help was placed in bathrooms where individuals could privately view the content.

Leaders not only communicated explicitly, but also, whether intentionally or not, through their reactions to followers. When Parker and Reese requested to work from home for personal reasons, they watched for cues in their leaders' responses to understand whether the behaviour was acceptable in practice or whether it was only espoused flexibility. In congruence, Krenz et al. (2019) found that leader reactions are a core aspect of communication that can influence follower behaviour (Fuller et al., 2015). Parker and Reese's comments illustrate that leader reactions are central to how followers determine what values and espoused actions can be practiced within an organisation. Despite the importance of leader reactions in the leadership of employee wellbeing, there is scant literature and further research would be beneficial to extend these findings.

Recognising and Developing Followers. A unique aspect of interpersonal practices associated with leading employee wellbeing is recognising and developing followers. The

findings contribute evidence that instead of a transactional relationship where employees exchanged remuneration for time doing specific tasks in their workplace, participants wanted their efforts to be noticed and rewarded. In light of these findings, it is unsurprising that the literature highlights that part of managing employee stress to improve employee wellbeing includes recognising, celebrating, and rewarding followers (Jimmieson et al., 2021). However, participants also wanted the opportunity for professional development and growth.

Leaders are key to enabling and facilitating recognition of employees, and their professional development and growth. One middle leader participant took team members out for food and drink to celebrate milestones to show their appreciation of the work individuals did in the team and acknowledge them. While practices like the above were noted in the findings, several participants discussed the need for greater recognition in their respective organisations. For example, participants wanted leaders to openly appreciate the work they had completed and the effort made, and discussed offering tangible or financial rewards, which links closely with fair compensation previously discussed. Acknowledging the importance of recognition, Apex Group were planning a formal monthly recognition and award system so that leaders and peers could nominate individuals for work-related outcomes. However, only one participant spoke about the system and as it had not been implemented, no data were available on its benefits or drawbacks.

Simultaneously, participants wanted opportunities for professional development and growth, which from a jobs-demands resources theory perspective, are job resources that can "satisfy basic psychological needs and foster employee work engagement" (Bakker et al., 2023). Significantly, for the leadership of employee wellbeing, job resources reduce or buffer the impacts of job demands on strain. Apex Group had an annual organisation-wide formal professional development plan process, which leaders and followers addressed multiple times a year. Individuals met with their direct leader and discussed opportunities available to them.

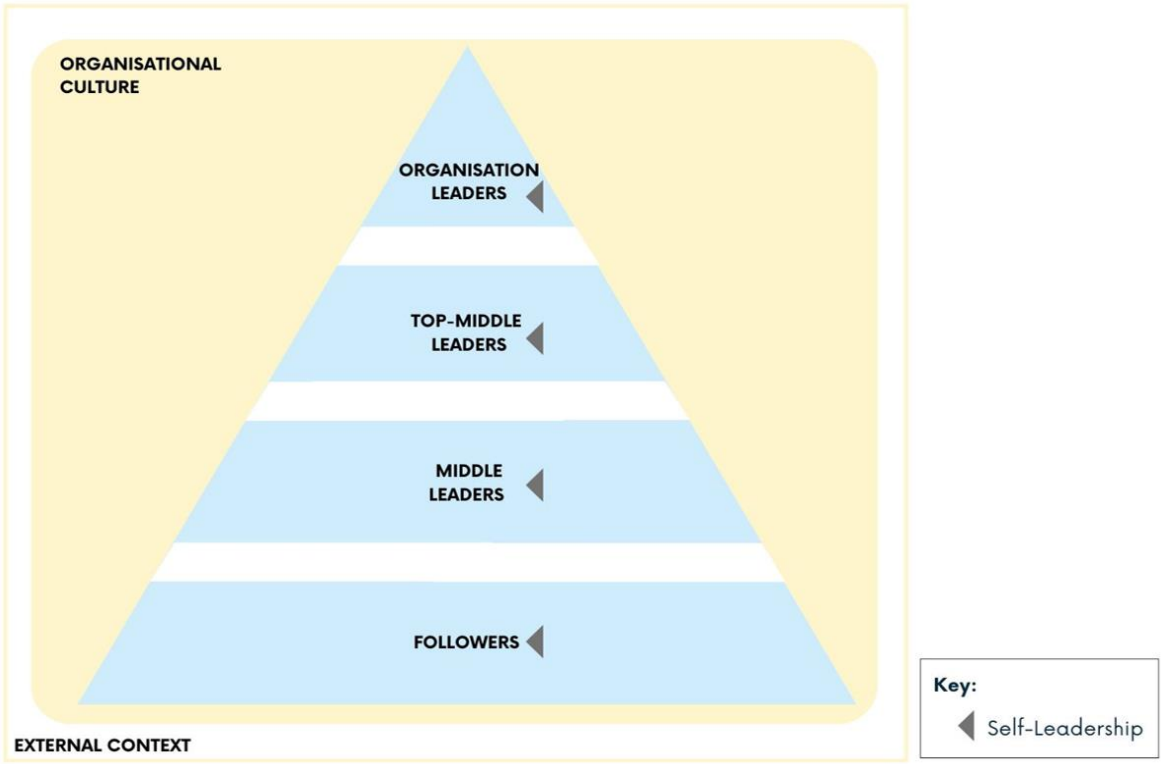
In Ferris Group, leadership development training programs were available to individuals at different hierarchical levels. Additionally, informal development opportunities were provided ad hoc by individual leaders. For example, Quinn, a middle leader, provided informal development opportunities for followers in their wider team to attend meetings and present information in different settings that were not usually available at a follower level. Top-middle leaders from the human resources group implemented organisation-wide professional development planning, and middle leaders encouraged followers to participate and supported followers as they undertook their plans. Middle leaders also facilitated informal professional development and recognition of their team. From the discussion throughout this chapter, it is expected that organisation leaders would be involved by allocating appropriate budgets to deliver professional development and enabling top-middle and middle leaders to deliver informal recognition and development.

5.4.2 Intra-Individual Processes and Self-Leadership of Employee Wellbeing

This section provides evidence that individuals, including followers, are not static participants in the leadership of employee wellbeing, instead they are actively involved through intra-individual or within person processes relating to the leadership of employee wellbeing. This involvement is illustrated in the simplified model in Figure 5.7, below.

Figure 5.7

Intra-Individual Processes Involved in the Leadership of Employee Wellbeing



Self-leadership, indicated by the grey arrows, is "a process through which individuals exert self-influence over their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours at work" (Harari et al., 2021, p. 890). Participants were involved in self-leadership of their employee wellbeing in several ways which are discussed in this section. Interview participants reflected on issues or interactions with others to increase their awareness and described having an awareness of current stressors and past experiences that caused poor employee wellbeing. From their self-awareness, individuals took intentional actions to address their poor employee wellbeing or prevent themselves from having poor employee wellbeing.

Franke et al. (2014) illustrated the centrality of followers valuing and being aware of their employee wellbeing and taking appropriate actions in what they termed self-care. In their model, follower self-care is influenced by leader self-care practices. While the findings offered

evidence that follower employee wellbeing did impact some leaders, there was no indication that the way leaders cared for themselves impacted follower self-care choices. Though the leader self-care influence is plausible because leader role modelling was important in other aspects of leading employee wellbeing. However, it is important to clarify that participants in this study took intentional actions for themselves and did not discuss or appear to be emulating leader practices. Instead, their actions were autonomous, self-determined choices. For example, individuals exercised, spent time in nature or with family, taking actions that made them happy, relaxed, or provided recovery. This finding is significant and relates to self-determination theory, which suggests that individuals need autonomy, self-perceptions of competence, and relatedness to others to thrive, and when lacking, employee wellbeing is negatively impacted (Ryan & Deci, 2019). Battaglio et al. (2022) provides further clarification and states that autonomy is the act of creating desired experiences that align with an individual's values or sense of self. Thus, the findings from this study and literature illustrate the importance of self-determination and autonomy in employee wellbeing.

It is possible that the organisational context had an influence on the finding of self-determination and autonomy. Both case organisations openly espoused values of employee wellbeing and took intentional actions towards leadership of employee wellbeing, which could have resulted in employees feeling empowered to practice self-leadership. Correspondingly, Slemp et al. (2018) outlined that leaders can encourage and support self-determination and autonomy through their practices. They stated, leaders can "take interest in the perspectives of their employees, provide opportunities for choice and input, encourage self-initiation, and avoid the use of external rewards or sanctions to motivate behaviour" (Slemp et al., 2018, p.706). The findings from this research do not align with Slemp et al.'s (2018) final point, because participants wanted both autonomy and rewards. Participants described a desire to be involved in their employee wellbeing and to take actions that could support themselves.

Though equally, many participants emphatically discussed their desire to be rewarded through tangible practices such as bonuses or additional paid time off and to be recognised by leaders to feel as though they were contributing to the organisation.

However Slemp et al.'s (2018) first points are congruent with the findings of this thesis and correspond with Sarmah et al. (2022), who suggested that autonomy supportive leaders "take interest in their employees' perspectives, offer them opportunities for choice and initiative, and provide them with meaningful rationales for doing their task when choice is not possible" (p.47). Thus, while the individual takes autonomous actions for self-leadership of their employee wellbeing, self-leadership is influenced by leaders who enable autonomous practices. Therefore, adding to the three leader functions presented in Section 5.4.1 (establishing a foundation of employee wellbeing in the organisation, structuring and designing work, and establishing and enabling inter-individual connection and practices), a fourth leader-specific function of positively influencing and enabling self-leadership of employee wellbeing is necessary.

Self-leadership also links to the jobs-demands resources perspective of self-regulation, which suggests that individuals can "actively influence their own job characteristics through adaptive or maladaptive self-regulation strategies" (Bakker & de Vries, 2021, p. 5). Adaptive individuals are said to cope more positively and actively support themselves through practices such as job crafting and recovery activities (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). Participants from this study illustrated adaptive self-regulation, for example, Morgan went running after work as a stress-relieving behaviour and Parker spent time in nature.

In contrast, maladaptive self-regulation includes self-undermining and coping inflexibility (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). While maladaptive self-regulation is a personal factor, the causes are likely work related, with Bakker and de Vries (2021) arguing that job demands

and strain lead to maladaptive thoughts and practices, and consequently, individuals are said to have less capacity to practice self-regulation. Indeed, maladaptive practices occur as "when individuals have demands placed on them they stop doing activities that would normally maintain their mental health … self-undermining is the consequence of high levels of job strain and may be the fuel of a vicious cycle of high job demands and strain" (Bakker & de Vries, 2021, pp. 7-8). Therefore, there is a tight coupling of cause and effect between an individual's work experience and their ability to self-regulate.

