Leadership Communication and its Impact on Employee Well-being: An Investigation in the European Food Industry

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Master's Thesis
June 2024

Word Count: 17967

ABSTRACT

With an emphasis on how leadership communication affects employee well-being, this thesis delves into the complex dynamics of leadership communication in the European food industry. This study fills a significant gap in the literature on leadership, wherein employee well-being is frequently viewed as secondary to primary performance outcomes in leadership communication, leading to an omission of the psychological and emotional dimensions of employee health. This oversight is particularly noticeable in the food sector, where stress levels can be high and employee satisfaction sometimes falls short.

The primary research question, "*To what extent and how does leadership communication impact employee well-being in the European food industry?*", intends to investigate the extent and way in which leadership communication affects employee well-being. This study utilizes a mixed methods approach, incorporating both a quantitative survey and qualitative expert interviews. It aims to analyze the impact of two main leadership styles, transactional and transformational, alongside the influence of leaders' emotional intelligence and perceived organizational support.

The data was collected from employees across various roles within the European food industry, yielding a sample of 87 respondents, complemented by insights from four human resources professionals from both The Netherlands and Italy, thus providing a new perspective on existing leadership communication studies.

The results indicated that transformational leadership significantly enhances employee well-being by fostering a supportive and inspiring environment. In contrast, transactional leadership showed minimal to no impact on well-being. Additionally, strong correlations were observed between high levels of perceived organizational support and leaders' emotional intelligence, and positive employee well-being outcomes. Interestingly, the study also discovered the relevance of situational leadership, emphasizing the importance of adaptability in leadership styles to suit specific team needs and organizational goals.

In conclusion, this thesis emphasizes the vital need for leadership approaches to evolve beyond traditional transactional techniques to embrace transformational traits alongside emotional intelligence. These elements are critical in cultivating a healthier, more productive workplace environment, which in turn improves employee satisfaction, happiness, and organizational efficacy within the European food industry.

KEYWORDS: *Leadership communication, Employee well-being, European food industry*

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Abstract and Keywords

1. Introduction

Over the past few years, there has been a noticeable trend in scholarly discourse around leadership discussions towards adopting a more holistic viewpoint (Kjellström et al., 2020, p. 455), driving a growing interest among academics to carefully study various aspects of leadership dynamics (Avolio et al., 2009, p. 426). Particularly noteworthy is the emphasis on clarifying the cognitive processes employed by leaders and followers, as well as how they affect each other, group dynamics, and organizational outcomes as a whole (Avolio et al., 2009, p. 441). However, in leadership literature, the investigation of employee health and well-being has received less attention than the thorough analysis of employee performance (Grant et al., 2007, p. 52; Onesti, 2023, p. 10).

There is an apparent pattern that appears when employee well-being is included in leadership studies, where it frequently takes on a supporting role or is presented as a way to explain the relationship between performance and leadership. Regretfully, the advantages or possible consequences inherent in leadership dynamics truly receive little thought (Montano et al., 2017, p. 328). Significantly, Nyberg et al. (2005) emphasize a prevailing gap in contemporary conceptualizations of successful leadership, wherein factors like productivity and job satisfaction are explicitly outlined, while the crucial dimension of health is remarkably absent as a determinant of leadership effectiveness (p. 19). This literature underscores a notable imbalance in the attention given to employee well-being within the broader framework of leadership studies (Inceoglu et al., 2018, p. 179). Besides this primary gap, it is pertinent to note that the majority of these leadership studies have been conducted and tested within a Western context (Avolio et al., 2009, p. 438; Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018 p. 458; Esen et al., 2018, pp. 263-264; Gumus et al., 2018, p. 42).

In light of the contemporary landscape in leadership literature and the previously mentioned diminished consideration of well-being, this study is positioned to delve into the intricate dynamics of leadership communication and assess its implications on employee well-being. Khatri and Gupta (2019) define employee well-being as "an individual's higher sense of meaning and purpose in life; through satisfying work-life experience in a flexible work environment with the help of supportive management and colleagues and having positive health outcomes" (p. 361). In this conceptualization, organizational support, defined as "the extent to which the organization values employees' contributions and cares about their well-being" (Eisenberger et al., 1986, as cited in Kurtessis et al., 2017, p. 1855), plays a pivotal role in enhancing employee well-being.

Before delving deeper into the examination of the role of leadership communication within this framework, it is essential to grasp the concept of leadership. For this investigation, the definition put forth by Robinson (2001) is adopted, indicating that "leadership is exercised when thoughts expressed in talk or action are recognized by others as capable of progressing tasks or problems which are important to them" (p. 93). Two styles of leadership communication, transactional and transformational, will be scrutinized, and particular attention will be placed on the influence of emotional intelligence among leaders. As delineated by Salovey and Mayer (1990), emotional intelligence is "the subset of social intelligence that

involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p. 189).

To address the existing gap in current academic literature, it becomes imperative to shift the prevalent Western-centric focus towards European countries for a nuanced exploration. This contextual adjustment not only diversifies the empirical investigations but also recognizes potential variations in leadership dynamics and their implications within distinct cultural contexts (Vilas-Boas et al., 2018, pp. 11-12). By concentrating on European nations, the inquiry gains depth, offering insights into the extant literature and promoting an examination of potential differences in attitudes towards well-being between northern and southern European regions, facilitated by this study's expert interviews. To augment this study's depth, emphasis will be placed on employees in the food industry. This choice is guided by the rich cultural heritage surrounding food in European countries and its crucial contribution to boosting tourism within the region (Pamukçu et al., 2021, pp. 1-2).

The global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic adds to the overall significance of this research, as it has contributed to a substantial increase in negative emotions, notably stress, anxiety, and depression (Li et al., 2022, p. 2; Porcelli, 2020, p. 109). Moreover, COVID-19 appears to have exacerbated a pre-existing issue, as highlighted by Skakon et al. (2010), who found that "work-related stress is estimated to be the second largest problem related to the working environment in the European Union" (p. 107). Despite the labor market having undergone structural changes over the last decade, this "rapid transformation of labor markets has been accompanied by the belief that work stress is rising" (Rigó et al., 2021, p. 460). By investigating the intersection of communication and well-being, this thesis not only addresses a timely concern but also offers societal relevance, as workplace practices that promote healthier environments are shown to increase job satisfaction and productivity, ultimately reducing costs (LaGree et al., 2023, p. 860).

Finally, the research question driving this inquiry is: *To what extent and how does leadership communication impact employee well-being in the European food industry?* In order to comprehensively address the various nuances of this query, it is further divided into the following sub-questions: (a) To what extent and how does the perception of organizational support among employees influence their overall sense of well-being? (b) To what extent and how do different leadership communication styles contribute to the employees' overall sense of well-being? (c) To what extent and how does leaders' demonstration of high emotional intelligence contribute to the employees' overall sense of well-being?

To thoroughly investigate the research inquiries outlined above and consider the variables under examination, i.e., leadership communication, perceived organizational support, emotional intelligence, and employee well-being, the present study employs a mixed methods approach within the field of positive psychology (Plano Clark, 2017, p. 305). This approach involves the use of a structured questionnaire to systematically assess the impact of leadership communication on the well-being of employees in the food industry across Europe. Recognizing that quantitative research alone may not suffice to provide additional insights (Almeida, 2018, p. 138), expert interviews are incorporated to enhance the interpretative depth of

the survey outcomes, providing "the opportunity to ask follow-up questions, probe additional information, justify previous answers, and establish a connection between several topics" (Queirós et al., 2017, p. 378).

This study adopts the following organizational structure. Subsequent to this introduction, which provides an overview of the scientific and societal significance of the investigation, the second chapter will delve into the key theories pertaining to leadership communication to establish a robust framework to assess its impact on employee well-being. Commencing with an overview of the European food industry, the definition of well-being, and an exploration of the social exchange theory (Homans, 1961), this section will elucidate the reciprocal dynamics inherent in workplace interactions. Following these foundational insights, attention will be directed towards an exposition of different leadership styles, specifically transactional and transformational leadership, in order to discern their specific attributes and efficacy in fostering a favorable working environment. The theoretical framework will be further augmented by the inclusion of Goleman's emotional intelligence theory (1998). Overall, this framework will function as a link, facilitating a seamless transition between this introductory exposition and the subsequent methods section. The third chapter will draw the methodological design of the research, elucidating the employed mixed methods approach. Within this discourse, due attention will be paid to ethical dimensions and matters pertaining to validity, reliability, and the aptness of the instrument of qualitative analysis. Subsequently, the fourth chapter will be dedicated to the analysis and discussion of the results derived from this study. Finally, the fifth section will outline the discussion and conclusion, addressing and answering the research questions, elucidating the theoretical and societal implications of the findings, acknowledging study limitations, and providing directions for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1   Chapter Overview

This chapter serves as a foundational pillar, establishing the framework for an in-depth inquiry into the impact of leadership communication on employee well-being. To accomplish this objective, a thorough examination of relevant theories and concepts is necessary. Initially, an overview of the constituent elements of the food industry and employee well-being will be provided, followed by the presentation of the social exchange theory by Homans (1961). Subsequently, attention will be directed towards an exploration of two distinct leadership styles, transactional and transformational leadership communication, due to their extensive theoretical development and empirical validation (Antonakis et al., 2003, pp. 264-265; Mouazen & Hernández-Lara, 2022, p. 156), which make them ideal for successfully examining leadership communication and its impact on employee well-being. While numerous other leadership styles exist (Braathu et al., 2022, pp. 5-6), these two have been selected for the following reasons. First, "transformational–transactional leadership theory dominates current thinking about leadership research" (Judge & Piccolo, 2004, p. 762). This dominance has led to extensive research over decades, resulting in robust theoretical foundations, continuous refinement, and validation through empirical studies (Changar & Atan, 2021, p. 17; Jensen et al., 2019, p. 4; Mahdinezhad et al., 2013, p. 30; Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2013, p. 359). This extensive research base provides much data and many insights, ensuring this study is grounded in well-established and widely accepted theoretical frameworks. Second, these leadership styles represent two fundamentally different approaches to leadership, and their combined strengths offer a comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics (Judge & Piccolo, 2004, p. 765). Moreover, the choice of these styles is driven by their proven impact on a wide range of organizational outcomes, including employee well-being (Cao & Le, 2024, p. 168; Obuba, 2022, p. 132; Umrani et al., 2024, p. 243). In particular, research consistently shows that transformational leadership is strongly linked to positive employee outcomes such as increased job satisfaction, reduced stress, and enhanced well-being (Tafvelin, 2013, p. 33; Teetzen et al., 2022, p. 16). In contrast, transactional leadership is often associated with maintaining order and efficiency and plays a crucial role in ensuring that employees understand their roles and responsibilities (Changar & Atan, 2021, p. 19). Finally, these two leadership styles are often seen as complementary, providing a balanced approach to this study's exploration (Dartey-Baah, 2015, p. 106). By examining both styles, this study offers a nuanced perspective that captures the strengths of each approach. Last, studies on the role of emotional intelligence in leadership will be scrutinized to conclude this theoretical framework. These components collectively will form the basis upon which the hypotheses guiding this dissertation will be formulated.

