

WELLBEING AT WORK WITH MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY IN SMES IN SPAIN

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Abstract

Wellbeing at work is a popular topic to attract and retain talent. Nevertheless, its relationship with organisational culture remains complex. This exploratory study sought to offer a pathway for SMEs to explore organizational culture and wellbeing at work, using mission, vision, and values, as motivational factors within a corporate culture. SMEs constitute over 99% of businesses in the European Union and Spain, where wellbeing at work is not generally addressed. This quantitative study focused on employee's perception of wellbeing at work at Spanish SMEs. Results offer information that can be used to address the situation as they indicated that wellbeing at work's perception decreases when internal communication and coordination across different layers are lacking. A perception gap of wellbeing at work exists between senior managers and other employees. The level of wellbeing at work declines as company size increases, and salary does not appear to influence wellbeing from an organisational culture perspective. Further research is required to validate these findings and confirm the role of mission, vision, and values as a valid path to explore inconsistencies at the strategic level of wellbeing at work and corporate culture.

Keywords

Wellbeing At Work, Organizational Culture, Vision, Mission, Values, Motivation, Leadership, SMEs

1. Introduction

Different studies suggest a relationship between the perception of wellbeing at work and elements of organizational culture including work environment (Nierenberg *et al.*, 2017), leadership (Page and Vella-Brodrick, 2009), work relationships and work goal alignment (Santos *et al.*, 2012). Despite this evidence, there is no clear consensus on how to approach a structured analysis of wellbeing at work and organizational culture, due to the disparity of purposes of culture elements (Gorton *et al.*, 2022), different culture definitions and measurements (Deshpande and Webster, 1989), as well as a variety of constructs and methods used to analyse wellbeing at work (Fisher, 2014). This exploratory study addresses this gap by using values as the central point where organisational culture and the perception of wellbeing at work converge. As a fundamental component of many definitions and levels of cultural analysis (Bro Uttal, 1983, and Brown, 1998, cited in Sun, 2008; Ogbonna and Lloyd, 2002, cited in Testa and Sipe, 2013; Schein, 2004), values serve both as a cornerstone of organisational culture and as a compass for a fulfilling life (Kimsey-House *et al.*, 2018, p137). Research suggests a strong link between values-based decision-making and long-term wellbeing benefits (Schwartz, 2016). At the workplace, people are happier, more motivated, satisfied, and committed when their personal values are congruent with the ones of the organization (Berings *et al.*, 2004).

Therefore, values seem to be a key culture component in the organizational culture and wellbeing at work analysis. Among researchers and practitioners, there is clear consensus that mission and vision are strategic components for any type of organization (Taiwo *et al.*, 2016; Darbi, 2012), and of its culture, at the same level as values and goal consistency (Testa and Sipe, 2013). Meaningful mission and vision statements serve as a guiding light for organizations of any size and are useful to establish a common and shared sense of purpose (Bart *et al.*, 2001), that uses values to ensure a coherent and consistent behavioural guide that promotes employee engagement, a construct used to analyse wellbeing at work (Fisher, 2010). Managers of an effective organizational culture define the mission to provide purpose and meaning (Givens, 2012), which along with the vision determine the organization's short and long-term goals (Nongo and Ikyanyon, 2012).

Strong cultures align personal goals and values to the ones of the organization through leadership, and internal communication (Verčič *et al.*, 2012), which also affect job satisfaction. It is important to note that motivation has a significant effect on job satisfaction (Basalamah and As'ad, 2021). Employees' wellbeing perception improves when organizations facilitate personal goals (Santos *et al.*, 2012) and provide alignment to individual's needs (Fisher, 2010). Research on the strategic role of mission and vision has mostly focused on organizational performance (Darbi, 2012) and further research is needed on culture-goal congruence (Santos *et al.*, 2012) and its relationship with wellbeing.

The culture audit is an applied method to assess culture synchronicities and inconsistencies (Testa and Sipe, 2013). The authors used the first step of the culture audit: "identification of the organization's vision, mission, values, and strategic goals" to offer a pathway that would structure the analysis of organizational culture and wellbeing at work and explore inconsistencies at the strategic level.