Neither organisation took actions to help individuals understand themselves and embed adaptive self-regulation or self-leadership practices. Due to prior experience with negative employee wellbeing, some individuals took specific adaptive actions to support themselves. However, outside of prior negative experiences, there was no evidence of processes to help individuals better understand themselves so they could take intentional positive self-leadership practices. Future research would be useful for understanding what practices may be useful for enabling individual self-awareness and adaptive self-leadership practices.

Last, although connected to the other processes already discussed, individuals can practice self-leadership of employee wellbeing through recovery. The "unwinding and restoration processes" (Sonnentag et al., 2022, p. 34), where individuals need: 1) psychological detachment from work, 2) relaxation, 3) having a perception of mastery (the positive challenge of gaining new knowledge), and 4) a perception of being able to control their outside of work activities (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). Employees can engage in at work and outside of work recovery practices. Outside of work recovery includes engaging in hobbies, sport, social activities (Bakker & de Vries, 2021) and taking holidays (Sonnentag et al., 2022). In contrast, at work recovery includes individuals taking microbreaks, the "short respite from work" such as going out of the office for a walk or work-related practices such as job crafting and organising or scheduling work to enable respite and recovery from work (Sonnentag et al.,

2022, p. 44). Participants described various at work and outside of work recovery practices, Reese spent time out of the office during their break at work, while Morgan, and Parker spent time in nature or exercised outside of work times. However, Sonnentag et al. (2022) argued that individual needs, context, and personalities may influence which at work recovery practices work best. Therefore, establishing standard homogenised work breaks is likely not appropriate, instead, leaders enabling and facilitating self-leadership of at work recovery would likely be more beneficial.

It is important to emphasise here that self-leadership practices sit within the broader leadership of employee wellbeing and do not replace leader practices, they support and rely on each other. For example, Ash highlighted the need to take breaks where they could completely detach, and it was their leader's practices that enabled that to happen; likewise, the leader's intentional actions facilitated job crafting in Devan's team. Thus, leaders facilitate and enable or limit autonomous behaviours. Additionally, though each human workplace actor type can influence themselves, Hu et al. (2023) asserted that leaders as individuals have a greater ability to define the demands and control the resources of their work, than non-leader employees. Thus, there are differing employee wellbeing needs and processes between workplace actor types (Hu et al., 2023).

An implication of this section is that individuals, including followers, need to be centrality located in theory and practice of the leadership of employee wellbeing. The findings discussed in the section show that leaders do not send their practices down through the organisation and have them perfectly received by their followers. Instead, individuals, both leaders and followers, make sense of practices, make judgements, take intentional actions for themselves, and desire autonomy and some self-determination over their employee wellbeing and work-related experiences. These findings cannot be ignored in future research and practice because individuals are vital in the overall process of the leadership of employee wellbeing.

5.4.3 Conceptualising How Workplace Actors are Involved

With each of the workplace actors and their involvement individually explained, the complete framework of how workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing is presented in Figure 5.8, below. This model provides a complete representation of the answer to RQ1, illustrating the two non-human workplace actants and their influence on the four human workplace actors and their specific roles.

Figure 5.8

How Workplace Actors are Involved in the Leadership of Employee Wellbeing

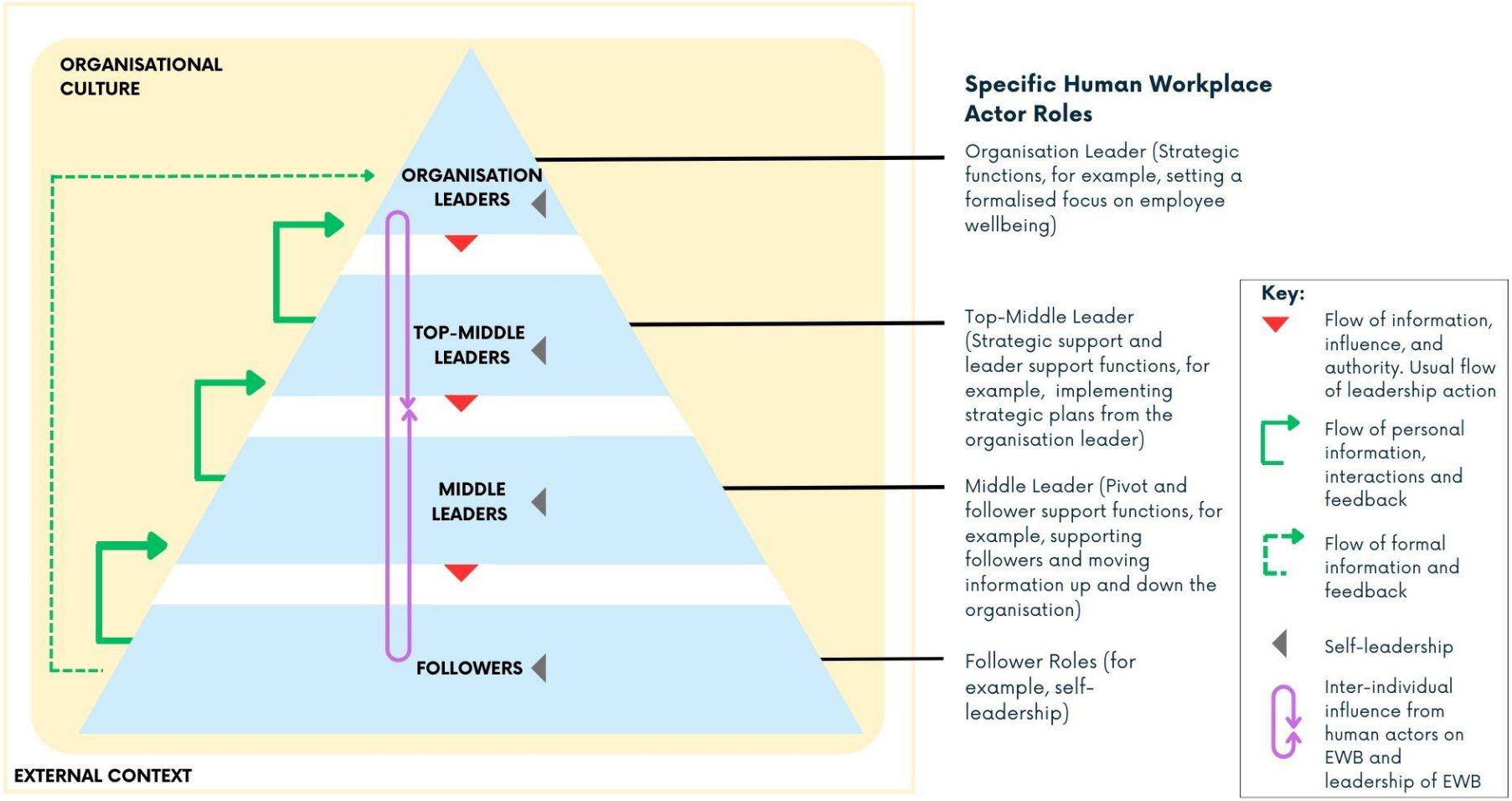


Figure 5.8 illustrates a network of interactions between human workplace actors, with leaders undertaking specific roles and practices that enact and enable the leadership of employee wellbeing. Followers are involved through sensemaking and providing feedback to leaders and participate in the leadership of employee wellbeing through self-leadership. Colleagues, leaders, and followers, influence and impact each other as they interact in their workplace. Human workplace actors are also influenced by non-human workplace actants. An implication of this framework is that the leadership of employee wellbeing is a collective practice with input and influence from different workplace actors and actants throughout, and external to, the organisation.

In contrast, the healthy leadership literature, which provided a foundation and gaps for this study in the literature review, contains a limited view of which workplace actors are involved and how they are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. For example, Franke et al.'s (2014) prominently used conceptualisation of healthy leadership (for example, Efimov et al., 2020; Kaluza et al., 2021; Krick et al., 2022) contains a simple flow of leadership practices enacted towards followers and self-leadership. However, when compared with the extended definition developed from this study (see pp.182-183), Franke et al.'s (2014) conceptualisation is limited, because they used only four dimensions of employee wellbeing, which the findings of this thesis show do not adequately represent the concept. In addition, Franke et al.'s (2014) model has a universal employee wellbeing end state. This universality is inappropriate as it overlooks the crucial individually constructed meaning of employee wellbeing presented in this research.

Significantly, the findings of this study present a complex network of distinct workplace actors who are individually different and have dissimilar functions and roles within workplaces and are encompassed within individual external contexts and organisational cultures. Thus, constraining the leadership of employee wellbeing to a specific healthy leadership style is

unnecessarily restrictive and limits the utilisation of the findings from this thesis. Not limiting the leadership of employee wellbeing is important, as the leader participant in Alvesson and Jonsson (2018) study argued that "leadership needs to be different in different situations" (p.47). Furthermore, Alvesson and Jonsson (2018) argued that as leadership occurs within a context of differing people and circumstances "you can't just have one style of leadership" (p.51). Consequently, attempting to confine the leadership of employee wellbeing within a healthy leadership style is inappropriate and unhelpful in the highly contextualised, individually constructed and experienced phenomenon of leading employee wellbeing. Additionally, while healthy leadership theory provided a sound basis for establishing the research direction of this thesis, the concept is too narrowly focused on only health and suffers from significant construct proliferation and ambiguity (Rudolph et al., 2020). These limitations render the theory inappropriate for development in this context.

In contrast, the leadership of employee wellbeing outlined in Figure 5.8 is not bound by specific leadership theories and ideologies. Shifting away from a leadership style is more in keeping Jiménez, Winkler and Dunkl (2017), who advocated for and referred to a leadership culture and process, rather than a rigid leadership style. Instead, the model in Figure 5.8 provides a practice-based framework that can be implemented irrespective of leadership style to enable and facilitate leadership that meets individual employee wellbeing needs within a specific organisational context. The framework provides a clear view of who is involved and what influences the leadership of employee wellbeing, with distinct functions explicitly outlined for use in practice and continued theory development.