2.2   Introduction to the Food Industry

Before delving into the introduction of relevant theories, it is essential to first provide the reader with an overview of the European food sector. In this context, the study conducted by Ariza-Montes et

al. (2019) offers a thorough examination of key trends within the food industry, with a specific focus on the role played by waiters and waitresses (pp. 138-147). Consequently, this study will serve as the starting point for this dissertation, allowing the researcher to assess whether the characteristics highlighted are to be held valid or not. Specifically, through a careful analysis of the insights presented by the aforementioned study, the present research seeks to determine the relevance and applicability of the identified trends within the sample under investigation.

First, according to research conducted by Michailids and Elwkai (2003), a prominent characteristic of the food industry is the expectation for employees to forego breaks and maintain constant busyness, often in exchange for comparatively low wages (p. 126). Furthermore, the physical working conditions within this sector have generally been reported to be inferior to those experienced in other industries, as evidenced by a multisectoral study conducted by Jettinghoff and Houtman (2009, p. 14). Furthermore, alongside the aforementioned attributes, long working hours have been documented as a prevalent characteristic within the food industry (Gerogiannis et al., 2012, p. 20). Additionally, non-standard working hours contribute to a challenging balance between work commitments and familial or social obligations, as highlighted by Gerogiannis et al. (2012, p. 40). Last, it has been shown that employees within the food sector face heightened exposure to ergonomic hazards, resulting in a notable percentage of workers expressing dissatisfaction with their overall working conditions, as emphasized by Jettinghoff and Houtman (2009, p. 12).

As we transition from the overview of the food industry to relevant theories shaping this dissertation, the challenges faced by employees within the food sector lay the foundation for a more nuanced exploration, with a specific focus on communication. Now, our attention turns towards establishing a precise definition of employee well-being before proceeding to analyze the various elements that can potentially affect it.

2.3   Employee Well-being: An Overview

As organizations increasingly recognize its importance (Grant et al., 2007, p. 51), employee well-being has been described by Khatri and Gupta (2019) as "an individual's higher sense of meaning and purpose in life; through satisfying work-life experience in a flexible work environment with the help of supportive management and colleagues and having positive health outcomes" (p. 361). Diving deeper, Grant et al. (2007) have identified three dimensions of well-being: (a) psychological; (b) physical; and (c) social (p. 52). According to Ryan and Deci (2001), psychological well-being has two components: hedonic and eudaimonic (p. 143), and "the predominant view among hedonic psychologists is that well-being consists of subjective happiness and concerns the experience of pleasure versus displeasure broadly construed to include all judgments about the good/bad elements of life" (p. 144). Ryan and Deci (2001) further elaborated on this point, underscoring that despite this established hedonic view, scholars have criticized happiness as the primary criterion of well-being, favoring instead a eudaimonic perspective, recognizing that not all desires or outcomes valued by an individual necessarily lead to well-being upon

attainment (p. 145). Within organizational contexts, psychological well-being has been conceptualized through employees' perception of fulfillment and the meaningfulness of their contributions (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003, p. 123). In addition, in illustrating the physical and social dimensions of well-being, Guest (2017) clarified the former as physiological manifestations of health or illness, including both positive and negative indicators, e.g., energy levels, exhaustion, and stress, while addressing the latter dimension as delineated by the quality and dynamics of interpersonal relationships (p. 27).

Building upon the established foundational understanding of well-being, we now turn our focus towards exploring the theories that help elucidate how different leadership communication styles lead to changes in well-being.

2.4   The Social Exchange Theory

The first theory to undergo scrutiny is the social exchange theory. Homans (1961) illuminated this theory by conceptualizing "social behavior as an exchange of activity, tangible or intangible, and more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two persons" (p. 13). Subsequently, Homans (1961) introduced the principle of distributive justice, asserting that within an exchange relationship, individuals anticipate that the benefits they receive should match the effort or resources they invest and that the overall gains or returns should align with the level of commitment invested in the relational dynamic (p. 75). Upon reviewing these definitions, it becomes evident that Homans' primary emphasis lies in delineating the social behaviors that emerge from processes of mutual reinforcement, as well as the absence thereof. As a consequence, relationships could terminate based on the failure of such reinforcement (Cook & Rice, 2003, p. 54). Furthermore, in accordance with the perspective advanced by this theoretical framework, exchange behaviors manifest as a self-centered orientation, wherein individuals assess potential rewards stemming from interpersonal interactions. In the event that neither of the involved parties attains gratifying rewards, the occurrence of social exchange is thereby precluded (Yin, 2018, p. 875).

While predominantly employed to explicate human interactive dynamics using economic paradigms (Hsieh et al., 2019, p. 2), Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) have emphasized the theory's capacity to elucidate the relationships between employees and their supervisors within workplace contexts (p. 874). This is consistent with prior research suggesting that employees may exchange their commitment for employer support (Eisenberger et al., 1986, p. 506). In these settings, the concept of perceived organizational support is introduced, reflecting that "the organization's value on employees' contributions and concern for employee benefits, is an important tool to help organizations establish favorable relationship with employees and motivate employees work hard" (Sun, 2019, p. 155). When individuals perceive that they are valued, they are inclined to engage in desired behaviors, including active learning, the manifestation of desired conduct, and, as previously noted, demonstrating a commitment to their organization while offering constructive solutions (Maan et al., 2020, p. 4). In accordance with the delineated theory and its constituent elements, our initial hypothesis posits:

H1: Employees who perceive a fair exchange of support, recognition, and resources in their interactions with leaders will report higher levels of well-being.

2.5   Leadership Communication

In laying the groundwork for this investigation on leadership communication and its impact on employee well-being, it is crucial to emphasize a foundational pillar: leaders play a significant role within organizations, aiding employees in the pursuit and achievement of their goals and objectives (Kalsoom et al., 2018, p. 23). In reaching organizational accomplishments, leaders extensively employ communication as their primary instrument (Hicks, 2020, p. 175), thereby supporting extant research findings which underscored the pivotal role of effective communication among leadership competencies (Campbell et al., 2003, p. 171). Notably, effective communication assumes profound significance in steering employees towards alignment with the strategic trajectory delineated by the organization (Jooste, 2004, p. 220). Drawing upon these premises, Jelphs (2006, as cited in Hicks, 2020, pp. 175-176) underscored the significance of leaders being cognizant of their communication style and its perception among employees as a requisite for achieving effective workplace communication.

Leadership styles can be classified into two main categories, transactional and transformational leadership (Men & Stacks, 2013, p. 174). Hence, the purpose of this section is to explicitly offer the reader primary insights into these communication styles. This exploration will start from the former, given that transactional leadership is one of the most popular leadership styles (Handayani et al., 2022, p. 70). Jaqua and Jaqua (2021) depicted transactional leadership style as a form of leadership characterized by the delineation of "employees' roles and tasks, hence stimulating the self-interests of employees based on the reward that awaits them if they perform well" (p. 399). Focusing on the role of supervision, these types of leaders emphasize contingent reward, also recognized as contingent positive reinforcement, or penalization, referred to as contingent negative reinforcement (Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2013, p. 358). Odumeru and Ogbonna (2013) specifically underlined that (a) contingent rewards are provided upon the attainment of predetermined objectives, while (b) contingent punishments are imposed when there is a decline in performance quality or quantity below established production standards, or when tasks and objectives are not met at all (p. 358). Additionally, within the realm of transactional leadership, two additional dimensions warrant consideration: (a) management by exception-active; and (b) management by exception-passive (Bass, 1990, p. 22). Delving further into these aspects, Young et al. (2021) elucidated management by exception-active as encompassing the proactive monitoring of follower conduct to promptly identify and address deviations from established norms, whereas management by exception-passive entails addressing such deviations only after their occurrence (p. 1256). Ultimately, this leadership approach can be summarized as an exchange process, wherein leaders leverage their authority to maintain control (Men & Stacks, 2013, p. 174). This system is particularly effective, especially when leaders manage to provide rewards that hold significance and value for their followers (Bass, 1990, p. 23). This specific leadership approach can also be interpreted within the framework of the aforementioned social exchange

theory, which revolves around a reciprocal interaction involving leaders and followers (Den Hartog et al., 1997, p. 20). More precisely, the incentives transactional leaders provide to their followers, i.e., their employees, can be seen as a reciprocation for the work efforts and performance contributions exerted (Young et al., 2021, p. 1257).

Continuing our investigation, the second leadership communication style under scrutiny is the transformational approach. Specifically, some authors pointed out that this communication style becomes evident when:

> Leaders broaden and elevate the interest of their followers, when they generate awareness and acceptance among the followers for the purposes and mission of the group, and when they move their followers to transcend their own self-interest for the good of the group. (Seltzer & Bass, 1990, pp. 693-694)

Bass (1990) emphasized how these outcomes can be achieved through different approaches. Specifically, (a) through charisma; (b) by inspiring the employees; (c) by addressing the employees' emotional needs; or (d) through the intellectual stimulation of employees (p. 21). If leaders demonstrate these traits, Rafferty and Griffin (2004) highlighted a positive outcome for organizations, suggesting that their employees are more likely to exceed and outperform their initial expectations (p. 329). At this point, readers might wonder about when charisma, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation occur. First, leadership is defined as transformational when "its charisma or idealized influence is envisioning, confident, and sets high standards for emulation" (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 187). Second, Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) underscored that inspirational motivation occurs when leaders provide their employees with challenges to overcome, with the intent to engage in shared goals. Here, the appeal resides in redirecting the attention towards the best qualities of their followers (p. 188). Third, Mendonca (2001) emphasized the power of this transformational leadership style to enable employees to "function as autonomous persons" (p. 268), thereby fostering individualized consideration. Last, intellectual stimulation occurs when leaders go beyond just giving task directives, and challenge employees to think of innovative strategies of execution (Sánchez-Cardona et al., 2018, p. 2). Through these approaches, transformational leaders showcase their willingness to share authority (Men & Stacks, 2013, p. 184), while illustrating their commitment to fostering a more involving working environment (Kovjanic et al., 2013, p. 545). Ultimately, Jin (2010) emphasized that transformational leaders tend to exhibit specific attributes, such as being sensitive, innovative, empathic, compassionate, and tend to be more inclined to devote their attention to cultivating relationships with their followers (p. 174). Similarly to transactional leadership, the transformational leadership style can be interpreted through the lens of the social exchange theory. By fostering a heightened sense of belonging within the organization, leaders can effectively obtain higher productivity levels and reduce turnover rates (Wang, 2020, p. 45). This is attributed to transformational leaders' adeptness in establishing closer relationships with their employees, who ultimately share and contribute to the organization's vision (Bass, 1990, p. 22).