Organizational culture is a crucial factor for SMEs' stability, growth, and competitiveness (Pisar, 2020). Furthermore, SMEs have a natural flexible identity, which is an excellent asset when cultural inconsistencies are detected, and some transformation is required. In 2022, SMEs constituted over 99% of businesses in the European Union and Spain, with an increase in employment of 2.4% (Di Bella, *et al.*, 2023; Statistics, Ministry of Industry, 2023). Recent analysis in Spanish organizations showed that wellbeing at work is an aspect that is not generally addressed and, when done, it is not structured nor planned (Castro-Martínez and Díaz-Morilla, 2020). The participants in this study were employees of Spanish SMEs.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Wellbeing at work

Wellbeing at work refers to a subjective perception of general satisfaction and positive feelings toward work (Keeman *et al.*, 2017), related to the overall quality of the employee's experience and functioning at work (Warr, 1987 cited in Grant *et al.*, 2007). Academic research on wellbeing at work has used different happiness-related constructs in the workplace (Fisher, 2010); from a hedonic perspective, focusing on pleasant feelings and evaluations, and from eudaimonia perspective, focusing on behaviour that is fulfilling, meaningful, and growth producing (Ryan and Deci, 2001; Fisher, 2014). However, there is agreement that social is one of the core dimensions of wellbeing at work, which is multidimensional (Grant *et al.*, 2007). The hedonic part of wellbeing at work may consider job satisfaction as the analogy of life satisfaction. Eudaimonia wellbeing at work relates to job involvement, work engagement, intrinsic motivation and meaning at work (Fisher, 2014). Social wellbeing at work focuses on interactions between employees (Bradbury and Lichtenstein, 2000) and the quality of these relationships (Keyes, 1998). For more accuracy, the present study combined hedonic, eudaimonia and social wellbeing at work approaches (Fisher, 2014).

2.2 Motivational factors of vision, mission, and values

Motivation can be intrinsic, coming from the individual's own interest and enjoyment (Ryan and Deci, 2001), or extrinsic, traditionally seen as rewards to reinforce the desired behaviour (Bénabou and Tirole, 2003).

Self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan and Deci, 2020) "is a broad framework for understanding factors that facilitate or undermine intrinsic motivation, autonomous extrinsic motivation, and psychological wellness". SDT argues that identification and integration of extrinsic factors may promote intrinsic motivation. From a SDT perspective, intrinsic motivation has a more positive effect on wellbeing as it facilitates pleasure (Ryan and Deci, 2001; Burton *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, intrinsic motivation can be enhanced when "basic psychological needs" (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) are satisfied through extrinsic motivators (Ryan and Deci, 2020). A work climate that promotes those needs fosters employees' intrinsic motivation (Gagné and Deci, 2005). Therefore, in the present study, personal alignment with mission, vision, and values is considered an intrinsic motivator. Managers and the organization's environment fostering the identification and integration of mission, vision, and values, in a consistent and coherent manner, are considered extrinsic motivators. Other motivational factors include having tasks that pose a challenge, recognition of achievements or the possibility of growth within the company (Alshmemri, *et al.* 2017).

On the other hand, according to SDT (Ryan and Deci, 2020), demotivational factors include lack of

perceived competence, lack of value or nonrelevance. Other demotivator factors, according to Herzberg's two-factor theory (Alshmemri, *et al.* 2017), are the lack of hygiene factors like the lack of organization's administrative policies, lack of work supervision, lack of remuneration or lack of physical conditions at the workplace.

Based on the previous motivational and demotivational factors and considering Locke's principles of the goal-setting theory of motivation (clarity, challenge, commitment, feedback, and task complexity) (Latham and Locke, 1990; 2006), the authors defined the following key themes for the present study (1) clarity and direction of mission and vision, (2) challenge and commitment of mission and vision, (3) clarity and direction of values, (4) organization feedback and task complexity, (5) organization leadership feedback, clarity and direction, and (6) personal commitment and satisfaction in the workplace.