5.5 The Dual Motivations for Workplace Actor Involvement

This section addresses RQ2 and contributes to the limited literature and poorly understood motivations for why workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. The findings illustrate two differing motivations for involvement in the leadership

of employee wellbeing. These findings are important, because understanding the motivations is necessary as individuals endeavour to make sense of experiences and explain to themselves why something has occurred (Guest et al., 2021; Hewett et al., 2018). This is significant as prior literature often focused on benefits to the organisation from employee wellbeing rather than for the employee (Inceoglu et al., 2018). Correspondingly, the findings of this study show expectations of a productivity-employee wellbeing link from several participants, as they anticipated that having happy, healthy, safe employees would result in better performance.

In the literature, the premise of employee wellbeing-productivity links has been investigated for decades through the happy-productive worker thesis (Bellingan et al., in press; Peiro et al., 2019). However, the happy-productive worker thesis as a motivator for leader involvement in the leadership of employee wellbeing highlights two important tensions. First, leaders have dual pressures that influence their involvement with employee wellbeing, because the nature of a leadership role is that leaders need to achieve positive outcomes for the organisation and for followers (Vakkayil et al., 2017). For example, as the workload of Rory's leader increased, they focused on operational aspects and their emphasis on employee wellbeing correspondingly decreased. Likewise, as the case organisations downsized during the pandemic, workloads on others increased, showcasing the duality of organisational requirements and employee affect. Second, research presents inconsistent findings about whether happy workers are more productive (for example, Bellingan et al., in press; Cropanzano & Wright, 2001; Peiro et al., 2019). Therefore, if employee wellbeing is subsequently found not to be a determinant of improved individual, team, or organisational performance, would leader involvement in employee wellbeing cease or change? In the findings, Charlie outlined that they had previously focused on job satisfaction; however, their views evolved based on an understanding that employee engagement rather than job satisfaction improved performance. The change in Charlie's focus suggests that if performance

was not improved by employee engagement, leaders' actions would shift to other areas more likely to improve organisational outcomes.

Outside of performance, retention of employees was an additional organisationally focused reason participants outlined for focusing on employee wellbeing. Participants, particularly leaders, were aware of wider employment conditions and explained that the organisation needed to care for employees or they risked losing them. This is significant, because the literature shows that employee management and retention "have become widely acknowledged as among the most important factors for organisational success" (Zhang & Stewart, 2017, p. 473). This sentiment was reiterated more recently, when Rogers et al. (2023) said that "employee turnover has long been a key issue for organisations due to its steep financial costs and potential to impact the organisation and its members" (p.34). Employee retention is additionally important for organisational stability and growth (Lazzari et al., 2022). Therefore, employee retention is an unsurprising organisationally focused motivator for leader involvement in the leadership of employee wellbeing.

External legislative requirements additionally motivate leaders to be involved in and address employee wellbeing. For example, Charlie highlighted the upcoming changes to legislation in Australia where leaders would be required to identify and where needed act to support psychological and physical wellbeing would cause those lagging behind to address employee wellbeing. The changes discussed by Charlie highlight only one change in the national and global regulatory framework that relates to employee wellbeing. For example, globally, the ILO (2022) adopted an amendment that a "safe and healthy working environment as a fundamental principle and right at work" (p.2). Consequently, this amendment requires that all ILO members have an obligation to enable and promote a safe and healthy work environment for workers (ILO, 2022). Additionally, on a global level the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 3 (good health and well-being) Target 3.4 aims to reduce

premature mortality rates from non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, and suicide (Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development, n.d.). Though not specifically focused on workplaces, the literature outlined previously highlight that poor employee wellbeing can contribute to psychological distress (Boddy et al., 2021; Maslach & Leiter, 2017), the development of diseases (Bakker & de Vries, 2021), and at times, fatalities (Goh et al., 2016; Timming, 2020).

Correspondingly, legislation related to employee wellbeing has been evolving for several years in Australia. For example, the Fair Work Amendment Act (Secure Jobs, Better Pay) 2022 contains a range of measures to improve workplace conditions such as prohibiting sexual harassment and providing a new dispute resolution process (Fair Work Commission, n.d.). These changes enable Fair Work Australia to act through provisions of mediation or settling disputes and awarding compensation (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2022). The findings and literature likewise support this argument that legislation provides a safety net for employees with minimum requirements for workplaces, without which the pace of change relating to employee wellbeing "is slow and very uneven and unlikely to have a broad national impact" (Warhurst & Knox, 2022, p. 313). Therefore, legislation is an important influencer and motivator, though external, in the leadership of employee wellbeing. Thus, Inceoglu et al.'s (2018) argument that "employee wellbeing has generally not been considered as an important outcome in and of itself" may have been true prior to 2018, but the situation is evolving as legislation requires leaders, and at times followers, in workplaces to become aware of and act to protect, support, and where necessary, improve employee wellbeing.

The second motivation for involvement in the leadership of employee wellbeing identified in this study was the employee, who was viewed for their humanity and therefore perceived to have innate worth and should be cared for and valued. The human perspective

motivated leaders to create environments for followers to have positive employee wellbeing. Human worth as a motivator builds on principles of ethical and servant moral-based leadership theories, with leaders prioritising followers' needs (Das & Pattanayak, 2023), taking a long-term sustainable view rather than an immediate profit-first approach (Eva et al., 2019), and desiring to do good beyond the business (Meuser & Smallfield, 2023). Moral-based actions were seen in the explicit descriptions of human worth, and the findings of this study highlight the need to embrace employees regardless of their gender, ethnicity, and orientations and ensure people feel included. Leader participants described that they were conscious of the impacts that work experiences had on followers and intentionally tried to be the best leaders they could for individuals because followers are human. Though some leaders felt striving for ideal working conditions was a utopian ideal and perhaps not fully attainable, it was what they were aiming for.

Despite the contribution of two key motivators to the scant research on why workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing, knowledge is still limited. Page and Vella-Brodrick (2009) presented one of the few articles that explicitly address the 'why' of employee wellbeing. The lack of research in this area is a missed opportunity to better comprehend the leadership of employee wellbeing through understanding what motivates workplace actors and drives leaders to embed an organisational focus on employee wellbeing and take intentional actions to improve it. Further research is required, and it may be beneficial to address the motivations as a single research question rather than coupled with another, as in this thesis.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter addressed the two research questions posed at the outset of this study and the findings contribute an extended definition of employee wellbeing and a framework for how workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. This framework

contributes a clarified understanding of four distinct human workplace actors and two non-human actants involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. The framework also contributes the identification of three core leader practices to enact and enable the leadership of employee wellbeing and understanding of individual and follower involvement through intra-individual processes. The answer to the second research question contributes an expanded understanding of dual motivations for workplace actor involvement in the leadership of employee wellbeing; first, for the betterment of the business, and second, because employees are human, and therefore have inherent worth. The next chapter provides a summary of the findings and the conclusion of this thesis.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The overarching aim of this research was to explore and extend the current understanding of workplace actor involvement in the leadership of employee wellbeing. From this exploration, I contribute to the disparate literature, practical and theoretical contributions to offer leaders and researchers a clearer understanding and conceptualisation of employee wellbeing. Additionally, I clarify who is involved in leading employee wellbeing, and significantly, how those distinct workplace actors are involved, so that more effective and relevant leadership of employee wellbeing can be provided. In this final chapter, I conclude and summarise the content of this thesis. I begin with an overview of the research presented in the previous chapters, and then discuss the theoretical and practical contributions arising from this thesis, followed by outlining the limitations arising from this study and directions for future research. To finish, I offer my final concluding remarks.

6.2 Overview of the Research

In Chapters 1 and 2, I outlined that employee wellbeing is a worker-specific wellbeing concept (Warr, 1999) that has significant positive and negative impacts on individuals. However, due to the substantial negative effects, understanding the causes was vital, and leaders and their leadership were found to be central in the literature (Inceoglu et al., 2021), though followers and an ambiguous organisation actor were also involved (for example, Horstmann & Remdisch, 2019). To investigate further, leadership theories were explored, and subsequently, two research questions were developed:

1) How are workplace actors involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing?

2) Why are workplace actors involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing?

In Chapter 3, I outlined the philosophical foundation of this research, which prompted the use of a qualitative case study research design to explore the constructed social realities of participants lived experiences. Data were collected from 23 interviews, 12 observations, and reviewing 20 documents from two Australian organisations analysed using the six phases of Bruan and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis. In Chapter Four, I presented the six themes constructed during data analysis. In Chapter 5, I analysed the findings to answer the two research questions, and in this final chapter, I detail the contributions of this research to both theory and practice.

6.3 Contributions to Theory

There are four major contributions arising from this study. The first three contributions relate to RQ1, how workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. The fourth contribution relates to RQ2, why are workplace actors involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing.

To address how workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing, a more robust foundation of the concept was necessary. As I highlighted in this thesis, there is no universally accepted definition of employee wellbeing, instead the literature presents a vast, disjointed, and ambiguous field (Chan et al., 2021) with research siloed into individual fields and theories (Wijngaards et al., 2021, p. 797). Without a more precise conceptualisation, employee wellbeing was at risk of stalling and failing to provide an effective foundation for researchers and practitioners, as consistency was at times lost due to researchers skewing their work to their individual perspective of the concept (Rook et al., 2021).

Significantly, the revised definition of employee wellbeing presented in Chapter 5, defines the concept as:

> The employee specific, individually constructed, fluid phenomenon resulting from an individual's positively and negatively experienced intra- and inter-individual work-related conditions. The concept is multi-dimensional and encompasses a combination of subjective dimensions; social functioning and connection; having a positive personal impact; physical and psychological functioning health and safety and is influenced by both work and non-work domains, compensation, the work environment, and stressors.

This expanded conceptualisation and the associated model (see Figure 5.1, pp.182-183) is significant because it responds to the call for a more unified conceptualisation of employee wellbeing (Pradhan & Hati, 2022) and contributes needed additions to prior definitions. Most importantly, the extended definition above contributes that the meaning of employee wellbeing is individually constructed. Prior definitions entirely lack this essential characteristic, which directly impacts the leadership of employee wellbeing, because a static, single, organisation-wide meaning is not enough to provide relevant leadership. Consequently, the addition of individual construction places the employee at the centre of the concept. Furthermore, the revised definition contributes additional dimensions to prior conceptualisations, particularly an understanding that individuals desire to positively contribute to their workplace and to have positive inter-individual connection that extends to functional working relationships. Overall, the extended definition connects the disparate conceptualisations and siloing of variables and theories to provide a clear, empirically derived foundation for future research.