As for the impact of different communication styles on employee well-being, findings from

Willett et al. (2023) indicated that employing effective communication fosters workplace respect, ultimately resulting in enhanced employee well-being (p. 15). Specifically, different studies suggested a positive association between transformational leadership communication and employee well-being (Skakon et al., 2010, p. 132; Tafvelin et al., 2011, p. 487). This conclusion was further reinforced by a study conducted by Kelloway et al. (2012, p. 52). Nevertheless, this beneficial impact was already advocated in studies by Bass (1990), which recommended promoting transformational leadership as a means to positively influence the company's performance across all organizational levels (p. 25). Finally, Skakon et al. (2010) highlighted mixed results when assessing the impact of transactional leadership communication on well-being outcomes (p. 132). Based on the positive impact of a transformational leadership communication style, this dissertation proposes the following hypotheses:

H2: Employees who respond to leaders adopting a transactional leadership communication style will report lower levels of well-being.

H3: Employees who respond to leaders adopting a transformational leadership communication style will report higher levels of well-being.

2.6   The Emotional Intelligence Theory

The final theory to be addressed in this exploration is the emotional intelligence theory, a construct that has received increasing interest and demonstrated potential to influence psychological well-being (Carmeli et al., 2009, p. 66). The concept has been defined by Salovey and Mayer (1990) as "the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p. 189). Mayer et al. (2004) further elaborated on this concept, suggesting that emotional intelligence should be divided into four primary domains, meaning the ability to (a) perceive emotions; (b) use emotions to facilitate thought; (c) understand emotions; and (d) manage emotions. It should be noted that these areas suggest a progression in skills, ranging from basic, i.e., emotion recognition, to the most advanced, i.e., management of emotions (p. 199). When examining the work environment, Goleman (1998) delineated five essential components of emotional intelligence. First, self-awareness assumes a crucial role, encompassing the ability to recognize one's own emotions alongside those of others. Second, self-regulation emerges as fundamental, reflecting the ability to think before acting. Third, motivation was found to be crucial to pursue goals with energy and persistence. Fourth, empathy underscores the ability to respond to others in accordance with their emotional states. Finally, social skills are emphasized as vital competencies to proficiently manage relationships (p. 4).

Over the years, other research groups have offered alternative definitions of the concept (McCleskey, 2014, p. 77). For the context of this dissertation, which specifically centers on employees, a definition that might seem more apt was provided by Boyatzis (2009), who defined emotional intelligence as "an ability to recognize, understand, and use emotional information about oneself that leads to or causes effective or superior performance" (p. 757). In addition, Humphrey (2002) considered leadership

as an "emotional process", asserting that leaders have both direct and indirect influence on employees' emotions, which can manifest as optimism or frustration (p. 502). The significance of this theory lies in the observation that leadership is characterized as an "emotional laden process" (George, 2000, p. 1046), hence emotional intelligence should be regarded as among the most important factors for achieving effective leadership (Kerr et al., 2006, p. 275; McCleskey, 2014, p. 81). In this context, a study conducted by Shamshad and Naqi Khan (2022) has shown that high levels of emotional intelligence are associated with transformational leadership behavior, which in turn has been demonstrated to improve psychological well-being (p. 4). Finally, the last hypothesis posits:

H4: Employees who respond to leaders with high emotional intelligence will report higher levels of well-being.

To conclude, the theoretical framework herein delineated provides a comprehensive overview of the key concepts that will be adopted throughout this dissertation to evaluate the impact of different leadership communication styles on employee well-being. Through an examination of the social exchange theory and the emotional intelligence theory, this framework lays the groundwork for further investigation into the hypotheses proposed. Consequently, the following chapter will outline the research design deployed to achieve this objective.

3. Methodology

This section is designed to offer the reader insights into the chosen research methodology aimed at addressing the research questions outlined in the introductory chapter. It will be structured as follows. First, a thorough explanation and justification of the methods employed will be presented. Subsequently, a rationale for the specific type of data analysis will be articulated, accompanied by an overview of the data sampling, the temporal scope of the investigation, and an exploration of how the data was collected. Second, the chapter will delve into the operationalization process, detailing the instruments utilized to measure and explore the concepts outlined to answer the research questions. Last, this section will include a discourse on the reliability and validity of the measuring instruments, alongside an assessment of the suitability of the chosen qualitative instrument for analysis.

3.1 Research Method

This research aims to investigate the influence of leadership communication styles on employee well-being within the European food industry. To achieve this objective, a mixed-methods approach will be adopted to answer the research questions and validate or reject the hypotheses. This methodological design intends to capture diverse perspectives from various stakeholders, i.e., employees within the European food industry, and human resources professionals, and is consequently tailored for each group to ensure a nuanced understanding of their viewpoints. Moreover, to enrich the analysis with academic insights, an expert interview will be conducted with a professor specializing in the psychology of labor, from the University of Turin. Overall, quantitative research will be carried out involving European employees, while a qualitative method, i.e., expert interviews, will be employed to engage with professionals within the human resources spectrum. Despite the inclusion of both quantitative and qualitative elements, quantitative analysis will serve as the primary method to test the hypotheses and derive conclusions about the research questions. The rationale behind this choice stems from this project's aim to examine data from a substantial pool of respondents. Hence, a quantitative methodology was deemed preferable as it enables the direct measurement of subjective opinions and perceptions (Queirós et al., 2017, p. 381). Additionally, it should be noted that employing a quantitative methodology could allow a clearer and more transparent presentation of results to the professionals who will contribute to the discourse through interviews. On the other hand, qualitative data will facilitate the comprehension of the survey results, thereby affording supplementary insights and elucidating emerging trends. Collectively, the outcomes from both quantitative and qualitative processes will address the research inquiries and explain the hypotheses at hand.

Ultimately, this methodological choice was deemed advantageous in terms of depth, as "mixing two methods might be superior to a single method as it is likely to provide rich insights into the research phenomena that cannot be fully understood by using only qualitative or quantitative methods" (Dawadi et al., 2021, p. 27). Such an approach will enable a comprehensive exploration, facilitating data triangulation,

and thereby bolstering confidence in the research findings (Heale & Forbes, 2013, p. 98). As Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) asserted, "many research questions and combinations of questions are best and most fully answered through mixed research solutions" (p. 18). In addition, the authors also delineated the strengths and weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative methods, underscoring how the former effectively elucidates complex phenomena, such as employee well-being, while the latter enhances precision through numerical data (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, pp. 20-21). Thus, the insights emerged from expert interviews not only will enrich the investigation of leadership communication's influence on employee well-being but will also complement the quantitative survey data with professional perspectives.

3.2   Procedure

This section aims to elucidate how the data was collected. To comprehensively investigate the research questions, a survey was formulated employing Qualtrics and subsequently disseminated via electronic mail. Thanks to the researcher's supervisor's network, collaboration was established with a country manager from a prominent Italian food company, leveraging his connections for survey diffusion. To safeguard confidentiality and privacy, the identity of the country manager shall remain undisclosed. To gather additional data, the survey was shared through the social media platform LinkedIn. To take part in the study, participants were affiliated with organizations presenting a workforce of a minimum of ten employees to ensure a focused examination of workplaces endowed with more structured communication paradigms. This criterion was established to exclude smaller-scale enterprises, as extant literature posited the heightened role of leadership and communication dynamics within larger, well-established corporations (Men & Stacks, 2014, p. 309).

The first section of the survey was crafted to furnish participants with an overview of the research's academic foundation, elucidating the main themes and appraising the respondents of the anticipated completion duration, estimated at approximately 5 minutes to maintain engagement and collect more considered and reliable answers (Sharma, 2022, p. 68). Emphasis was placed on the voluntary nature of participation, coupled with explicit assurances regarding the confidentiality of responses and their exclusive utilization for scholarly endeavors, thus precluding any external dissemination. Furthermore, respondents were requested to confirm their attainment of legal adulthood, stipulated as 18 years or older. Prior to embarking on the survey, participants were required to explicitly consent to the prescribed terms. Finally, to cater to different linguistic backgrounds, the survey was presented in both English, i.e., the native language of the survey items and scales, and Italian, leveraging the researcher's proficiency in the latter language.

Structurally, the survey was divided into three distinguished segments. Initially, foundational information was imparted to participants. Subsequently, inquiries were directed towards perceived organizational support, leadership communication, emotional intelligence, and employee well-being. Finally, participants were prompted to provide demographic details encompassing age, gender, educational attainment, occupational designation, and the geographic location of their professional

engagement. Upon the completion of the survey, an expression of gratitude was extended to participants for their contributions.

As for the qualitative data collection, an initial phase involved a thorough examination of potential interviewees through the networking platform LinkedIn. There, the researcher sought out individuals with demonstrable expertise, direct involvement, or specialized knowledge in domains pertinent to human resources, employee well-being, and leadership communication. Upon identification, through indicators such as pertinent LinkedIn posts or involvement as speakers at relevant events, prospective participants were initially contacted through LinkedIn to first introduce the research project itself. Following their expression of interest, further correspondence was conducted via email to arrange virtual meetings for in-depth discussions.

The interviews were conducted using the Microsoft Teams platform, with each session typically spanning between 45 minutes and 60 minutes. Prior to commencement, explicit consent for recording was obtained orally from all interviewees. Moreover, participants were provided with comprehensive briefings regarding the interview's objectives, the overarching goals of the study, and the procedural aspects involved. From the beginning, it was explicitly communicated that participation in the study did not entail direct benefits for the interviewees. Additionally, it was emphasized that participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and professionals were reassured of the possibility of withdrawing from the process at any time without repercussions. Furthermore, strict assurances were provided regarding the confidentiality of answers, with a commitment to ensuring that no personally identifiable information would be disclosed in any research outputs. However, the titles and positions of employment were preserved to facilitate the sharing and contextualization of insights drawn from the interviews. Before proceeding with the interview, the researcher emphasized to the experts that they could interrupt the conversation and seek clarification on any matter at any time. Following each interview session, participants received a personalized email expressing gratitude for their invaluable contributions and time invested. The message also included a summary outlining the key points regarding consent and the overarching objectives of the study, ensuring transparency, and reinforcing mutual understanding.