2.2.1 Clarity and direction of mission, and vision

Employee identification of goals provides orientation towards the long-term significance of their current job (Zhang *et al.*, 2016). From the perspective of this study, vision and mission are considered strategic goals. Vision, mission, and goal consistency are also part of the "structure and culture development efforts" in the areas of culture analysis (Testa and Sipe, 2013). Clarity and direction are part of the nature of efficient mission and vision statements. When clearly identified, mission and vision serve as a guide for successful strategic planning (Taiwo *et al.*, 2016).

2.2.2 Challenge and commitment to mission and vision

Employees may discover that work has a satisfying purpose (Steger *et al.*, 2012) through their daily work at the organization to achieve the mission, and when feeling aligned with it. Goal achievement is a motivator factor (Alshmemri, *et al.* 2017) that is positively associated with job satisfaction at work when perceived by employees (Doest *et al.*, 2006). Employees may also feel committed to serving a greater purpose, and willing to make a positive difference in the world (Steger *et al.*, 2012). Vision statements may transcend the individual to serve and "be part of something bigger than ourselves" (Sinek, cited in Lo, 2022).

2.2.3 Clarity & direction of organization values

Values are at the core of organizational culture. Clarity and consistent direction on unspoken rules, formal vs informal rules and what is prohibited vs what is permitted (Testa and Sipe, 2013) is needed to create a sense of stability and meaning for positive outcomes for employees and organizations (Day, 2014).

2.2.4 Organization feedback and task complexity

Organization communication "is the basis of a good work environment, which shows that productivity increases as workers feel more satisfied and happier with their tasks in a space dominated by a pleasant interpersonal environment" (Oliván, 2017). Research on the dimensions of internal communication satisfaction (ICS), that mostly predicts life satisfaction, showed that informal communication and communication climate are the most important (Ćorić, *et al.*, 2020). Organization size also has an impact on internal communication (Holá, 2012). Furthermore, there is a relationship with supportive work environments that promote employee internalization of the importance of organizational goals (mission and vision) and a better work performance (Zhang *et al.*, 2016), which can be done through feedback and coordination. The way the organization coordinates and connects mission, vision and goals throughout the different layers of the organization affects the level of task complexity, which belong to the subjective, interpretive aspects of culture and the experience within the organization (Smirichi, 1983).

2.2.5. Leadership feedback, clarity, and direction

Leadership and organizational culture have a bidirectional influence. On one side, managers and leaders are responsible for generating an organizational culture that influences employee's wellbeing (Kossek *et al.*, 2011; Maidaniuc-Chirila and Constantin, 2016; Thirlwall, 2015, cited in Nierenberg *et al.*, 2017), and on the other, an organizational culture influences leadership style and working environment (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). In addition, organization leaders are considered creators of mission and vision statements (Darbi, 2012), and responsible for fostering the identification and integration of mission, vision, and values, consistently and coherently within the organization. Testa and Sipe (2013) affirmed "that senior managers can see their culture as positive and effective, despite evidence to the contrary", since it is not evident, nor easy identifying negative factors that may force self-criticism, according to self-theory (Snyder and Williams, 1982). In the case of SMEs, this could be more aggravated since senior managers may also be founders of the organization.

2.2.6. Personal commitment and satisfaction in the workplace

Meaningful work is associated with higher organizational commitment (Duffy *et al.*, 2011; Wrzesniewski, *et al.*, 1997, cited in Day, 2014). Commitment is related to intrinsic motivation and seems to represent components of hedonic, eudaimonia and social wellbeing at work in the form of personally identifying with the organization goals (mission and vision), and values, which are also shared by others (Fisher, 2014) through organizational culture.

Based on the literature discussed above, this study posits the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1 - What is the level of awareness of employees of Spanish SMEs regarding the vision and mission of their organizations?

RQ2 – What is the perception of Spanish SMEs’ employees regarding the culture of their organizations? And the behaviour of their leaders?

RQ3 – What is the perception of Spanish SMEs employee’s wellbeing at work?