Second, prior understanding of workplace actors is limited and often provides a leader dominant view (Kaluza et al., 2021). In the literature, leaders are frequently homogenised into one group (Hu et al., 2023), though are at times connected with vague ambiguous descriptions of an organisation leader (for example, Horstmann & Remdisch, 2019; Inceoglu et al., 2021). Followers were obscurely involved in the literature, and at times, the individual was discussed without clarification of their status as a follower or leader (for example, Bakker et al., 2023).

Consequently, practices are assigned to poorly defined groups of diverse workplace actors who do not have the same roles and functionalities. This thesis clarifies the previous ambiguity, and contributes two non-human actants, organisational culture and external context to the employee wellbeing leadership literature. These actants influence the leadership of employee wellbeing, but do not directly participate in leadership because, according to Alvesson et al.'s (2023) conceptualisation of leadership, they do not have the capacity to intentionally influence others or ideas. Despite not actively participating, the two non-human actants have a significant influence on the leadership of employee wellbeing carried out by human workplace actors.

In addition to the non-human actants, this thesis contributes four distinct human workplace actors involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing to the employee wellbeing leadership literature. This contribution provides the unique classification of three leader types; organisation leaders, top-middle, and middle leaders, where previously leaders have either been homogenised into one group or divided between high-level strategic leaders and mid-level leaders (Hu et al., 2023). Distinguishing between the leader types also importantly clarifies the previously obscure organisation actor, and instead presents a distinct organisation leader group who have the highest authority and can use and delegate the use of organisational resources.

The most significant contribution of this research and direct response to RQ1, culminated in the framework presented in Figure 5.8, depicting how workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. Prior literature skews to being leader centric and other workplace actor perspectives are required (Kaluza et al., 2021); however, knowledge of how leaders influence the wellbeing of followers is still lacking (Inceoglu et al., 2018; Jimmieson et al., 2021). This thesis provides a detailed contribution and clarifies understanding of the distinct workplace actors and how each are involved through their role specific functions that enable and enact the leadership of employee wellbeing to the limited prior employee wellbeing leadership literature.

As illustrated in Figure 5.8 and throughout the discussion in Chapter 5, there is an inter-connected eco-system of actors and actants in the leadership of employee wellbeing. The external context with factors such as legislation providing frameworks of guidance and standards (for example, Comcare., 2024; SWA., 2022), the influence of industry specific conditions, and macro-cultural influences with associated norms and values (for example, Mason, 2019) enable and constrain the leadership of employee wellbeing. These contexts combine with the internal influence of the established organisational culture with embedded norms and values that drive behaviour and what is considered normal and acceptable. These actants sit pervasively around the human workplace actors—the different leaders and followers.

Each workplace actor has position-specific roles, with organisation leaders providing strategic functions. Top-middle leaders provide strategic support to organisation leaders, assisting with implementation of strategic plans and activities in their unique area of the organisation. They also provide support to other leaders hierarchically beneath them. Middle leaders provide follower support and pivot functions, moving information, support, and activities up and down the organisation. Aligning with their role specific functions, leaders have four core roles to enact and enable the leadership of employee wellbeing. First, leaders need to establish a foundation of employee wellbeing within the organisation. Second, they need to structure the organisation to enable the leadership of employee wellbeing. Third, leaders need to establish and enable inter-individual processes to facilitate functional social connection. Fourth, leaders need to enable self-leadership practices for all employees. Correspondingly, the framework in Figure 5.8 further contributes that individuals, followers and leader's, are involved through intra-individual and self-leadership processes and followers contribute their opinions through feedback mechanisms so that leaders can take relevant actions.

The final key theoretical contribution of this thesis is an enhanced understanding of the motivations of why workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. Clarifying the motivations is necessary, because attribution theory suggests that individuals attempt to make sense of and explain to themselves why phenomena occur (Guest et al., 2021; Hewett et al., 2018). Reasons for addressing employee wellbeing in the literature have frequently drawn on employee wellbeing-performance links, and consequently, "employee wellbeing has generally not been considered as an important outcome in and of itself" (Inceoglu et al., 2018, p. 179). The prior narrow motivations offer mostly organisation-enhancing reasons for workplace actor involvement in the leadership of employee wellbeing; however, this research contributes distinct dual motivations for workplace actor involvement in the leadership of employee wellbeing. First, in alignment with prior literature, the findings show that workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing for the betterment of the organisation. Additionally, legislation was a motivator for workplace actors, including leaders to be involved in and address employee wellbeing and was seen by some as an influencer of those who did not optionally address employee wellbeing and were lagging behind. The findings and literature support the argument that legislation provides a safety net for employees with minimum requirements for workplaces, without which the pace of change relating to employee wellbeing "is slow and very uneven and unlikely to have a broad national impact" (Warhurst & Knox, 2022, p. 313). Therefore, legislation is an important influencer and motivator, though external, in the leadership of employee wellbeing.

However, the second motivation addressed an overlooked human side—the individual employee and their wellbeing. The findings were clear that workplace actors chose to be involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing because employees are human and have corresponding inherent worth. These two motivations add much needed evidence to the

employee wellbeing leadership literature about what drives workplace actors, but particularly leaders, to be involved in and address employee wellbeing in their organisation.

6.4 Contributions to Practice

This study also presents three significant practical implications. First, the expanded definition developed in this thesis contributes a more robust conceptualisation of employee wellbeing to guide policymakers. This is significant, because relevant legislation aims to "secure the health and safety of workers and workplaces" through providing a consistent framework for regulators that enable worker protection (SWA., 2024b, n.p.). However, SWA (2023b) divides employee wellbeing from workplace health and safety, and limits employee wellbeing to pleasant initiatives, and positions workplace health and safety as the strong practices that protect workers from harm. The extended definition and model in Figure 5.1, developed from the findings of this thesis, show that employee wellbeing encompasses personal and work dimensions including physical and psychological health and safety. This study shows that it is unhelpful to continually divide sections of employee wellbeing, creating silos of meaning and practice, rather than unifying the concept to focus on supporting and improving employees' wellbeing. As outlined earlier, the division between workplace health and safety and employee wellbeing is unnecessary in light of new psychosocial legislation that requires workplaces to identify and mitigate workplace hazards that reduce psychosocial wellbeing (Comcare., 2024). It is positive that legislation now includes psychosocial factors to provide standards for organisations to safeguard employees (SWA., 2024b) and the wider conceptualisation presented in this thesis can contribute to the pursuit of healthy and safe employees without unnecessary divisions.

Second, in the findings, leader participants lacked a foundational understanding of what employee wellbeing is and interchangeably substituted terms for similar border concepts. The extended definition of employee wellbeing and accompanying model in Figure 5.1 contributes

a needed clarified conceptualisation for leaders to use in establishing their leadership of employee wellbeing and removes the need to use ambiguous term substitutions. This expanded definition provides a sound foundation for utilising the framework in Figure 5.8 to enable and enact relevant leadership of employee wellbeing.

Third, as explained earlier (see p.245), by developing a framework rather than a leadership style, this thesis provides specific practical guidance that can be adapted to different organisational settings. The framework outlines the specific human workplace actors involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. These actors can be compared with organisation structure charts to map out which roles should carry out specific functions to enable, and enact the leadership of employee wellbeing. Further assistance is provided through the clarification of the four necessary leader functions and intra-individual processes. Using the framework in Figure 5.8 eliminates the need for ad hoc leadership, and instead establishes the conditions to provide relevant and effective leadership of employee wellbeing.

6.5 Limitations

While this research makes several contributions to leadership of employee wellbeing theory and practice, three limitations are apparent. First, was the inherent individual freedom where involvement was voluntary; thus, interview participation was imbalanced between the case organisations, with eight interviews in Ferris Group and 15 in Apex Group. While the data skews to Apex Group, the data were very similar in both organisations, with the same topics independently raised in both, such as flexible working, organisational culture, leader practices, and organisation structures. Often, the main differences were the unique perspectives relative to participants' organisational experiences. If there had been significant differences between the case organisations, the unbalanced interview participation may have led to the need for a separate analysis of the two organisations with a cross case comparison; however, this was not necessary here.

Second, closely linked to the first limitation, there was an imbalance in workplace actor types in the interview participants. In Apex Group, several participants came from the same department; however, each had different roles with three different workplace actor types represented. There were heterogenous opinions amongst participants, and each spoke freely about their experiences and issues they felt were important. Other participants in Apex Group came from several different departments and functions within the organisation, providing a wide view of experiences with the leadership of employee wellbeing. Additionally, the data also skewed to top-middle and middle leader workplace actors, with seven followers and 16 leader participants. Additionally, only one organisation leader participated in an interview from Ferris Group, while none participated from Apex Group. As there were fewer organisation leaders in an organisation, it was expected that fewer would participate; however, their perspective was lacking from Apex Group.

Despite the imbalanced distribution of workplace actor types, no issues were evident. Interestingly, Brinkmann (2022) suggested that when determining the number of interview participants, the focus should be on interviewing "as many people as necessary to find out what you need to know" (p.48). The purpose of this research was to understand how and why workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing and the imbalanced participation between workplace actor types did not prevent that. Indeed, having many leader participants provided a deeper insight into the divergent roles of the different leader types. Rather than being a constraint, their insights contributed to developing the distinctions between leader types and the specific roles each plays in the leadership of employee wellbeing. Thus, the skew to leader participants was beneficial for the outcomes of this research.

Last, there are also contextual limitations. As previously highlighted, data were collected in only two Australian organisations of a similar size and both within the professional, scientific, and technical sector (Business, 2023). Data were collected from participants who

worked in predominantly office-bound roles and this study is thus limited in that it does not include front line public service such as teachers, nurses and emergency services. This is relevant as Xerri et al. (in press) argue that street levels bureaucrats such as police officers experience "psychological distress when constantly expected to negotiate intensively high workloads and difficult organisational processes" (p.7). For these types of workers, stress arises from organisational and administrative sources but also from the nature of police work such as attempting to protect victims and apprehend individuals perpetrating crimes (Xerri et al., in press). Thus, the findings and contributions of this thesis may be limited to the context of employees who work in mainly office environments and future research in differing context would likely add valuable insights into employees who face different organisational pressures.

Additionally, there are said to be macro-cultural differences between individuals from Western and Eastern backgrounds and in societies and that have specific dominant religious foundations (Eisenberger et al., 2020). Thus, the macro-Western environment of the case organisations is likely not representative of workplaces outside of this context. It was outside the scope of this research to investigate several cultural contexts, which could be addressed in future research. Additionally, despite the single macro context of this study, the data obtained were rich and enabled an in-depth analysis and development of an expanded definition of employee wellbeing and a novel framework for how workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing.