In both quantitative and qualitative data collection processes, the researcher made her contact information readily available for participants to address any queries or concerns they may have.

3.3   Sample

The survey aimed to target a broad spectrum of employees across various roles within the European food industry, ensuring diversity in age, with all participants being at least 18 years old, and occupying positions ranging from (a) frontline staff; (b) support staff; (c) supervisors; and (d) management and leadership.

Given the mixed methods approach employed in this thesis, the target sample was established at a minimum of 75 respondents. To achieve this objective, a random sampling methodology was implemented to ensure comprehensive representation across various countries and different employment

roles. This strategic decision was grounded in the acknowledgment that employing random sampling methods enhances the generalizability of survey outcomes while mitigating potential research biases (Noor et al., 2022, p. 82). By systematically integrating viewpoints from employees occupying diverse roles, this approach effectively reflected potential variations in experiences stemming from job responsibilities and organizational hierarchies. This deliberate sampling strategy aimed to capture and provide a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the diverse perspectives of workers within the European food industry.

As for the interviewees contributing to this study, four professionals with backgrounds in human resources or academia, with at least 10 years of experience, were selected. These include: (a) a university professor specializing in the psychology of labor and organizations; (b) a consultant of strategic human resources management; (c) a chief officer overseeing people, organization, communication, happiness, and innovation functions; and (d) a corporate human resources advisor specialized in well-being. To ensure additional clarity when reporting their responses, experts were respectively referred to as (a) Expert A; (b) Expert B; (c) Expert C; (d) Expert D. A detailed overview of the interviewees is presented in Appendix B.

In both the quantitative and qualitative sampling processes, no emphasis was placed on distinguishing between genders. For the former, the focus remained on the employee's role and experience, while for the latter attention centered on their professional expertise and perspective regarding employee well-being matters.

3.4   Design

To adequately address the overarching research inquiry, this investigation centered on leadership communication as the independent variable and employee well-being as the dependent variable. Regarding the sub-questions, employee well-being continued serving as the dependent variable, while the independent variables included (a) perceived organizational support; (b) transactional leadership; (c) transformational leadership; and (d) emotional intelligence.

3.5   Quantitative Operationalization

The variables under investigation were assessed utilizing previously validated Likert scales that are well-established in the field of interest. To maintain respondents' engagement throughout the entirety of the questionnaire, it was determined to employ abbreviated versions of each scale, ensuring conciseness and efficiency in data collection.

Diving further, the assessment of perceived organizational support (POS) utilized the scale initially devised by Eisenberger et al. (1986, p. 502), comprising a 7-point Likert scale, spanning from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) and encompassing a total of 16 items. To counteract the potential bias toward agreement responses, the scale included an equitable distribution of both positively and negatively worded statements.

The assessment of leadership communication was evaluated employing the six-item Perceived Leadership Communication Questionnaire Other-Rating (PLCQ-OR) scale developed by Schneider et al. (2014, p. 192). This scale utilizes response options ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Specifically, both transactional and transformational leadership communication styles were assessed using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (1997). This assessment required respondents to rate specific behaviors exhibited by their supervisors on a scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). While the original scale consisted of 36 items, two versions were available: a long version and a shorter one. For the purpose of this study and to ensure respondent engagement, the shorter version was selected. This abbreviated version included 9 items, with 5 items reflecting transformational leadership styles, e.g., "My supervisor helps me develop my strengths", and 4 items indicative of transactional leadership styles, e.g., "My supervisor makes it clear what I can expect to receive when performance goals are achieved".

Continuing, emotional intelligence was assessed using the 16-item scale formulated by Wong and Law (2002). This scale utilizes a rating system spanning from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) and the wording of its items was adjusted to mirror the perspective of employees regarding their employer's emotional intelligence. For instance, instead of the statement "I have a good control of my emotions", the item was rephrased as "My supervisor has a good control of his/her emotions".

Finally, employee well-being was assessed by evaluating two key dimensions: (a) psychological health; and (b) job satisfaction. These dimensions were highlighted in prior research as integral components of employee well-being (Noblet, 2003, pp. 353-354; Rydstedt et al., 2006, pp. 10-11). Specifically, psychological health was evaluated using a 12-item version of the General Health Questionnaire developed by Goldberg and Williams (1988), utilizing a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (always) to 4 (never). Instead, to measure job satisfaction, a 10-item scale developed by Warr et al. (1979) was employed. This scale operates on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly dissatisfied) to 7 (strongly satisfied), with higher scores indicating greater levels of job satisfaction.

The complete questionnaire employed to collect responses from employees within the European food industry is presented in Appendix F.

3.6   Qualitative Operationalization

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using predetermined interview questions established by the researcher before the interview sessions. Although the questions remained consistent across all experts, the semi-structured interview approach afforded the interviewer the flexibility to delve into new lines of inquiry and to probe further into responses as needed, thus enabling a dynamic yet nuanced exploration of the research topic while maintaining a level of consistency across all interviews.

On a deeper note, for this investigation, the researcher developed an interview template to serve as a framework for conducting expert interviews (Appendix D). The template commenced with an introductory section, featuring a personal presentation of the interviewer, an overview of the interview's

objectives and their relevance to the thesis. Subsequently, the interviewees were briefed on the discussion topics and asked to grant permission to record the conversations to facilitate their subsequent transcription and analysis.

The interviews began with establishing rapport and understanding the interviewee's expertise, through a request for the interviewees to introduce themselves and provide a brief overview of their experience in the human resources field. Subsequently, the concept of employee well-being was explored by asking questions aimed at eliciting the interviewee's definition and understanding of the term, as well as its significance in professional settings. The interview then transitioned to topics related to organizational support and its influence on employee well-being, with questions focused on the interviewee's perspective on effective organizational support, its promotion of employee well-being, and examples of successful support practices, particularly through communication strategies. Then, leadership styles and their impact on employee well-being were discussed, probing the interviewee's observations on various leadership approaches and their effects on employee happiness and satisfaction. Following, social exchange dynamics were examined through inquiries into reciprocal exchanges between leaders and employees within work settings, as well as examples of positive exchanges improving employee well-being. In addition, emotional intelligence was addressed through questions defining the concept, assessing its importance for effective leadership, and exploring instances when emotionally intelligent leadership positively impacted team well-being. Later, interviewees were asked for recommendations on communication to improve employee well-being, as well as for insights into future trends in leadership approaches. Finally, the interviews concluded with an opportunity for the interviewees to share any additional insights regarding leadership communication and employee well-being.

Overall, this structured interview template provided a comprehensive framework for exploring key themes related to leadership communication and its influence on employee well-being within organizational contexts.

3.7   Quantitative Data Analysis

A total of 87 participants completed the survey between March 27th and April 30th. Subsequently, descriptive statistics were employed to obtain an overview of the dataset, followed by correlation and multiple linear regression analyses to investigate the study's hypotheses. Specifically, correlation analysis assessed the strength and direction of the association between two variables, providing insights into how much one variable changes in relation to the other, while the regression analysis examined the predictive relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

Diving deeper, the statistical analysis was performed using IBM SPSS software. First, descriptive statistics offered insights into various demographic factors, including age, gender, level of education, employment status, and the country where the participants' experience in the food industry occurred. Although demographic questions were asked at the end of the survey, their inclusion at the beginning of the quantitative analysis offered a general understanding of the sample's characteristics, facilitating

subsequent interpretation. Finally, the next step involved correlation and regression analyses to test the hypotheses and interpret the interrelationships between key variables through numerical data.

3.8   Qualitative Data Analysis

A total of four interviews were scheduled and conducted over a two-week period, spanning from April 17th to April 29th. Due to time constraints caused by the overlap of the interview stage and the simultaneous collection of survey responses, it was not possible to solicit commentary from the interviewees on the quantitative outcomes.

After the participants' oral consent, recordings of gathered data were meticulously processed, transcribed, summarized in English where required, and finally analyzed. Specifically, the qualitative analysis adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach, following the six-step framework outlined in their study (pp. 79-93) and detailed in Appendix G. Ultimately, the themes identified for this investigation include (a) employee well-being; (b) the impact of COVID-19 on employee well-being; (c) perceived organizational support; (d) leadership communication; and (e) emotional intelligence. These themes will be thoroughly explained in the following chapter.

3.9   Quantitative Validity and Reliability

This section intends to dive deeper into the factors that contribute to the validity and reliability of this research's outcomes. Specifically, this study ensured reliability, defined as the consistency and stability of measurement (Heale & Twycross, 2015, p. 66), by using well-established scales that had already been tested for reliability in previous research. Consequently, employing these scales to measure this research's variables facilitated the accurate measurement of the intended constructs, ultimately ensuring the validity of the survey instrument (Heale & Twycross, 2015, p. 66). Finally, the incorporation of a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative data with qualitative expert interviews, bolstered the validity of the findings by offering a comprehensive understanding of the research topic from multiple perspectives.

3.10   Qualitative Validity and Reliability

Delving into the qualitative aspect of this investigation, semi-structured interviews were conducted utilizing a predefined interview template, ensuring consistency, thus reliability, in the topics addressed throughout all interviews. While the questions remained consistent, the semi-structured format of the interviews allowed for flexibility, allowing the interviewer to dive into new lines of inquiry as necessary. Additionally, attention was paid to the transcription process to maintain the accuracy of the original interviews, and a systematic coding approach was employed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and key concepts throughout the interviews, thereby bolstering the consistency and reliability of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 95).

In terms of the validity of the qualitative component of this study, the interview questions were

crafted to address themes and concepts clearly pertinent to the research objectives, aiming to guarantee that the gathered data was closely aligned with the overarching research aims. Furthermore, the inclusion of diverse perspectives via interviews with experts representing various backgrounds and roles within the realm of human resources and communication enriched the validity of the findings, offering a comprehensive understanding of the research topics.

3.11   Ethics

This investigation adhered to the general principles of ethical research, as outlined in Greaney et al.'s (2012) study (pp. 39-40). Specifically, recruitment was limited to participants aged 18 years and above, with a detailed account of this process provided at the beginning of this methodological chapter. Furthermore, all respondents were carefully briefed on the study's purpose, its academic nature, and the potential risks or benefits involved, ensuring they could provide explicit and well-informed consent (Greaney et al., 2012, p. 39). Moreover, participants were instructed on the expected duration of their contribution, warranting transparency throughout the entire process. Finally, they were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage and were provided with the researcher's contact information for any inquiries. In the survey data collection, anonymity was upheld, and confidentiality was maintained throughout all interviews (Greaney et al., 2012, p. 40). In adherence to these ethical standards, only the interviewees' identifiers, i.e., Expert A, Expert B, Expert C, and Expert D, were used when directly quoting, ensuring consistency in maintaining both anonymity and confidentiality.