3. Procedure

Themes served to develop an instrument designed to identify synchronicities and inconsistencies in employees’ perceptions of wellbeing at work and organisational culture, using the work and meaning inventory (WAMI) (Steger *et al.*, 2012), a multidimensional model that proposes that work is a way to give meaning, the work wellbeing questionnaire (WWQ) (Hyett and Parker, 2015), a 31-question model that identifies a range of factors underlying individual employee wellbeing at work, and Testa and Sipe’s (2013) areas of culture analysis

Author’s Key Themes	Model	Key Themes	Specific Themes	Author’s Survey
Clarity and direction of mission and vision	Areas of culture analysis	Structure and Culture Development Efforts	Mission consistency	S1. Employees know clearly what the company does.
			Vision and goal consistency	S18. At the organisation, we have a long- term focus. S22 At the organisation, we have a clear future strategy.
	WAMI	Positive meaning	I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful	S2. Employees have a clear mission that gives meaning and direction to our work. S20. I feel that my work contributes to progress to the future organisation’s vision.
			WWQ	Work Satisfaction
Challenge and commitment of mission and vision	WAMI	Meaning making through work	I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose	S4. The organisation’s mission generates passion and motivation to employees.
		Greater good motivations	The work I do serves a greater purpose	S5. I feel that my organisation has a purpose that benefits society.
			I know my work makes a positive difference in the world	S6. I feel that my organisation has a purpose that benefits the planet.
Clarity and direction of values	Areas of culture analysis	Customs & Norms	Unspoken rules	S9. Among employees, there is clarity on what is the correct and the incorrect way of doing things.
		Rules & Policies	What is prohibited vs what is permitted	S8. In the organisation, there is an ethical code that gives us guidance and indicates what is right and what is wrong.
			Formal vs informal rules	S10. In the organisation, there is a clear and coherent set of values that marks the way we work together.

Organisation’s feedback and task complexity	Areas of culture analysis	Communication	How do employees find things out?	S13. The organisation assures that we are all informed of what is happening.
			How much do employees find out through the grapevine?	S15. There are many rumours among employees.
		Structure and Culture Development Efforts	Layers on the organisation chart	S16. It is easy to coordinate projects that involve different organisation’s parts.
			Disconnects between the top and bottom of the structure	S17. There is a balance in the way that objectives are distributed at the different organisation’s levels.
		Measurement and accountability	Are measurements consistent with mission, vision, and values?	S23. We evaluate our progress according to our goals.
Organisation's leadership feedback, clarity and direction	Areas of culture analysis	Measurement & Accountability	Discipline system	S11. The organisation gives notice to employees that ignore our way of working.
		Leader Behaviour	Employee perceptions of leadership	S12. Organisation’s directors lead by example.
		Rewards and Recognition	Are leaders genuine in their praise?	S14. I feel recognized in the organisation.
		Structure and Culture Development Efforts	Employee perception of culture development efforts	S19. Leaders clearly explain how the organisation wants to evolve in the future.
Personal commitment and satisfaction in the workplace	WAMI	Work Satisfaction	Does your work make you feel flourishing?	S7. I feel committed to the organisation’s success.
		Positive meaning	I have found a meaningful career	S21. I share the vision of what the organisation wants to become.
	WWQ	Work Satisfaction	Does your work bring a sense of satisfaction?	S24. I feel satisfied at work. S25. I would recommend working in this organisation to other people.

Table I - Procedure

The final survey consisted of 25 questions, employing a five-point Likert scale alongside multiple-choice demographic questions. Survey statements were generated from the individual’s employee perspective for more accuracy in any inconsistencies, following cognitive dissonance theory that suggests that feelings of dissonance are strongest when the individual’s self-concept is involved (Aronson, 1960, cited in Bator and Cialdini, 2006).

A total of 301 questionnaires were completed by employees of different SMEs throughout Spain in March and April 2022. Demographic descriptives are presented in table II. Statistical analysis was performed with SAS v9.4 software, SAS Institute Inc, Cary, NC, USA. Statistical decisions were made taking 0.05 as the level of significance.