6.6 Areas for Future Research

As this study was exploratory, it provides a wide range of ideas and details; however, the broad nature of the data and findings have resulted in several areas for future research. There remains considerably more to learn about how the leadership of employee wellbeing is, or can be, enabled and enacted in organisations and why human workplace actors choose to be

(or not) involved. This section presents areas identified in the discussion that would be particularly beneficial to advance theory and practice.

As noted above, the framework in Figure 5.8 for how workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing was developed using data derived from two Australian organisations of a similar size, and sector. Different cultural contexts have divergent norms associated, particularly related to values (Eisenberger et al., 2020) and normalised practices associated with leadership practices (Schein & Schein, 2017). Thus, exploring the leadership of employee wellbeing within differing macro-cultural contexts would provide additional insights into similarities or differences into how, and ideally why, workplace actors are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. It is anticipated that context divergent research would provide further theoretical and practical advancements to this important field. For example, future research exploring diverse sectors such as different types of emergency services of the police service, nurses, or other public service roles such as teachers may be valuable in understanding the leadership of employee wellbeing from the context of differing organisational pressures and norms. Similarly, small organisations and much larger organisations with simple or complex organisational structures and functions, respectively, would provide a broader understanding of which workplace actors are required and how each are involved. Such future research could advance knowledge of organisation-specific contexts when leadership of employee wellbeing is enacted when there are far fewer or considerably more employees in the workplace.

This research shows that organisational culture is critical to the leadership of employee wellbeing. The findings and discussion demonstrate that influencing organisational culture is vital to establishing a foundation of employee wellbeing and that leaders are fundamental to shaping their organisation’s culture (O'Reilly et al., in press). The findings and literature provided some leader practices for embedding norms and values in organisational culture.

However, as this research was not focused on organisational culture, it does not provide a comprehensive view of relevant actions that leaders can take to positively influence organisational culture in the context of leading employee wellbeing. Thus, additional research specifically exploring how workplace actors can embed, influence, or impact shaping organisational culture as part of the leadership of employee wellbeing would provide a more comprehensive understanding of this vital aspect.

Gaining an awareness of employee wellbeing was fundamental to leaders taking relevant action and from the discussion chapter, the idea of a desire path provided a conceptual framework for leaders to gain an understanding of individual employee wellbeing was presented. This is important, because research highlights that employee voice, being able to express dissatisfaction and a desire for changes to make improvements, is beneficial for employee wellbeing (Brooks & Wilkinson, 2022). However, there are several difficulties, including competing organisational and personal demands (Nichols, 2014) and a reluctance for individuals to voice their concerns (Brooks & Wilkinson, 2022). Despite the difficulties, exploring how the desire path concept could be enacted in organisations would be valuable for expanding understanding of this potentially useful mechanism.

The findings showed that leaders communicate explicitly with followers through words and actions, but also, whether intentionally or not, through their reactions. Participants watched for cues in their leaders' responses to understand whether the actions were acceptable or whether something was only an espoused practice. Leader reactions were therefore central to how followers determined what behaviours and values could be practiced within the organisation. Despite the importance of leader reactions in the leadership of employee wellbeing from the findings, there is scant literature on leader reactions in general. Future research on how followers make sense of leader reactions and the broader impacts and

implications of leader reactions related to the leadership of employee wellbeing would be helpful.

In this study, compensation had strategic and individual importance for employee wellbeing and the leadership of employee wellbeing; however, literature and data were limited in comparison to other dimensions of employee wellbeing. It was unclear from the findings how workplace actors are specifically involved in fair compensation and future research is required to examine the idea and associated practices. It would be useful to explore how leaders decide what fair compensation is and whether followers agree, and how leaders determine what compensation to provide (financial and non-financial) and any impacts on employee wellbeing. Such future research would advance this under-researched area and contribute to theory and practice.

Despite the usefulness of policies as a safety net and providing guidance for leaders and followers, many participants were only vaguely aware of the documents and could not name or locate them. Participants tended to view policies as an organisational function or necessity, rather than a useful document that could guide practice and effective functioning within the workplace. Interestingly, the case organisations had taken two different approaches to implementing flexible working conditions. Apex Group implemented a formal policy on flexible working, while Ferris Group only had verbal expectations, but no policy. Therefore, research exploring how policies are used and interpreted by followers and leaders and any impacts on the differences between formal policies and informal expectations relating to the leadership of employee wellbeing would be particularly useful. Exploring policy use and impacts would deepen understanding of the practical role policies play in the leadership of employee wellbeing, help to establish clearer guidelines for policy use, and provide better understanding about why these documents are underutilised in practice.

Finally, despite the contribution of two key motivators for involvement in the leadership of employee wellbeing, most participants who commented on this area had links to human resource type positions and gaining a broader range of views would be beneficial. Most participants simply did not appear to know why they were involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing. As indicated previously, understanding the motivations driving involvement in leading employee wellbeing is important, as individuals attempt to make sense of and explain to themselves cause and effect, why outcomes such as a leader practices, occur (Guest et al., 2021; Hewett et al., 2018). The lack of research in this area is a missed opportunity to better comprehend what drives different types of leaders to address employee wellbeing. Additionally, as leaders often treat their own employee wellbeing differently, and often harshly, in comparison to followers, it would be helpful to explore individual motivations and impacts of this behaviour, particularly as the findings show that leader role modelling is important. Consequently, exploring leaders' motivations and individual involvement, particularly without other research questions, would be especially useful in future research.

6.7 Concluding Remarks

This thesis is predicated on the belief that individuals and their employee wellbeing are important. The background to this research highlights the significant negative impacts that occur as a result of poor employee wellbeing to individuals, and further out into their families and personal lives. Mitigating the potential for these negative impacts to occur was the driving motivation behind this study. The literature established that leaders and their leadership play a role in causing poor employee wellbeing, and are conversely central in helping to improve employee wellbeing, though followers and an organisation-type actor are at times involved. However, the involvement of each actor in the literature is limited in some way. Thus, this study set out to explore workplace actors, how they were involved, and why they were involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing through a qualitative case study. Data, analysed

through a qualitative thematic analysis, were constructed into six themes. The findings surprisingly highlighted that the concept of employee wellbeing was ambiguous in practice, reflecting the literature, and emphasised the need to centrally position the individual and their constructions of meaning in the concept and leadership of employee wellbeing.

Importantly, this thesis contributes significantly to theory and practice, offering an extended definition of employee wellbeing. Workplace actors are clarified with three distinct leader types, followers, and two non-human actants identified. These non-human actants influence, and the human actors actively contribute through specific practices to the leadership of employee wellbeing. A final contribution presents two motivations that drive involvement in the leadership of employee wellbeing; for the betterment of the organisation, and because employees are inherently valuable as humans. This final contribution is a fitting conclusion to this thesis, which set out to explore employee wellbeing because employees, as humans, have fundamental worth.

7. References

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8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix A: Initial Interview Guide

Initial questions (informal):

1. Can you tell me a bit about your role in the organisation?
2. I know … can be a dynamic industry, what is a normal day like for you?

Situating questions:

Number	Question	Notes
3	***Can you tell me what employee type you identify with?*** *(for example, employee, leader, executive or is there another term you would use to identify what type of employee you are)* ***OR*** ***What word would you use to describe what type of employee you are?*** *(for example, employee, leader, executive or is there another term you would use to identify what type of employee you are)*	
4	***Can you tell me what employee wellbeing means to you?*** ***OR*** ***What words come to mind when you hear 'employee wellbeing'*** Follow up questions: • Would you describe employee wellbeing as important or not important to you? o Why do you think you feel that way?	

Who is involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing and how they are involved:

Number	Question	Notes
5	***Can you tell me about an experience that involves employee wellbeing at your current workplace?*** ***OR***	

	Thinking in general terms, can you give any example of employee wellbeing that happened here at work? Follow up questions: • Who was involved in this experience? • Why do you think this experience was memorable for you? • What was the impact or outcome of this experience?	
6	***Can you tell me about an experience when someone at your current work tried to improve employee wellbeing?*** *(this could be a big initiative or a small everyday action)* ***OR*** ***How do people here try to make employee wellbeing better here?*** *(this could be a big initiative or a small everyday action)* Follow up questions: • How did they try to improve employee wellbeing? • In your opinion did wellbeing improve or not improve? • Who was involved? • Why do you think this experience memorable to you? • How did you act after this experience?	
7	***Can you tell me what you think is involved in leading employee wellbeing?*** *(for example, certain actions, implementing initiatives, caring about people, good policies, the structure of the organisation, and so on)* ***OR*** ***In your opinion, what is part of leading employee wellbeing?*** *(for example, certain actions, implementing initiatives, caring about people, good policies, the structure of the organisation, and so on)*	

	Follow up questions: • Can you give me an example of what you are describing? o Why do you think those things are important to leading employee wellbeing?	
8	***Can you tell me about who you think influences your wellbeing at work?*** ***OR*** ***Are there people who influence (positive or negative) your wellbeing here?*** Follow up questions: • In what ways do they influence your wellbeing? • Why do you think they influence your wellbeing? • Can you give me an example? • How does this make you feel? **IF NO**: • Can you share about an experience with wellbeing that involves you and someone else? o What was important about this experience to you?	
9	***We've just spoken about who influences your wellbeing, can you tell me what influences your wellbeing at work?*** *(for example, a process, policy, guidelines, actions, expectations, or something else)* ***OR*** ***Can you share about something that is not a person which influences your wellbeing here?*** *(for example, a process, policy, guidelines, actions, expectations, or something else)* Follow up questions: • Why do you think this influences your wellbeing?	

	• Can you give me an example? • How does this make you feel? **IF NO:** • Can you think of an experience when your wellbeing was impacted (positive or negative) by something like a policy or expectations here? o Can you tell me more about that? o What impact did this experience have on your wellbeing?	
10	***Can you tell me about what you think influences the overall leadership of employee wellbeing in your workplace?*** *(for example, a person, process, policy, action or something else that influences the leadership of employee wellbeing)* ***OR*** ***In your opinion, what are some important influencers of leading employee wellbeing here?*** *(for example, a person, process, policy, action or something else that influences the leadership of employee wellbeing)* Follow up questions: • In your opinion, how does this/these influence leadership of employee wellbeing? • Can you give me an example of this? o How did you act after this experience? o In your opinion, what was the impact or outcome of this experience? (for example, to you, colleagues or the organisation) • Why do you think these important for leading employee wellbeing? • Are there other things that aren't being done now, that you think are important for leading employee wellbeing?	