4. Results

This chapter elucidates the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses. Starting with an exploration of the descriptive statistics pertaining to the sample, subsequent sections delve into hypotheses testing conducted employing IBM SPSS software. This chapter includes the insights gained from the semi-structured interviews, thereby offering a more comprehensive view of the overall research outcomes.

4.1   Quantitative Descriptive Statistics

The data collection for this study took place from March to April 2024, employing Qualtrics as the platform to build the online survey. In total, the survey recorded 87 responses, with a diverse representation of participants in terms of gender and age. Among the respondents, 57.5% ($n = 50$) identified as "female", 39.1% ($n = 34$) as "male", and 3.4% ($n = 3$) as "other". Importantly, all respondents confirmed to be at least 18 years old, with reported ages ranging from 19 years old for the youngest respondent to more than 80 years old for the oldest. To facilitate analysis and ensure methodological clarity, the participant who reported being more than 80 years old was categorized as being 81 years old. Participants' average age was 32.24 ($SD = 13.91$). Given the aforementioned range, the study sample could be divided into five groups, each pertaining to a different generation, notably (a) mature generation, born before 1946; (b) baby boomers, born between 1947 and 1964; (c) generation X, born between 1965 and 1980; (d) generation Y, born between 1981 and 1995; and (e) generation Z, born after 1995 (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005, as cited in Bejtkovský, 2016, p. 107). Applying these ranges, the distribution within the sample is as follows: 1.1% ($n = 1$) represents the mature generation, 4.6% ($n = 4$) constitutes baby boomers, 16.1% ($n = 14$) is from generation X, while 13 respondents (14.9%) represent generation Y, and 63.3% respondents ($n = 55$) represent the biggest group, generation Z.

In terms of educational attainment within the sample, 11.5% of participants ($n = 10$) possess educational qualifications below the high school level. A substantial portion of the sample, comprising 34.5% ($n = 30$) holds a high school degree or its equivalent. Moreover, 17.2% of respondents ($n = 15$) pursued some form of university education but did not obtain a degree, while 20.7% ($n = 18$) obtained a bachelor's degree. Additionally, 14.9% of participants ($n = 13$) obtained a master's degree, while a mere 1.1% ($n = 1$) hold a doctoral degree.

Regarding the employment status, the analysis revealed that 49.4% of the sample ($n = 43$) is engaged in employment commitments ranging from 1 hour and 39 hours per week. A considerable portion of respondents, comprising 34.5% ($n = 30$), dedicate more than 40 hours a week to their employment. Additionally, 11.5% of participants ($n = 10$) are currently unemployed but are actively seeking employment opportunities, while 4.6% ($n = 4$) are not employed and are not actively seeking employment. Further exploration into the occupational roles of the participants indicated that out of the 87 individuals partaking in the study, 51.7% ($n = 45$) represent "frontline staff", 24.1% ($n = 21$) constitute

"support staff", 11.5% (n = 10) are designated as "supervisors", and 12.6% (n = 11) identified as holding "management or leadership positions".

Finally, participants were requested to specify in which country their professional experience occurred. Specifically, 65.5% of the sample (n = 57) reported "Italy" as the location of their experience, 19.5% of participants (n = 17) indicated "The Netherlands", while "Denmark" was mentioned by 3.4% (n = 3) of the respondents. Other countries were also mentioned, and a comprehensive breakdown is provided in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1

Frequency Table of Sample Countries

Country	n	%
Austria	2	2.3
Denmark	3	3.4
Germany	2	2.3
Greece	1	1.1
Ireland	1	1.1
Italy	57	65.5
The Netherlands	17	19.5
Poland	1	1.1
Romania	1	1.1
Sweden	2	2.3

4.2   Food Industry: A Descriptive Analysis

The primary characteristics of the European food industry have been thoroughly examined in the theoretical framework established for this thesis. The analysis of the survey data collected (N = 87) revealed a general sense of moderate satisfaction among respondents regarding their "physical working conditions". Specifically, on a scale from 1 (strongly dissatisfied) to 7 (extremely satisfied) respondents expressed moderate satisfaction with noise levels, temperature, safety, and cleanliness in the workplace (M = 4.39, SD = 1.78). This indicates that there is still room for improvement in creating not only a safer but also a more comfortable work environment. Similarly, participants rated their "satisfaction with pay" at a somewhat satisfactory level (M = 3.75, SD = 2.02), which could imply that wages may not adequately meet employees' expectations. This sentiment extended to their evaluation of "working hours" (M = 3.92, SD = 1.86), showing a need for better scheduling or a more favorable work-life balance. Last, participants' "overall job satisfaction" (M = 4.44, SD = 1.78) revealed a general sense of satisfaction, while still highlighting the necessity for comprehensive improvements in workplace practices throughout the entire European food industry. Overall, this study's findings align with the characteristics of the European food industry outlined by Gerogiannis et al. (2012, pp. 20-40) and Jettinghoff and Houtman (2009, pp. 12-14).

4.3   Explanatory Factor Analysis

This section aims to undertake an explanatory factor analysis. Before proceeding, it was essential to evaluate the adequacy of the sample size for such an analysis. Pallant (2016) asserted that "while there is little agreement among authors concerning how large a sample should be, the recommendation generally is: the larger, the better" (p. 204). In this regard, Pallant (2016) further emphasized that factors derived from small datasets may not generalize as effectively as those from larger samples (p. 204). Moreover, Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) advocated for a minimum sample size of 300 participants for factor analysis, although they acknowledged that a sample size of 150 cases could be acceptable if the solutions exhibit loading marker variables exceeding .80 (p. 618). Based on these criteria, it became apparent that the sample size in this study ($N = 87$) falls short of the stipulated requirements for conducting explanatory factor analysis, and therefore such analysis could not be executed.

4.4   Correlation Analysis

In correlation analysis the relationship between different variables is examined, with coefficients ranging from –1 to +1, indicating respectively perfect negative and perfect positive relationship, with 0 meaning that no correlation is found.

In examining the relationships between employee well-being and the predictor variables, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. The analysis showed that employee well-being was found to have a significant, positive correlation with perceived organizational support ($r = .36$, $p < .001$), transformational leadership ($r = .25$, $p = .021$), and emotional intelligence ($r = .47$, $p < .001$), suggesting that higher levels of perceived organizational support, transformational leadership, and emotional intelligence are associated with greater employee well-being (Table 4.4). Finally, as predicted in this dissertation's theoretical framework, no significant correlation was observed between transactional leadership and employee well-being ($r = .09$, $p = .414$).

Table 4.4

Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Employee Well-being	—	.356**	.247*	.089	.465**
2. Perceived Organizational Support	.356**	—	.189	.107	.348**
3. Transformational Leadership	.247*	.189	—	.418**	.653**
4. Transactional Leadership	.089	.107	.418**	—	.286**
5. Emotional Intelligence	.465**	.348**	.653**	.286**	—

Note. Significance levels: *$p < .05$ **$p < .01$.

4.5   Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

For a deeper look into this study's variables and their predictive relationship, this section aims to report the regression analysis ran. A multiple linear regression was conducted with employee well-being as the dependent variable, and (a) perceived organizational support; (b) transactional leadership; (c) transformational leadership; and (d) emotional intelligence as predictors. The model was found to be significant, $F(4, 82) = 7.36$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .26$, indicating that the independent variables collectively are significantly associated with the dependent variable, explaining approximately 26% of the variance in employee well-being. Specifically, perceived organizational support was found to have a significant positive influence on employee well-being ($\beta = .22$, $p = .034$), thereby offering support for H1. Furthermore, emotional intelligence was found to be a significant positive predictor of employee well-being ($\beta = .45$, $p = .001$), thereby offering support for H4. Conversely, transformational leadership was found not to be a significant positive predictor of employee well-being ($\beta = -.07$, $p = .593$), offering no support for H3. Last, transactional leadership was found not to be a significant positive predictor of employee well-being ($\beta = -.03$, $p = .759$), thereby offering no support for H2. In summary, while the overall model is significant, only perceived organizational support and emotional intelligence are significant predictors (Table 4.3).

Nevertheless, it must be noted that while transactional leadership not being a significant positive predictor of employee well-being is consistent with previous research (Skakon et al., 2010, p. 132), transformational leadership not being a positive predictor diverges from prior findings (Kelloway et al., 2012, p. 52; Tafvelin et al., 2011, p. 487). Indeed, it is important to acknowledge that with the sample size at hand ($N = 87$), it may not be possible to ensure an accurate representation of this study's target population (Cronbach et al., 1972, as cited in Wilson Van Voorhis & Morgan, 2007, p. 45).

Table 4.5

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis for Study Variables

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
(Constant)	-1.358	0.305	—	-4.451	<.001
Emotional Intelligence	0.187	0.055	0.445	3.396	.001
Perceived Organizational Support	0.161	0.075	0.218	2.150	.034
Transformational Leadership	-0.030	0.055	-0.071	-0.537	.593
Transactional Leadership	-0.012	0.039	-0.032	-0.308	.759

4.6   Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data for this study was collected in April 2024, with interviews conducted on April 17th, 19th, and 30th. Following the collection and analysis of the qualitative data, several key themes emerged, shedding light on leadership communication and its influence on employee well-being. The themes mirrored the variables investigated in the previous quantitative analysis, including aspects such as

(a) employee well-being; (b) the impact of COVID-19 on employee well-being; (c) perceived organizational support; (d) leadership communication styles; and (e) emotional intelligence. Before delving into the specifics of each theme and discussing their respective sub-themes, a concise general overview will be presented. The detailed codebook is available in Appendix H.

During the interviews, the initial inquired theme was employee well-being, seeking to understand how experts defined it and whether they had personal interpretations. Within this discussion, several sub-themes emerged, including (a) physical well-being, which entails promoting physical activity through initiatives like fitness programs or gym memberships; (b) mental and emotional health, reinforced by providing access to counseling or other mental health resources; (c) work-life balance, exemplified by the flexibility in working hours and the implementation of remote work policies; and (d) job satisfaction and motivation, facilitated through initiatives such as recognizing performance and offering opportunities for career advancement.

Another significant theme that emerged is the impact of COVID-19 on employee well-being, which encompasses several dimensions. Firstly, (a) remote work and isolation presented both advantages and challenges. Secondly, (b) organizational adaptation necessitated changes and posed challenges in communication and leadership styles due to the shift to virtual work environments. Lastly, (c) changing employee needs were observed, with professionals noting an increased demand for more flexible work arrangements in the present context.