Variable	Test	Frequency	%
Gender	Males	125	41.5%
	Females	176	58.5%
Age	18-34	58	19.3%
	35-44	57	18.9%
	45-54	134	44.5%
	> 55	52	17.3%
Education	Bacc. or inferior	86	28.6%
	University	99	32.9%
	Master or higher	116	38.5%

Salary	Less than 1500 €	80	28.1%
	1500€ - 2000€	54	18.9%
	2000€ - 3000€	75	26.3%
	3000€ - 4000€	32	11.2%
	> 4000 €	44	15.4%
N° people at organisation	1-9 people	90	29.9%
	10-49	110	36.5%
	50-250	101	33.6%
Seniority	< 1 year	25	8.3%
	1-3 years	52	17.3%
	4-7 years	58	19.3%
	8-14 years	53	17.6%
	> 14 years	113	37.5%
Position	Employee	134	44.5%
	Middle Manager	82	27.2%
	Senior Manager	85	28.2%

Table II – Demographics

Source: The authors

Summary tables were obtained with absolute (N) and relative (%) frequencies for qualitative variables, and with mean, median, deviation and minimum and maximum values for quantitative variables.

Each factor was calculated from the average of the questions in the questionnaire. Reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (Table III). Alpha values are considered acceptable from 0.7, although it is preferable to obtain values between 0.8 and 1 (Cortina, 1993).

Key theme	N	N Miss	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	Alpha
Clarity and direction of mission	301	0	4.38	4.7	0.71	1	5	0.7398
Clarity and direction of vision	301	0	3.55	3.7	1.06	1	5	0.7760
Clarity and direction of values	301	0	3.62	3.7	1.07	1	5	0.8528
Challenge and commitment of mission and vision	301	0	3.36	3.3	1.07	1	5	0.8033
Organisation's leadership feedback, clarity and direction	301	0	3.42	3.8	1.15	1	5	0.8688
Organisation's feedback and task complexity	301	0	3.29	3.5	1.11	1	5	0.8941
Personal commitment and satisfaction in the workplace	301	0	3.70	4	1.10	1	5	0.8981
Overall	301	0	3.60	3.7	0.92	1	5	0.9558

Table III – Reliability

Summary tables were obtained for each of the explanatory variables with absolute (N) and relative (%) frequencies for qualitative variables, and with mean, median, deviation and minimum and maximum values for quantitative variables.

Bivariate tests were performed to compare the scores of each subscale according to demographic characteristics. Student's t-test or analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used. If a significant result was obtained, 2 to 2 posteriori contrasts were performed. To correct for type I error, in multiple contrasts, the p-values obtained were corrected by Tukey's correction.

A general multivariate linear model was employed to analyse the level of wellbeing as a function of each of the demographic characteristics that obtained a statistically significant result in the bivariate analysis. Adjusted means were calculated for each of the variables.

4. Results

This study focused on how mission, vision, and values, as motivational factors within an organisational culture, can be used to explore inconsistencies at the strategic level of employee's perception of wellbeing at work at Spanish SMEs.

4.1 RQ1 - Awareness of organization vision and mission

The study found that Spanish SMEs' employees have clarity and direction about the mission of their organizations, although there are differences according to age, seniority, organization size, and position in the organization chart. Employees in the 35-44 age group have less mission awareness in relation to older employees (45-54 years and over 55 years). Employees working in medium-sized organizations, with 50 or more employees, perceive less

clarity and direction of the mission than employees at smaller organizations. There is also less clarity and direction of the mission among people who have been working in the organization for less than 3 years compared to those who have been working there for more than 14 years. Senior leaders have greater clarity and direction about the organization mission than employees in other positions.

Regarding vision awareness, employees have less clarity and direction than mission awareness (one point below). Gender, organization's size, and position in the organization's chart affected the level of awareness. Men have greater clarity and direction of the vision than women. As in mission's awareness, employees working in medium-sized organizations have lower clarity and direction of the vision than employees of smaller ones. It is also observed that senior managers have greater clarity and direction about their company's vision. Salary did not affect the level of mission and vision awareness.

These results are similar to Darbi's (2012) study, where most employees were aware of the mission and vision statements of their organizations, which is far from the finding in Bart and Taboue's (1998), that reported that 40% of employees do not know or understand the vision or mission of their company.