	IF NO:
	• Can you tell me about a time when your wellbeing was influenced positively at work?
	  o What impact did this have on you?
	  o Who was involved?
	  o Why do you think this was memorable for you?	

11	***Can you tell me what you think limits leadership of employee wellbeing from occurring in your workplace?*** *(for example, a person, process, policy, action or something else influence the leadership of employee wellbeing)* ***OR***
	In your opinion, are there things that prevent leadership of employee wellbeing happening here? *(for example, a person, process, policy, action or something else influence the leadership of employee wellbeing)*
	Follow up questions:
	• In your opinion, how has this limited/prevented leadership of employee wellbeing?
	  o Can you give me an example?
	• Can you give me an example of the impact of this on employee wellbeing?
	IF NO:
	• What do you think could make leading employee wellbeing here better?
	  o Why is that?
	  o Can you tell me a bit more?	

12	***Do you know of any policies or guidelines that your workplace has on employee wellbeing? OR Are there any policies on employee wellbeing that are used here?*** Follow up questions (**IF YES**):	

	• Can you tell me about any of the policies or guidelines that you know about?
	• Can you tell me about a time when a policy or guidelines influenced your wellbeing at work?
	  o What was the impact or outcome of this policy or guideline?
	  o Who was involved in this experience?
	• Do you think there are additional policies or guidelines that would help improve employee wellbeing here?
	• Are there other things like culture or the structure of your workplace that would help improve employee wellbeing here?
	IF NO:
	• Do you think policies or guidelines would help with the leadership of employee wellbeing?
	• Why do you think that?
	• Why/ why not
	• Maybe training?	

How are actors involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing questions:

Number	Question	Notes
13	***Can you tell me how you or other employees try to improve or maintain your wellbeing at work?*** ***OR*** ***What do you do to help improve or maintain your own wellbeing at work?*** Follow up questions: • Did anything change because of your actions? • Why do you do these things?	

	• Are there things that prevent you or others trying to improve or maintain your wellbeing at work?
	• Would you like to be able to do more for your own wellbeing?
	IF NO:
	• Can you think of an example of when you felt like you had poor wellbeing?
	  o Did you do anything, outside of work or at work, to help make it better?
	  o Would you like to be able to do more for your own wellbeing?	

14	***In what ways do you feel that you are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing?***
	OR
	Do you feel like you are involved in leading employee wellbeing here?
	Follow up questions (**IF YES**):
	• Can you share an example of this?
	• Would you like to be more involved?
	  o Can you give me an example?
	• Do you want to be involved?
	  o Why do you feel that way, can you share more about that?
	IF NO:
	• Can I ask why you don't feel like you are involved, can you share an example?
	• In your opinion who do you think is involved in leading employee wellbeing?
	• Do you think other people could be involved?
	• Is it important to you to feel like you are involved?
	  o Can you tell me more about why you feel that way?	

General questions:

Number	Question	Notes
15	***Do you think leading employee wellbeing is important or not important?*** ***OR*** ***In your opinion, is leadership of employee wellbeing important or not important?*** Follow up questions: • Why do you think so? • Can you give me an example of what you are describing? **IF NO:** • Can you tell me why you don't think leading employee wellbeing is important? • Are there things that make you feel this way?	
16	***What do you think is the most important aspect of leading employee wellbeing?*** ***OR*** ***In your opinion, is there anything that is an important part of leading employee wellbeing?*** Follow up questions: • Why do you do you think that is important? • Can you give me an example of this happening in your workplace? o What was the outcome or impact? **IF NO**: why do think it is not happening in your workplace? • What do you think helps (aspect) to occuring? • What do you think limits (aspect) from occuring?	
17	***Is anyone given training on employee wellbeing in your workplace? OR*** ***Does your workplace give or send anyone for training on employee wellbeing?***	

	Follow up questions (**IF YES**):
	• Who can take the training?
	• What is the training for?
	• What are the impacts or outcomes of the training, can you give me an example?
	IF NO:
	• Do you think training on employee wellbeing would be useful?
	  o In what ways would it be useful?
	  o Can you give me an example?	

18	***Who do you think is responsible for employee wellbeing in your workplace?***
	OR
	Are there specific people you think are responsible for employee wellbeing here?
	Follow up questions:
	• Who can take the training?
	• In what ways do you think they are responsible, can you give me an example?
	• Can you give me an example of how this person leads employee wellbeing?
	  o What happened because of their leadership?
	• Who do you think is responsible for your wellbeing at work?
	IF NO:
	• Are there people you think should be responsible for employee wellbeing here?
	  o In what ways should they be responsible?
	  o Can you give me an example?
	  o Why do you think this is important?	

19	***Are there any aspects of employee wellbeing in your workplace that could be improved?*** ***OR***	

	Do you think there is anything related to employee wellbeing that could be done better in your workplace? • Can you give me an example? • What was the impact or outcome of this?	
20	***What aspects of employee wellbeing are working well in your workplace?*** ***OR*** ***Thinking about employee wellbeing at your work, what is working well?*** • Can you give me an example? • What was the impact of outcome of this?	

Finishing questions:

Number	Question	Notes
21	***Is there anything else you'd like to add about wellbeing that we haven't covered so far?*** **IF YES**: • Can you give me an example?	
22	***Is there someone that you think I should interview about employee wellbeing in your workplace?***	

8.2 Appendix B: Final Interview Guide

Number	Question	Notes
1	***Can you tell me what employee wellbeing means to you?*** *OR* *What words come to mind when you hear 'employee wellbeing'*	

Number	Question	Notes
2	***Can you tell me about an experience that involves employee wellbeing at your current workplace?*** *OR* *Thinking in general terms, can you give any example of employee wellbeing that happened here at work?*	
3	***Can you tell me about an experience when someone tried to <u>improve</u> employee wellbeing at work?*** *(this could be a big initiative or a small everyday action)* *OR* *How do people here try to make employee wellbeing better here?*	
4	***Can you tell me about an experience that you think shows <u>leadership</u> of employee wellbeing?*** *OR* *Can you describe what you think is involved in <u>leading</u> employee wellbeing?*	
5	***Can you tell me what you think influences your wellbeing at work?*** *(a person, guidelines, expectations and so on)* *OR* *Are there people or things that influence (positive or negative) your wellbeing here?*	

General Questions

Number	Question	Notes
6	***Do you know of any policies or guidelines that your workplace has on employee wellbeing?*** *OR* *Are there any policies on employee wellbeing that are used here?*	
7	***Is anyone given training on employee wellbeing in your workplace?*** *OR* *Does your workplace give or send anyone for training on employee wellbeing?*	
8	***Are there any aspects of employee wellbeing in your workplace that could be improved?*** *OR* *Do you think there is anything related to employee wellbeing that could be done better in your workplace?*	
9	***What aspects of employee wellbeing are working well in your workplace?*** *OR* *Thinking about employee wellbeing at your work, what is working well?*	

Finishing questions

Number	Question	Notes
10	***Is there anything else you'd like to add about employee wellbeing that we haven't covered so far?***	
11	***Is there someone that you think I should interview about employee wellbeing in your workplace?***	

Additional Questions as a Backup:

12	***Can you tell me how you or others try to improve or maintain your wellbeing at work?*** *OR* *What do you do to help improve or maintain your own wellbeing at work?*	
13	***Can you describe what you think is involved in leading employee wellbeing?*** *(for example, initiatives, guidelines, structure, and so on)* *OR* *In your opinion, what is part of leading employee wellbeing?*	
14	***Can you tell me what you think limits leadership of employee wellbeing from occurring in your workplace?*** *(for example, a person, process, policy, action or something else influence the leadership of employee wellbeing)* *OR* *In your opinion, are there things that prevent leadership of employee wellbeing happening here?*	
15	***What do you think is the most important aspect of leading employee wellbeing?*** *OR* *In your opinion, is there anything that is an important part of leading employee wellbeing?*	
16	***Do you feel like you are involved in leading employee wellbeing here?*** *OR* *In what ways do you feel that you are involved in the leadership of employee wellbeing?*	
17	***Do you think leading employee wellbeing is important or not important?*** *OR* *In your opinion, is leadership of employee wellbeing important or not important?*	

18	***Are there specific people you think are responsible for employee wellbeing here?*** *OR* *Who do you think is responsible for employee wellbeing in your workplace?*	

8.3 Appendix C: Interview Fieldnote Template

Date:	**Time Start:**
Location:	**Time End:**
	Time of write-up:
Interviewee code:	
Context:	

	Initial Jottings	**Reflective Notes**
How did the interview go?		
How was the rapport?		
Participant reactions to questions?		
What surprised me?		
What intrigued me?		
What disturbed me?		
General Notes		

8.4 Appendix D: Observation Fieldnotes Template

Date:	**Time Start:**
Location:	**Time End:**
	Time of write-up: For example, same day.
People (Type of Actor) Involved:	
Context: For example, what is happening, where, why, how	
Initial Jottings	**Reflective Notes**
• Words, expressions, sequences, and interpretations - interpretations need to be labelled to avoid later confusion (Anderson et al., 2006) • How well did the interview go? (Patton, 2002) • How was rapport? (Patton, 2002) • Interviewee reactions to questions (Patton, 2002)	

What surprised me? (to track my assumptions)	
What intrigued me? (to track my positionality)	
What disturbed me? (to track the tensions within my values, attitudes, and beliefs) (all three points (Saldaña, 2016, p.23)	
General Notes	

8.5 Appendix E: Codebook

Code	Description
Theme 1	Having an awareness of employee wellbeing for leadership
Concept Dimensions of EWB	Concept dimensions that contribute to the meaning of employee wellbeing group
EWB evolves	Employee wellbeing has evolved/changed and continues to change
Life stage and EWB	Life stage and employee wellbeing (e.g., becoming a parent, kids older/left home)
Individual meaning and construction	Individuals describe employee wellbeing dimensions in their own way
Meaning of EWB is multifaceted	EWB consists of multiple aspects
Term substitution	Different terms used for employee wellbeing (wellness ...)
Role perspective	Leadership containing the perspective of an organisational role in theme group
Trigger. EWB as a construction	Employee wellbeing is a reactive and a reaction and construction of meaning from experiences
Difficulties in gaining awareness of employee wellbeing	Aspects which pose difficulties in gaining awareness or understanding of employee wellbeing
Anonymity in feedback	Anonymity in surveys or feedback
Difficult to be aware of EWB	Difficulties in awareness or understanding of employee wellbeing
Lack of proximity difficulty	Working in office helps leaders be aware of employee wellbeing issues
Questioning what to do next	Questioning what to do next with information given by team members
Having an awareness of EWB	Awareness theme group
Awareness in leading EWB	Awareness in leading employee wellbeing (different to knowing the individual as awareness is about being aware of any aspect, such as context of org, or work structures, while knowing the individual is focused specifically on understanding individual employees. Though these codes are related)
Knowing individuals to meet their needs	Knowing an individual employee to meet their needs
Leaders taking an interest in EWB	Leader taking an interest in employee wellbeing
Mechanisms	Formal and informal mechanisms to gain awareness of employee wellbeing theme group