Another prominent theme is perceived organizational support, which incorporates various aspects. Firstly, (a) physical and mental health resources, such as gym memberships or counseling services, play a crucial role. Secondly, (b) managerial responsiveness was highlighted, as leaders are required to acknowledge and address individual needs effectively.

A fourth significant theme pertained to leadership communication and specifically the various approaches that leaders may adopt in their communication styles. In this regard, this analysis of interviews highlighted three key areas: (a) transactional leadership, characterized by a goal-oriented approach involving structured rewards, penalties, clear communication of expectations and objectives, as outlined by Odumeru and Ogbonna (2013, p. 358); (b) transformational leadership, where leaders aim to inspire and motivate employees through vision sharing and support, as described by Bass (1990, p. 21); and (c) situational leadership, which, as elucidated by the interviewed professor of psychology of labor, entails adapting communication styles based on employee needs or specific situations.

The final theme identified through this qualitative analysis focused on the significance of emotional intelligence in effective leadership, further delineated into two distinct sub-areas: (a) empathy and understanding, emphasizing the ability of leaders to discern and respond to employees' emotional states while nurturing a supportive environment; and (b) social skills and communication, whereby experts suggested that although emotional intelligence can be cultivated and honed, possessing robust interpersonal skills remains essential for comprehending one's working environment effectively.

Having identified these key themes, the subsequent sections will delve further into each sub-

theme, examining their nuances and implications within the context of leadership communication and employee well-being.

4.6.1 Employee Well-being

The initial theme for analysis is employee well-being. Before delving into its sub-areas, it is noteworthy to explore the diverse definitions provided by experts. Specifically, the interviews started with a request for a personal definition of well-being to elucidate potential disparities between their perceptions of employee well-being and its operationalization within work settings. First, Expert A defined employee well-being as "the physical and mental health of people in general and employees", with further discussion revealing that "a few years ago, it was primarily physical health and giving people the possibility to go to the gym", reflecting a prioritization of physical well-being. Expert B emphasized a more motivational approach, framing well-being as "enjoying your work, about getting up in the morning, and at least 80% of the time you gotta think 'yes, I am gonna do this again', and you feel good about it". This view highlights the relevance of job satisfaction and enthusiasm. Moving to a different perspective, Expert C offered a different definition of well-being, describing it as "a dynamic concept, often easily confused with the idea of feeling good, relaxed", while also incorporating "the possibility of self-realization". This definition conveys a more comprehensive understanding of personal fulfillment while recognizing that happiness is not the sole dimension of well-being, as also revealed by Ryan and Deci (2001, p. 145). Last, from an academic standpoint, well-being was defined by Expert D as "an emotional, psychological, physical, social and relational well-being, achieved through a balance between the demands that jobs and organizations place on their employees and what employees can reciprocate". This definition underscores the importance of balance required to achieve holistic well-being, consistent with Khatri and Gupta's study (2019, p. 361). Indeed, the diverse range of definitions presented in this section highlights the intricate nature of employee well-being, suggesting the necessity for a thorough and critical examination of its various dimensions.

First, it is worth noting that, as already highlighted by Grant et al. (2007), this study's results reflect the three dimensions of employee well-being: (a) psychological; (b) physical; and (c) social (p. 52). Specifically, Expert A emphasized how a few years ago well-being was primarily framed around physical health, indicating that companies prioritized access to fitness amenities like gym memberships. However, in addition to this narrow dimension, experts identified a contemporary shift towards recognizing psychological well-being, often supported through the provision of company-employed psychologists and anonymous counseling. Despite these services, an interesting point of contention arises, as Expert A asserted that such support "that's not the first responsibility of a company", raising questions about where the burden of care should lie. Moreover, the interviews revealed a nuanced perspective regarding the efficacy of psychological support within the workplace. Specifically, while there is broad recognition of its necessity, experts cautioned that such resources cannot fully mitigate the effects of a stressful work environment. Diving deeper, during the third interview, Expert C observed that companies often

approach psychological support superficially, treating these services as "mere checkboxes" rather than addressing "underlying systemic issues". Despite acknowledging financial constraints, experts unanimously agreed that monetary investment alone cannot inherently improve workplace conditions.

In conclusion, the different definitions hereby presented reveal the complex nature of well-being, requiring a thorough understanding of its dimensions and indicating the need for holistic approaches to address well-being comprehensively. Despite the increasing emphasis on psychological support initiatives within organizations, this study's results reveal a gap between rhetoric and practice, underlining the need for companies to tackle more structural issues before providing any additional support services.

4.6.2   *The Impact of COVID-19 on Employee Well-being*

The second theme under investigation is the role COVID-19 played in employees' lives. Consistent with previous studies by Li et al. (2022, p. 2) and Porcelli (2020, p. 109), all interviewed experts concurred that COVID-19 "negatively affected people's well-being", emphasizing how individuals have come to realize that "you need people around you". While the pandemic prompted companies to adopt different working methods, which represented both challenges and opportunities, Expert B noted that "mental problems have been on the rise since COVID-19 and it has also changed the way younger generation approaches life and work". Delving deeper, the professional also reflected on the paradox of remote work. Initially perceived as a form of "freedom", it quickly turned into an expectation of constant productivity, as "we got this strange notion that working from home had to be 8 hours of productivity because we also have 8 hours in the office", overlooking the reality that being in the office involves a blend of working and "being busy in a work environment". This unrealistic expectation created additional stress and blurred boundaries between personal and professional lives. Experts also identified COVID-19 as an "accelerator of many things", with Expert C sharing that "I don't remember that before COVID 'well-being' was a keyword. Today, it is more common to talk about well-being than about diversity". Similarly, this view was shared also by Expert D, who noted that "from COVID onwards, more attention has been placed on these themes", referring to well-being and mental health. Last, in terms of working conditions, COVID-19 shed light on the broader theme of flexibility, including working hours and work settings (e.g. remote versus in-office work), and being geographically closer to home. While flexibility has offered benefits to employees, such as enabling them to work in more comfortable environments, it has also come with unintended consequences. On this note, the professor emphasized that this flexibility has increasingly become a negotiation point at the bargaining table, as presently younger generations seem to prioritize flexibility over pay rates, indicating a shifting trend in workplace preferences. However, this expert also denoted a downside brought about by the pandemic, as employers now feel free to communicate with employees without regard to time, meaning that "employees are unable to switch off completely". This blurring of work-life boundaries creates an always-on culture, where employees feel compelled to respond to work-related matters even during their personal time (Steffens et al., 2023, p. 9). Such pressure not only erodes leisure time, but also contributes to burnout, ultimately harming mental

health, sleep quality, and leading to emotional exhaustion (Arlinghaus & Nachreiner, 2013, p. 1197; Dettmers, 2017, p. 24). On this note, both Expert B and Expert D recognized that while different employees might be more productive at different times during the day, there are certain tricks they can implement to ensure that the flexibility granted by remote work doesn't come at the cost of employees' ability to maintain personal boundaries and a healthy work-life balance. One example is the possibility of writing an email and scheduling its send at a different time to match working hours.

In conclusion, this examination of COVID-19's impact on employees revealed a complex interplay of both challenges and opportunities, highlighting how the pandemic blurred the boundaries between personal and professional life. As flexibility becomes a key negotiation point, maintaining healthy work-life boundaries is increasingly important to safeguard employee mental health and their overall well-being.

4.6.3   Perceived Organizational Support

The third theme to explore is perceived organizational support. Interestingly, all experts interviewed concurred that counseling services and psychological desks, alongside gym memberships, are foundational forms of organizational support for employee well-being. Diving deeper, this comprehensive offering is best illustrated by Expert B, who stated "I say we have the Rolls-Royce of help available. There are psychologists, we have a company doctor, we have social workers, we have confidentiality counselors". By mentioning this, the same professional also revealed a critical flaw in the current approach, by noting that these services are mainly accessed by "people who are already wobbly", implying a reactive, rather than proactive, approach where employees only seek help when their challenges become unmanageable. This failure to address well-being proactively means that these resources are underutilized until a crisis occurs, failing to prevent stress before it becomes overwhelming (Aguirre Velasco et al., 2020, p. 2). Such underutilization highlights potential barriers to accessing support, including stigma, lack of awareness, or organizational culture that discourages early intervention (Aguirre Velasco et al., 2020, p. 14; DeSa et al., 2022, pp. 4-8; Leka & Nicholson, 2019, p. 5). This expert's statement "you go to a psychologist when you feel that there's something happening and you might get into trouble, or you might even be closer to trouble" further emphasized this reactive stance. In sum, while offering counseling services and gym memberships is a positive step, this support needs to move beyond surface-level solutions, developing cultures where employees feel encouraged to seek help early.

Another interesting point was raised by Expert C, who emphasized the necessity of expanding organizational support to include "training programs and insurance for employees' families", highlighting the need to support the broader ecosystem affecting employee well-being. While these measures aim to provide a holistic safety net, they often focus on treating symptoms rather than tackling root causes such as overwhelming workloads or poor work-life balance, drawing attention to the limitations of traditional support measures. Specifically, training programs can enhance skills and career growth, but if they lack flexibility or are not aligned with the current workload, they can add to employee stress rather than reduce

it. Similarly, while insurance benefits for families demonstrate a company's commitment to its workforce, they don't directly impact the day-to-day challenges that contribute to burnout. Overall, this "broader ecosystem" approach advocated by Expert C recognizes the interconnection between all different aspects of well-being. Ultimately, this requires continuous assessment of employee needs and commitment to adapting support structures to align with the evolving nature of work and personal lives.

In addition to these elements, Expert D provided a comprehensive definition of organizational support as "the labor and organizational resources provided by a company to its employees to help them reach their goals, complete tasks, and feel fulfilled" clarifying that the objective of organizational support is to not merely to reduce stress but also to foster motivation and generate work engagement. Furthermore, this expert also pointed out the importance of social organizational support, emphasizing that "it's every company's responsibility to oversee the quality of the relationships and social exchanges within their workplace". Ultimately, organizational support should be perceived by employees as a genuine resource that enables balance and well-being. In this regard, it is also noted that "organizational support encompasses everything that employees perceive as a resource, thereby contributing to the balance I previously mentioned as the definition of well-being", including functional equipment and reliable internet connections. However, these tangible resources are only one part of the equation.

Another crucial aspect of organizational support is managerial responsiveness. According to Expert D, despite having job contracts, employees can still feel insecure in their roles. Therefore, organizational support in this regard should include transparency and managers being available to answer questions and provide guidance. This level of responsiveness helps foster trust, alleviates uncertainty, and encourages open communication, making employees feel acknowledged and secure. On this note, it was also finally shared that "it might seem obvious, but our research shows that one of the most crucial aspects to invest in is communication".