4.2 RQ2 - Perception of organization culture and leadership behaviour

The study showed that Spanish SMEs' employees have a better perception of leadership behaviour than of their organization's culture. Employees give just a high pass to organizational culture, despite feeling a relatively good degree of alignment with their organization's mission and vision and having notable clarity on the organization's intangible values. Employees consider that the vision of their companies generates greater benefit to society than to the planet (environment). Internal communication and coordination throughout the different organization layers are the worst perceived aspects of culture by Spanish SMEs' employees. These results confirm that communication is basic for a good work environment (Oliván, 2017), and the idea that the way the organization coordinates and connects different layers affects subjective interpretation of culture and the experience within the organization (Smirichi, 1983).

Demographic statistics found that men have a better organization culture and leadership behaviour perception than women. Employees of small organizations (up to 9 people) have a better perception about their organizations' culture, internal communication, coordination, and leadership behaviour than employees of bigger organizations, which confirms that organization's size has an impact on internal communication (Holá, 2012).

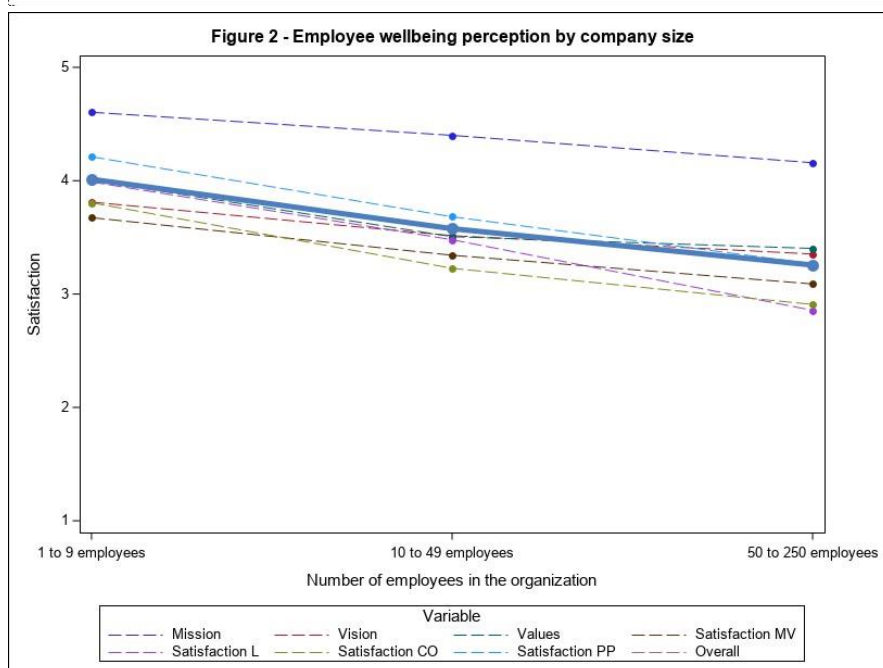
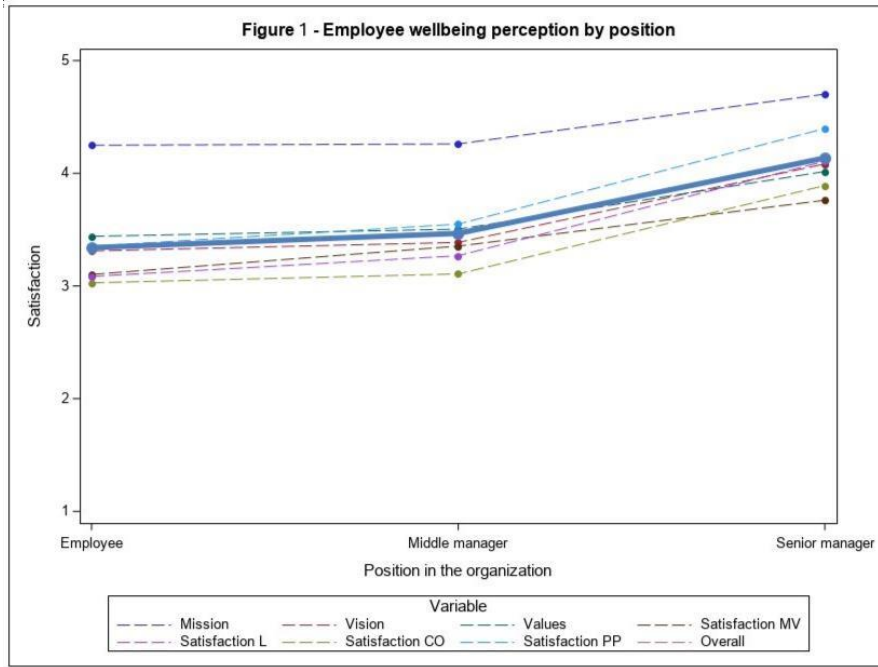
Senior managers have the best perception of their organizational culture, communication, coordination, and leadership behaviour compared to both employees and middle management. Salary did not affect the perception of organization culture and leadership behaviour.