Communication in leading EWB	Instances where communication is important to leadership of employee wellbeing
Formal mechanisms	Formal mechanisms for gaining awareness of employee wellbeing
Feedback from formal mechs	Feedback being used in monitoring employee wellbeing
Formal Monitoring EWB	Actions taken to monitor employee wellbeing
Formal stats and information	EAP and other statistics for gaining awareness
Performance reviews as a mechanism	Performance reviews as a mechanism for gaining awareness of employee wellbeing
Survey for leading EWB	Using an employee survey as a mechanism in leadership of employee wellbeing
Surveys in monitoring EWB	Surveys in monitoring employee wellbeing
Informal mechanisms	Informal mechanisms used in gaining awareness of employee wellbeing
Coffee as a mechanism to catch up	Coffee as a mechanism to catch up and check in with followers
Cross team check-in	Checking-in with employees outside of work team
Leader's checking-in for EWB	Leader's checking-in for employee wellbeing
Mechanisms for gaining awareness	Formal mechanisms for gaining awareness of employee wellbeing
Meetings for monitoring EWB	Meetings for monitoring employee wellbeing
Meetings in leading EWB	Meetings as an aspect of leading employee wellbeing
Networks in awareness	Network of individuals who are involved in increasing awareness of employee wellbeing
Personal and Work Dimensions of EWB	Dimensions of employee wellbeing group
Compensation in EWB	Financial and other forms of compensation in employee wellbeing
Higher order	Dimensions relating to a higher order, or something higher/bigger/beyond themselves
Holistic	Holistic dimension of employee wellbeing
Spiritual	Spiritual dimension of employee wellbeing
Integration of Work and Non-work Group	
Balance in EWB	Balance in employee wellbeing

Boundaries between work and personal life	Boundaries or balance between work and personal life in employee wellbeing
EWB impacted by work and outside of work	Employee wellbeing is impacted by things that occur at work or related to work and by things that occur outside of work
Flexibility - feeling valued	Feeling valued as an outcome of flexible working conditions
Flexibility allowing work-life integration	Flexible working conditions allow participants to blend work and home
Flexibility in EWB	Flexibility in employee wellbeing
Whole-of-self in EWB	An employee's whole-self (work, home, other aspects) as part of or influencers of employee wellbeing
Personal impact and contribution	Contributing as an employee/participant's roles in employee wellbeing
Physical Group	
Health in EWB	Being/feeling healthy in employee wellbeing
Physical in EWB	Physical dimension in EWB
Safe in EWB	Feeling of safe (physical and psychological in employee wellbeing
Psychological Group	
Diversity and inclusion in leading EWB	Diversity and inclusion in leading EWB
Psychological in EWB	Psychological aspect in employee wellbeing
Psychological safety	Psychological safety
Social Functioning and Connection Group	
Inclusivity in EWB	Inclusivity as a dimension of employee wellbeing
Interpersonal connects with colleagues	Impact of colleagues on employee wellbeing
Relationships	Relationships in employee wellbeing
Social connection in EWB	Social connection in employee wellbeing
Togetherness	Togetherness in employee wellbeing
Treated fairly in EWB	Being treated fairly in employee wellbeing
Trust in EWB	Trust in employee wellbeing
Stressors Group	
Bullying	Bulling in employee wellbeing
Positive workload	Having an individually positive/fulfilling workload
Uncertainty as a stressor	Urgent work that can't be predicted or planned for as an aspect that negatively influences employee wellbeing

Using leave unnecessarily	Using leave for things that could be worked around as a stressor
Work stress reducing EWB	Stress an aspect of negatively influencing employee wellbeing
Subjective Group	
Achieving at work	Being able to achieve things while working in employee wellbeing
Authentic	Individuals are able to be authentic in employee wellbeing
Being productive	Being productive as a dimension of employee wellbeing
Flourishing	Flourishing in employee wellbeing
Growth in EWB	Growth as a dimension of employee wellbeing (growth can include professional development/growth, learning, progressing)
Positive emotions	Positive emotions relating to employee wellbeing
Being appreciated	Being appreciated in employee wellbeing
Belonging in EWB	Belonging in employee wellbeing
Caring for people in EWB	Caring for people or being cared for in employee wellbeing
Feeling comfortable	Feeling comfortable at work in employee wellbeing
Feeling good in EWB	Feeling good in employee wellbeing
Feeling listened to	Feeling like employees are being listened to/heard
Feeling supported	Feeling supported in employee wellbeing
Feeling valued in EWB	Participants feeling valued in employee wellbeing
Happiness in EWB	Being happy as an aspect of employee wellbeing
Having fun	Having fun in employee wellbeing
Respect in EWB	Respect in employee wellbeing
Treated fairly	Feeling like they are treated fairly in employee wellbeing
Trust in EWB	Trust in employee wellbeing
Purpose in work	Having purpose in the work that is done
The Individual Group	
Everyone is different	People are different
EWB is seen and unseen	The meaning of employee wellbeing includes aspects that are seen and unseen
Inclusivity in EWB	Inclusivity as a dimension of employee wellbeing
Personal values	Personal values that impact how an individual feels

Personality in EWB	An individuals personality in employee wellbeing
Self determination	Self determination as part of employee wellbeing
The whole person	An employee's whole-self (work, home, other aspects) as part of or influencers of employee wellbeing.
They are people	Recognising that employees are people in leading employee wellbeing
Work Experiences and Environment Group	
Collaborative involvement with work	Collaborative approach to work in EWB
Embracing diversity for EWB	Embracing diversity for employee wellbeing
Happy work environment in EWB	Having a happy work environment as an aspect of EWB
Meaningful work in EWB	Having meaningful work as a dimension of employee wellbeing
Realistic expectations	Expectations of employees work/role in employee wellbeing
Variety of work	Variety or type of work in employee wellbeing
Theme 2	Structuring the organisation to enable leadership of employee wellbeing: The formal aspects that are part of leading employee wellbeing (structures, processes, policies etc)
Finance and REM	Finance and remuneration as an aspect of structuring leadership of employee wellbeing theme group
Compensation in leading EWB	Compensation as a mechanism in leadership of employee wellbeing
Finances in EWB	Financial aspects in employee wellbeing
Remuneration in EWB	Remuneration in employee wellbeing
Formalised focus on employee wellbeing	Having a formal focus on employee wellbeing as a key aspect of structuring the organisation to enable leadership of employee wellbeing
Budget line to keep focus on EWB	Having a budget line to keep focus on employee wellbeing
EWB focus from high-level planning	Employee wellbeing focused on because it is incorporated into high-level organisation planning
Focus on EWB	Focus on employee wellbeing
Focus on EWB filters down	Focus on employee wellbeing filters down through the organisation
Genuine focus on EWB from leaders	Genuine focus on the wellbeing of employees from leaders

Wellbeing starts at the top	Employee wellbeing starts with leaders at the top of the organisation or team
Leaders enabled to act	Leaders being able to act and provide support for employee wellbeing
Organisation resources and support	Having appropriate resources as an aspect of structuring leadership of employee wellbeing theme group (including people, programs)
EAP in EWB	Employee assistance program in employee wellbeing
External support	External support for leading employee wellbeing
Fear in using support services	Fear preventing people from accessing support services
Highlighting support available	Highlighting support available to employees to help individual employee wellbeing
Impact of structured support	Impact of structured support
Impact of training	Impact of training
Meeting the needs of a few	Meeting the needs of a few employees (individuals/small groups) rather than everyone
Not using resources	Participants express that they have not used available resources
Providing support in leading EWB	Providing support as part of leading employee wellbeing
Reluctance to use organisation support	Reluctance to use organisation support
Training for leading EWB	Training for leadership of employee wellbeing
Training on EWB	Training on employee wellbeing
Uncertainty around resources	Uncertainty about what resources are available
Organisational culture	Developing organisational culture as an aspect of structuring for leadership of employee wellbeing
Building a positive work environment	The work environment as part of employee wellbeing
Developing psych safe environment	Developing a psychologically safe environment to raise issues, have opinions, address concerns
Diversity and inclusion in leading EWB	Diversity and inclusion in leading EWB
Embracing diversity for EWB	Embracing diversity for employee wellbeing
Taking breaks in EWB	Taking breaks in employee wellbeing
Work environment	The work environment in employee wellbeing
Code of conduct	Code of conduct in employee wellbeing
Individuals involved in CoC	Individual employees/employee types who are involved with enacting the code of conduct

Cultural values and personal WB	Organisational cultural values and personal wellbeing
Culture and EWB	Aspects relating to organisational culture and employee wellbeing
Culture and leadership of EWB	Organisational culture and leadership of employee wellbeing
Culture is the backdrop	Organisational culture the backdrop of the working environment
Employing the right people	Employing the right people who value others and wellbeing
Norms	Normalised attitudes, behaviours, values and other aspects relating to employee wellbeing
External norms	Norms developing from external pressures including legislation
Justifying time on catching up	Justifying time spent catching up with other employees
Negative norms	Norms that are related to negative employee wellbeing
Norms developing over time	Norms developing over time
Norms of busyness	Normalised busyness in the culture
Progressive thinking	Progressive thinking as part of leadership of employee wellbeing
Setting norms	Things that set what is normalised in the organisation
Stigmas around EWB	Stigma around employee wellbeing
Support a norm	Support at work a long-term norm not a one-off occurrence
Policy	Policy as a structure in leadership of employee wellbeing group
Awareness of policies	How aware participants are about policies on employee wellbeing in the organisation
EWB policies	Participants views on organisation policies and guidelines on employee wellbeing
Policies a safety net	Policies act as a safety net for employee's wellbeing
Policies in leading EWB	Policies as part of leadership of employee wellbeing
Policy and Org Culture	Policies in relation to organisational culture
Policy legislation links	Links between organisation policies and external legislation
Using policies on EWB	Participants experiences or perceptions using organisation policies or procedures on employee wellbeing