In conclusion, the theme of perceived organizational support encompasses a range of resources intended to foster employee well-being, yet it often involves a reactive approach rather than a proactive one, with counseling services primarily accessed when challenges escalate. Ultimately, a comprehensive strategy requires moving beyond surface-level solutions to create a proactive culture where employees are encouraged to seek help early.

4.6.4   *Leadership Communication*

The fourth theme to undergo scrutiny is leadership communication, categorized into two main domains: (a) transactional leadership; and (b) transformational leadership, as also underscored by Men and Stacks (2013, p. 174) in the theoretical framework of this study. In addition to these categories, a third one emerged, distinguished as situational leadership. This analysis revealed nuanced approaches tailored to organizational context and gender dynamics, highlighting the complexity of implementing effective leadership strategies.

In discussing leadership communication styles, Expert A began with an important premise,

stating that "the fit of such a transformational leader who has really an eye for the person behind the employee is also depending on the kind of company". When referring to specific industries, namely the more male-dominated ones, the expert also emphasized that "the whole touchy-feely thing is not really there, and sometimes needed, but less appreciated", pointing out the complex interplay between leadership styles and workplace culture, influenced by gender dynamics. Further exploration of the well-being aspect revealed a significant impact of transformational leadership: "very important as a high impact on happiness and well-being". The professional elaborated that this style's focus on individual needs correlates directly with employee happiness, underscoring that "there is some sort of relation between being transformational, having an eye for the person, and the well-being and happiness". When diving a bit deeper into gender differences, it was observed that male leaders typically exhibit more transactional behaviors, while female leaders are more likely to embrace transformational qualities, enhancing team dynamics, thanks to their higher "sense and intuition about what's going on in the team". While acknowledging the differences between transactional leadership styles, with clear goals and rewards (Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2013, p. 358), and transformational, as a style whose intent is to engage in a shared mission (Seltzer & Bass, 1990, pp. 693-694), Expert A also distinguished between short-term goals and long-term goals, sharing that the "transactional kind of leadership is sometimes needed", as teams might be "too much focused on their well-being and not so much on results". However, when focusing on long-term goals, the expert felt that employees "can be focused on results only for a certain amount of time". Interestingly, Expert A called this kind of leadership communication "sustainable employability", referring to the feature of transformational leadership to help employees feel happy and "having well-being for the longer run, for the longer term". For this purpose, transformational leadership, as a blend of leadership styles, adapting to short-term demands and fostering long-term employee engagement, is deemed essential for creating a workplace that supports both productivity and employee satisfaction. By integrating these insights, it became evident that effective leadership communication is not just about choosing one style over another, but about understanding and responding to the specific needs of the organization and its employees.

Building on it, Expert B offered practical insights into effective leadership communication, emphasizing that leaders must exemplify the communication standards they expect from their team: "if you talk about communication in general, then first of all, a leader has to be the example". This approach involves active engagement with employees through "verbal communication, checking and asking", as well as talking about "what do you like?" and "what don't you like?", establishing a foundation for transparent and responsive interactions. This direct involvement not only fosters open communication but also builds trust and facilitates a deeper understanding of individual and collective needs. On this note, Expert C identified a significant challenge in balancing different needs (e.g., those of the single individual and the team), defining this challenge as a tension between "future development goals" and "immediate needs". This tension manifests in leadership decisions that can either constrain or enable risk-taking and innovation: "if you just focus on what your business needs today, no one will have the chance

of being wrong, taking risks". Conversely, if leaders were to purely adopt a transformational approach, "it's clear that it then fails even earlier", leading businesses to premature failures if not judiciously balanced with practical, short-term objectives.

In addition, Expert D discussed that the relationship between employees and their employers is "one of the main causes of work-related stress", categorizing leadership styles into "positive" and "negative" impacts, and underscoring how leaders "should be able to adapt their leadership style based on the individuals' needs". Furthermore, the concept of "followership" was introduced, highlighting that just as leadership styles vary, so too do the needs and responses of different team members, who not only have different needs but also should be "challenged in different ways" to enhance performance.

Collectively, these insights underscored that there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach, and all experts agreed that it is particularly hard to define "the best leadership style". Based on what they expressed, it can be concluded that the best leadership style requires a blend of styles tailored to the specific circumstances and needs of the team at any given time. While transactional leadership may be necessary for achieving specific, immediate outcomes, transformational leadership tends to have a more significant and positive impact on long-term well-being. This nuanced understanding should encourage leaders to develop a flexible, situational approach to leadership that considers both the immediate business needs and the personal development of their team members.

4.6.5   *Emotional Intelligence*

The final theme under examination is emotional intelligence. Similarly to the previous themes, experts were initially prompted to define emotional intelligence and subsequently asked to consider whether it is an innate skill or rather something that can be developed through training.

Expert A described emotional intelligence as the act of "reading between the lines" which involves "asking the right questions, looking for clues, nonverbal clues". Adding to this perspective, Expert B stated that "especially on the emotional side, we do see a lot of things going wrong on the one hand, because they say the wrong thing, but also because they don't dare to ask". Expert C expanded on this, by defining emotional intelligence as the "ability to read emotions, or listen to something, even just refraining from judging" which highlights the importance of emotional awareness and self-regulation in social interactions, in line with Mayer et al.'s (2004) study (p. 199). Finally, Expert D described emotional intelligence as "very closely linked to the theme of listening, which must be not only on a rational but also emotional level", defining the concept as "the ability to tune into the emotions of others and one's own emotions", especially since what leaders feel can be closely "aligned to what their employees feel", underscoring the reciprocal nature of emotional understanding in leadership.

As aforementioned, the debate on whether emotional intelligence is an innate ability or can be developed through training was also addressed. Expert A posited that emotional intelligence is not purely instinctual but "is something that is trained", suggesting that through personal and professional experiences individuals can enhance their emotional acuity. Supporting this view, Expert B acknowledged

that "it is something you have to have some affinity with. I mean, if some people just don't have it, then they are good at other wonderful things". However, the interviewee also mentioned that "it doesn't have to be an innate talent", adding that "if you have, well, a bit of those feelers, you can train them and you can hone them". In addition, this expert also advocated for structured interventions like coaching and communication training as effective methods for enhancing emotional intelligence: "I do think that coaching and communication training can really help you". Similarly, Expert C concurred that emotional intelligence can be cultivated, adding that leaders can have a "bigger or smaller portion" of it, but you need to be able to "leverage what you already have", which suggests that training programs can amplify existing emotional skills. Finally, having previously categorized leadership communication into a "positive" and "negative" one, Expert D finally recognized that "emotional intelligence is one of those traits and of those features of a positive leadership", highlighting its role in fostering empathetic, responsive, and adaptive leadership, thus positively influencing employee well-being.

In sum, these insights showed that emotional intelligence is a dynamic and critical skill that enhances personal interactions and professional leadership. Moreover, the emphasis on its trainability and impact on leadership effectiveness also suggests that organizations stand to benefit significantly from investing in emotional intelligence development programs. Ultimately, embracing this approach has the potential to enhance organizational health and effectiveness, making it a successful strategy to promote employee well-being.

4.7   Integrated Findings: Key Insights

This section offers a comprehensive overview of the key findings, drawn from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses conducted in this study. Specifically, while the positive link between perceived organizational support and employee well-being underlined the crucial role of a supportive organizational culture, experts suggested that this reliance on organizational support might be masking deeper structural and cultural issues, such as excessive workload, inadequate resources, or poor work-life balance. Therefore, addressing those root causes is essential for cultivating a genuinely healthy work environment, particularly post-COVID-19, which exposed weaknesses in organizational support systems and emphasized the need for robust and adaptable support structures.

Both quantitative and qualitative data confirmed that emotional intelligence significantly impacts employee well-being. Leaders with high emotional intelligence excel at understanding and managing their own emotions, as well as those of their employees, creating a supportive and empathetic workplace. However, the data also revealed inconsistencies across different contexts, especially between male-dominated and female-dominated industries, suggesting that trainings must be context-specific, addressing unique industry challenges to be effective.

Regarding leadership styles, the data demonstrated that transformational leadership is correlated with employee well-being, whereas transactional leadership had a more limited effect. While transactional approaches may achieve short-term objectives (Expert A, 2024), sustaining long-term employee

engagement and satisfaction requires the transformative impact of the kind of leadership that inspires and supports.

From a practical standpoint, training programs must go beyond basic emotional intelligence and transformational skills, targeting the root causes of employee stress and dissatisfaction, rather than merely enhancing perceived support. This requires improving workload management, resource allocation, and work-life balance policies. Overall, a balanced approach, integrating transformational and transactional elements, is essential. It should be tailored to the specific needs of teams and organizations, ensuring that immediate objectives are achieved while also prioritizing long-term employee well-being and satisfaction.

In conclusion, these findings reveal the interconnection between leadership styles, organizational support, and emotional intelligence in promoting employee well-being. Effective leadership requires more than just the adoption of popular styles. It necessitates genuine, consistent, and context-specific approaches that address both immediate and long-term employee needs, ultimately contributing to a resilient, supportive, and productive work environment able to foster employee well-being.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Research Questions and Answers

This thesis delved into the impact of leadership communication on employee well-being within the European food sector. To comprehensively explore this aspect, a primary research question was formulated, and to ensure further depth, the same research question was dissected into sub-questions. Specifically, this study intended to answer the following inquiry: *To what extent and how does leadership communication impact employee well-being in the European food industry?* This question was further divided into three different sub-questions, each aimed at exploring the various components comprising leadership communication: (a) To what extent and how does the perception of organizational support among employees influence their overall sense of well-being? (b) To what extent and how do different leadership communication styles contribute to the employees' overall sense of well-being? (c) To what extent and how does leaders' demonstration of high emotional intelligence contribute to the employees' overall sense of well-being? Given the mixed methods approach employed in this exploration, both quantitative and qualitative analyses were utilized to address these questions, and the following paragraphs will mirror this division.

Before providing an answer to all the queries, the researcher deems it necessary to explain the reasoning behind such an approach. Dividing the main research question into sub-questions was a strategic methodological choice designated to provide a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between leadership communication and employee well-being within the European food sector. This division allowed for a targeted exploration of distinct yet interconnected nuances of leadership communication, enabling a deeper analysis that could not be achieved through a singular, overarching inquiry. Each sub-question focused on a specific element of leadership communication, starting from perceived organizational support to different leadership styles, and emotional intelligence. By isolating these elements, the researcher could delve deeper into the nuances of each factor, assessing their unique contributions and interactions. This approach was deemed critical for avoiding the oversimplification that often accompanies broad inquiries, allowing for a nuanced understanding that reflects the complexity of real-world organization dynamics.