The fact that leadership is better perceived than the culture can be explained through self-theory (Snyder and Williams, 1982), as senior managers are included in the sample and are the ones with the best perception of their own behaviour. Furthermore, culture perception may have been even worse if senior managers had not participated in the sample, as there is a tendency not to criticize one's own culture responsibilities (Testa and Sipe, 2013).

4.3 RQ3 - Perception of wellbeing at work

The study showed that, Spanish SMEs' employees feel satisfied regarding their alignment at work perception. However, their wellbeing at work perception is not as high, though it is notable. This perception disparity can be explained if, on one side, individuals feel they have a meaningful job that fulfils their personal goals (Santos *et al.*, 2012) and, on the other side, they perceive inconsistencies in the culture that act as factors of demotivation (Alshmemri, *et al.* 2017). The study also found that men have a better wellbeing at work perception than women. Employees of the 35-44 age group are the ones with the lowest perception of wellbeing at work, and the ones that feel less aligned with the organization, with significant statistical differences to those in the oldest group (over 55), who are the ones that perceive the highest level of wellbeing at work, as there is evidence that supports that "as individuals get older, they tend to be more satisfied in their jobs, potentially because they are more capable of aligning their work values to their choice of vocation (Davies *et al.*, 1991, cited in Furnham *et al.*, 2009).

Regarding organization size, the perception of personal satisfaction and wellbeing at work decreases as the size of the company increases (figure 2). Senior managers are the most personally satisfied and with the highest wellbeing perception compared to both employees and middle managers, who do not show any differences between them (figure 1). These results are aligned to those considering that job status is a significant predictor of job satisfaction (Furnham *et al.*, 2009). Education and salary did not affect the perception of wellbeing at work among Spanish SMEs' employees.



Source: The authors

5. Conclusions

We can conclude that exploring mission, vision and values facilitates finding culture inconsistencies at the strategic level and may be useful as a first step for SMEs to explore wellbeing at work and better understand what needs to be addressed. The study indicates that a satisfactory level of awareness and alignment of mission, vision and values among employees of Spanish SMEs does not ensure a good organizational culture perception when internal communication and coordination throughout the different layers of organizations are lacking. There is a gap in the perception of leadership behaviour, culture, and wellbeing at work between senior managers and the rest of the

employees, including middle managers. The perception of wellbeing at work decreases as the size of the company increases. Salary does not affect employee wellbeing at work when analysed from an organizational culture component perspective.

6. Limitations and future research

This research is not free of limitations that could be solved in future studies. Firstly, participation in this study was voluntary and anonymous, so there is no information on the distribution of the sample in Spain. Therefore, the results show a trend that would need further research to be reinforced. Other possible explorations could extend the sample analysed to other countries, which would allow a comparison of results in different geographical areas. Secondly, the age variable shows that the 35 to 44 age group is the least aligned with the organization and has a lower perception of wellbeing at work than the other groups. It would be interesting to understand the reasons behind these perceptions. Fourthly, although statistically there were no significant differences in the gender variable, it could be a field to be explored. More qualitative studies could delve deeper into how mission and vision statements should be presented, made explicit and communicated from both the male and female point of view. Finally, this is an exploratory study considering mission, vision, and values as the first culture components to analyse employee's perception of wellbeing at work and results prove that inconsistencies are detected. Further research needs to confirm this path and inform further on future steps.

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