Work Structures	Structuring work and work process as an aspect of structuring for leadership of employee wellbeing
Bureaucracy limiting leadership of EWB	Bureaucracy as a limiting factor in the leadership of employee wellbeing
Capacity to focus on EWB	Having capacity to focus on employee wellbeing
Employees and roles	Employees and their work roles as an aspect of structuring leadership of employee wellbeing theme group
Owning EWB	Having responsibility for employee wellbeing
Role of HR	Role of the HR/P&C department in leading employee wellbeing
Poor work structures stressors	Lack of prioritisation, clarity, resources and other work structures as stressors in employee wellbeing
Structured processes in leading EWB	Structured processes in leading employee wellbeing
Work structures in EWB	Work structures that relate to employee wellbeing
Theme 3	Leaders and their practices
Leader Practices	
Communication	Communicating as an aspect that leaders need to do group
Communication in leading EWB	Instances where communication is important to leadership of employee wellbeing
Conversation in leading EWB	Talking one-on-one in leading employee wellbeing
Listening in leading EWB	Listening in leading employee wellbeing
Meetings in leading EWB	Meetings as an aspect of leading employee wellbeing
One-way communication	One-way communication (posters and mass meetings …)
Open communication in EWB	Openly communicating about issues or stressors to help people manage/cope
Dealing with issues and stressors	Dealing with issues and stressors theme group
Addressing foundational issues	Addressing foundational issues in leading employee wellbeing
Addressing issues	Addressing issues for positive outcomes
Dealing with issues quickly	Dealing with employee wellbeing issues quickly
Escalating EWB issues	Involving higher leaders or formal EWB leaders to address EWB issues
Identifying potential hazards	Identifying potential hazards as part of addressing issues and stressors in the workplace

Norms impacting addressing issues	Cultural norms impacting whether issues are addressed adequately
Not dealing with issues	Not dealing with issues
Problems building	Problems building leading to poor employee wellbeing
Quietly addressing mistakes	Quietly addressing mistakes as a leader
Seeking the root causes	Understanding the root causes of busyness as a mechanism to understanding what is most important to do (identifying issues and causes for prioritisation)
Stressors	Work-related stressors negatively impacting employee wellbeing
Stress reducing EWB	Stress an aspect negatively influencing employee wellbeing
Uncertainty as a stressor	Urgent work that can't be predicted or planned for as an aspect that negatively influences employee wellbeing
Using leave unnecessarily	Using leave for things that could be worked around as a stressor
Work pressure as a stressor	Work pressure as a stressor in employee wellbeing
Workload issues	Overwork/workload issues
Recognising and developing individuals	Recognising and developing employees
Acknowledgement in leading EWB	Acknowledgement in leading employee wellbeing
Celebrating in EWB	Celebrating in employee wellbeing
Leader facilitating growth opportunities for EWB	Leader intentionally facilitating opportunities for growth and progression to support employee wellbeing
Leaders showing appreciation	Leaders showing appreciation through intentional actions
Professional development in EWB	Professional development in employee wellbeing
Recognition in EWB	Being recognised or appreciated/acknowledged in employee wellbeing
Support	Support group
Impact of support on EWB	Impact of support on employee wellbeing
Leaders providing support	Leaders providing support an important part of leading EWB

Networks of support	Multiple workplace actor types providing support in employee wellbeing
Not a counsellor	Support given with the limitation of 'not being a counsellor'
Too much support	Too much support could be a problem
Taking Action	Taking action as a leader practice
Being proactive	Being proactive in leadership of employee wellbeing
Fear limiting leading EWB	Fear as a limiting factor in leadership of employee wellbeing
Iterative process to improve	Improving employee wellbeing iteratively through using employee feedback
Responding to feedback	Following up on feedback (includes acting on feedback)
Role Modelling	Role modelling in leading employee wellbeing
Soft skills	
Being vulnerable in leading EWB	Being vulnerable in leading employee wellbeing (leaders or followers in leading)
Building trust in leadership	Building trust in leadership
Emotional intelligence for leading EWB	Emotional intelligence for leading employee wellbeing
Empathy in leading EWB	Empathy in leading employee wellbeing
Honesty in leading EWB	Honesty in leadership of employee wellbeing
Impact leader not being genuine	Impacts of leaders not being genuine
Leader cares	Leader caring
Not micromanaging	Leader not micromanaging
Taking action on EWB	Taking action on employee wellbeing
Leaders	
Leaders across the organisation	Different types of leaders, at the top and in the middle group
Middle leaders as a pivot	Middle leaders as a pivot point between followers and higher leaders/org level
Organisation Leaders	Organisation leaders as a leader type
Three types of leaders	Chain of leadership, CEO, executive and middle leaders
Top leader for culture	Top leader a key influencer of the organisational culture

Top middle leaders	Top-middle leader (above middle but below CEO/org leader)
Wellbeing starts at the top	Employee wellbeing starts with leaders at the top of the organisation or team
Leaders as individuals	Leaders as individuals (traits, needs, personality etc) group
Differences between leaders	Differences between leaders
Impacts of EWB on leaders	Impacts of employee wellbeing (positive and negative) on leaders
Justifying different self-treatment	Justifying different treatment of self by a leader
Leader protecting followers	Leader protecting people they lead
Leader worries	The worries that leaders have
Leaders treating own and others WB differently	Leaders treating their own employee wellbeing and subordinates' wellbeing differently
Personality in leading EWB	Personality traits in leading employee wellbeing
Support for leaders	Support for leaders and leadership/leading group
External support for leading EWB	External support for leading employee wellbeing
Impact of support on leaders	Impact of having support for leaders
leaders are often the chaplain	An aspect of leadership and leading employee wellbeing is listening and providing advice and guidance like a chaplain
Wanting reassurance	Wanting to be reassured about leadership actions in EWB
Legitimate order in accessing leaders	The legitimate order of accessing different levels of leadership
Motivations for leading EWB	Motivations for leading employee wellbeing
Balancing EWB with org needs	Balancing employee wellbeing with the realities of running the organisation/org needs
EWB to improve org	A focus on employee wellbeing to achieve organisation outcomes
Leader desires for EWB	The hopes that leaders have (in regard to employee wellbeing)
Two sides	Improving for employee's wellbeing but also for the 'greater good' of the organisation
Won't perform without EWB	Employees won't perform well without employee wellbeing

The organisation	Instances where participants talk about the organisation as an individual actor
Theme 4	Individuals and self-leadership
Making sense	Making sense/sensemaking theme group
Comparisons	Instances where participants make comparisons with other organisations or experiences they've had or know of that happen elsewhere
Leader reactions	Leader reaction's theme group
Past experiences	Influence of prior experiences in dealing with current issues
Sensemaking	Sensemaking in employee wellbeing
Self-leadership	Leading on own way or individual leadership group
Co-creation of working conditions	Co-creation of working conditions
Eating at desks	Employees taking lunch to their desk and keep working
Employee voice	Employees being able to speak/share their opinions (essentially, have their voice)
Leader self-awareness	Self-awareness from leaders in leading employee wellbeing (includes words such as mindfulness, reflection)
Personal responsibility	Individuals being responsible for some of their employee wellbeing
Self-leadership of EWB	Participants taking actions to support their own wellbeing
The Individual	
Different work context	Different work contexts
Everyone is different	Everyone is different
People have different needs	Being aware that people have different needs
Personal values	Personal values that impact how an individual feels
Theme 5	Social connection leadership of employee wellbeing
Mechanisms for social connection	How employees connect with each other group
Celebrating in EWB	Celebrating in employee wellbeing
Food and drink in EWB	Food and drink in employee wellbeing
Leaders in creating social connection	Leaders in creating social connection
Onboarding - org processes in social connection	Onboarding and other organisational processes in social connection
Proximity. In office Social Con	Being in the office for social connection
Social club for younger employees	A reason given for being part of the social club and wanting social connection is being young

Social club in connection	Social club playing a role in social connectivity
Social club social con EWB	Social club and social connection related to employee wellbeing
Social connection initiatives	Social connection initiatives
Social events for connection	Social events for connection
Spaces for connection	The physical spaces that are available/made available for employees to connect with each other
Using coffee for leadership of Social Con	Participants use coffee/tea as a mechanism to connect or reach out to other employees
Social connection in EWB	Social aspects in leadership of employee wellbeing theme group
Colleague support in EWB	Colleague support in employee wellbeing
Colleagues in EWB	Colleagues in employee wellbeing
Different social needs	People have different social needs
Impact of colleagues on EWB	Impact of colleagues on employee wellbeing
Isolation work difficult	Isolation making working conditions more difficult
Lack of social connection	Lack of social connection in organisation
Leader-follower relationships	Instances where leader-employee relationships have an influence
Relationships in EWB	Relationships in employee wellbeing
Social Con for work	Making social connections to make work better in some way
Social connection for leadership of EWB	Social connection for leadership of employee wellbeing
Social connection in EWB	Social connection in employee wellbeing
Theme 6	Changing expectations and workplace practices for employee wellbeing
Changing expectations and attitudes	Changing expectations and attitudes in relation to leadership of employee wellbeing
Challenges with flex	Challenges with flexible working
Office different with flex	The office is different with flexible working
Org Culture and flex	Challenges of flexible working on organisational culture
Some roles limited flex	Some roles don’t or can’t or have limited flexibility
Changes from Covid	Changes relating to employee wellbeing stemming from covid
Changing expectations for EWB	Changing expectations for employee wellbeing
Evolving flex	Evolving flexibility
External factors impacting EWB	External factors impacting employee wellbeing

Flexibility in EWB	Flexibility as an aspect of employee wellbeing
Flexible working	Flexible working structures, processes, as a new way of working
Positive benefits of flex	Positive benefits to employee wellbeing of flexible working
Flexibility for you to do your own thing	Purpose of flexibility is for employees to work in their own way, meet their needs
Compensation in EWB	Financial and other forms of compensation in employee wellbeing
Context of the work environment	Context of the work environment
Leading changing working conditions	Aspects of leadership to change and within changing working conditions
Being accountable in flexible working	Being accountable in flexible working
Leaders different at flex	Leaders are different at leading aspects of flexible working
Leading flex	Leadership in flexible working
Learning to lead flexibility	Learning to lead flexible working arrangements
Monitoring WFH	Monitoring working from home