From a theoretical perspective, breaking down the main question into sub-questions allowed the research to align more closely with existing literature and theoretical frameworks, each of which often focuses on specific aspects of leadership communication. This decision was taken to critically evaluate and expand on established theories by providing fresh empirical data, whereas from a practical standpoint, this division guided the development of targeted recommendations for organizational leaders. As a matter of fact, by understanding the specific impacts of different leadership components, organizations can tailor their programs and leadership strategies more effectively, addressing specific development areas and leveraging strengths. Overall, the division into sub-questions provided a structured framework for the mixed methods approach employed for this dissertation, ensuring that both quantitative and qualitative

analyses could be conducted with clear, focused objectives. Furthermore, addressing this complex research question in segments helped in maintaining analytical rigor by enabling a systematic examination of each component of leadership communication, and providing an opportunity to identify and explore emergent themes, such as situational leadership, which might not have been as apparent without the detailed focus afforded by the sub-questions. Last, the decision to dissect the primary research question into several sub-questions was not only methodologically sound but also critical for achieving the depth, precision, and practical relevance necessary to make contributions to the field of leadership studies. This approach ensured that the research was not only comprehensive but also capable of yielding actionable insights that could directly impact organizational practices and leadership programs.

5.1.1   Perceived Organizational Support

The quantitative analysis underscored the significant impact of perceived organizational support on enhancing employee well-being. Correlation analysis revealed a positive relationship between perceived organizational support and employee well-being, indicating that higher levels of perceived organizational support are associated with greater employee well-being. In addition, regression analysis demonstrated that perceived organizational support significantly predicts employee well-being, emphasizing its influential role in fostering positive psychological and emotional health outcomes. These complementary analyses were deemed essential in not only establishing associations but also in elucidating the specific contribution of perceived organizational support, thereby facilitating the formulation of comprehensive recommendations for organizations in the concluding section of this dissertation.

Parallel qualitative data provided deeper insights into the perceived organizational support within the workplace, as interviews highlighted the significance of various support mechanisms, including counseling services, psychological desks, and gym memberships, which are perceived as vital components of organizational support. Additionally, it was shared that some other companies extend their support to encompass the broader ecosystem of employees, including their families, through insurance coverage. However, it was noted that open communication, while challenging to implement, is considered one of the most critical aspects of organizational support. Overall, these elements were found to not only be beneficial but also essential for cultivating a positive workplace environment conducive to employee well-being (Sun, 2019, p. 155).

Finally, the findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses provide a clear and affirmative answer to this research sub-question: "To what extent and how does the perception of organizational support among employees influence their overall sense of well-being?" Moreover, they validate the hypothesis that "Employees who perceive a fair exchange of support, recognition, and resources in their interactions with leaders report higher levels of well-being" (H1).

5.1.2   Leadership Communication Styles

The quantitative analysis offered a nuanced understanding of the impact of various leadership

communication styles on employee well-being. Correlation analysis revealed contrasting effects of transactional and transformational leadership styles on well-being. While transactional leadership showed a weak to non-existent relationship with employee well-being, indicating no significant improvement, transformational leadership exhibited a strong positive association, in line with prior research discussed in this exploration's theoretical framework. However, regression analysis did not support these findings, highlighting no significant predictive power of transformational leadership in enhancing employee well-being. This discrepancy suggests that while transformational leadership is correlated with well-being, other factors might play a more significant role in predicting well-being when conducting a regression analysis. Overall, these results not only distinguished the effects of each leadership style but also clarified their respective contributions to fostering a supportive workplace environment conducive to well-being. Furthermore, this dichotomy underscored the essential nature of leadership styles that focus beyond mere task completion to include motivational and personal development aspects, which, to some extent, correlate with employee well-being (Willett et al., 2023, p. 15).

Complementing these quantitative insights, qualitative data gathered from professionals in the human resources field enriched the narrative around these leadership styles. From the expert interviews, it became apparent that transformational leadership is not only preferred but also more effective in fostering a work environment promoting employee satisfaction and psychological health, as professionals pointed out that transformational leaders directly contribute to creating a positive workplace atmosphere. Moreover, this leadership style aligns closely with the well-being of employees, as it addresses both their professional and personal development comprehensively. Conversely, this qualitative data also highlighted the limitations of transactional leadership, which traditionally has little emphasis on emotional or personal employee growth (Jaqua & Jaqua, 2021, p. 399). This approach, as detailed in the interviews, often falls short of nurturing long-term employee well-being, particularly in environments where emotional support and personal recognition are crucial. On this note, Expert D introduced the idea of "situational leadership" as a nuanced approach, suggesting that effective leadership communication involves the flexibility to adapt styles according to specific team needs and organizational goals. Specifically, this adaptability is crucial in balancing the short-term objectives associated with transactional leadership and the long-term well-being goals fostered by transformational leadership.

In synthesizing these findings, this research clearly addresses the sub-question "To what extent and how do different leadership communication styles contribute to the employees' overall sense of well-being?" by examining the impacts of transactional and transformational leadership communication styles on well-being. From a quantitative standpoint, while no causal relationship was found between transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and employee well-being, rejecting both H2 and H3, correlation analysis indicated a positive association between transformational leadership and employee well-being, suggesting that while transformational leadership may be associated with enhanced employee well-being, other factors might still moderate or mediate this relationship.

Overall, an effective leadership strategy should not rigidly adhere to a single style but rather

incorporate a spectrum of approaches tailored to the evolving needs of the organization and its employees. This strategic flexibility ensures that leadership effectively supports both the immediate goals and long-term well-being of employees, fostering a workplace that is not only productive but also nurturing and supportive.

5.1.3   *Emotional Intelligence*

In exploring the impact of emotional intelligence on employee well-being, this exploration offered a detailed analysis that addressed the sub-question "To what extent and how does leaders' demonstration of high emotional intelligence contribute to the employees' overall sense of well-being?"

The quantitative analysis provided compelling evidence on the role of emotional intelligence in enhancing employee well-being. Correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between emotional intelligence and well-being. Further, regression analysis supported this result, showing that emotional intelligence is a significant predictor of employee well-being, indicating that leaders who demonstrate higher emotional intelligence significantly contribute to the psychological and emotional health of their employees (Shamshad & Naqi Khan, 2022, p.4). Specifically, this analysis not only highlighted the direct effect of emotional intelligence on well-being but also quantified its substantial influence, thereby affirming its role as a pivotal element in fostering a supportive and nurturing work environment.

Complementing the quantitative data, qualitative insights from interviews with human resources professionals enriched the understanding of how emotional intelligence influences workplace dynamics. Interviewees consistently reported that leaders with high emotional intelligence create a more positive work atmosphere by effectively recognizing and responding to the emotional and professional needs of their employees. This leadership trait was seen as crucial for promoting an inclusive and empathetic workplace culture that prioritizes personal growth and employee satisfaction. Additionally, emotional intelligence was also highlighted as a key factor in adapting leadership communication to meet diverse employee needs, thereby fostering employee well-being. Therefore, the hypothesis that "Employees who respond to leaders with high emotional intelligence will report higher levels of well-being" is strongly supported by this study's findings, as the significant predictive power of emotional intelligence directly confirms this statement. Moreover, qualitative data further validated this relationship, providing contextual examples and expert opinions that illustrated the practical benefits of emotionally intelligent leadership.

To sum up, this examination sought to shed light on how emotional intelligence influences employee well-being, conclusively answering the sub-question, and offering support for the hypothesis (H4). It is evident that emotional intelligence is not merely an advantageous trait but a fundamental component of effective leadership. On a deeper note, leaders who are emotionally more intelligent not only enhance individual employee well-being but also cultivate a work environment that is conducive to overall organizational health, in line with Humphrey's (2002) research (p. 502).

5.1.4 Research Question: Key Findings

Having explored the reasoning behind the sub-questions and having provided a detailed answer to both sub-questions and hypotheses, this section aims to answer the overarching research question guiding this dissertation.

The findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses provided a comprehensive response to this study's central inquiry, which would not have been comprehensive or fully accurate with quantitative data alone (Dawadi et al., 2021, p. 27; Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 18). Synthesizing these results made it clear that leadership communication significantly impacts employee well-being by shaping the workplace's emotional and psychological environment. Moreover, the importance of adopting leadership styles that go beyond transactional interactions to include transformational and emotionally intelligent practices became evident. As aforementioned, such approaches not only meet employees' immediate needs but also foster a sustainable environment that supports their long-term well-being and productivity. Therefore, this research conclusively answers the central question by demonstrating that effective leadership communication, characterized by high emotional intelligence and a supportive approach, is essential for enhancing employee well-being in the European food industry. This conclusion intends to reinforce the need for organizations to train leaders in emotional intelligence and transformational practices, highlighting the crucial role of continuous support and recognition in maintaining a healthy, motivated workforce (Sun, 2019, p. 155). Finally, this thesis confirmed that a transformational approach to leadership communication is crucial for promoting a positive organizational climate and enhancing employee well-being (Teetzen et al., 2022, p. 16). By integrating effective organizational support practices, transformational leadership, and emotional intelligence in their core leadership, organizations can significantly improve their employees' satisfaction, leading to a more productive and harmonious workplace (Wang, 2020, p. 45).

5.2 Empirical Findings and Theoretical Implications

This section intends to address the theoretical implications of this study's findings, revisiting the foundational theories outlined in Chapter 2 and assessing how the empirical evidence from Chapter 4 aligns or challenges them. To reiterate, the theoretical underpinnings drew from the social exchange theory, leadership communication styles, namely transactional and transformational, and the role of emotional intelligence in leadership. These theories informed the hypotheses guiding this empirical research, contributing to a deeper understanding of its broader implications in the field.

First, the social exchange theory by Homans (1961) posited social exchange as a process of mutual reinforcement, where individuals expect a balance between their efforts and the rewards received (p. 75). This foundational theory underpins many relationships within the workplace, particularly between employees and employers, as explored by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005, p. 874). Moreover, previous literature consistently demonstrated that individuals who feel their contributions are valued are more likely to engage in positive workplace behaviors (Maan et al., 2020, p. 4). The findings from this current

study reinforce these notions, demonstrating that perceived organizational support, a critical form of social exchange, significantly boosts employee well-being. In essence, the considerable impact of perceived organizational support, as revealed in this dissertation, can be viewed through the lens of Eisenberger et al. (1986, pp. 500-507). Eisenberger et al. (1986) suggested that when employees perceive their contributions as valued and supported by the organization, it not only strengthens their commitment to the organization (p. 506) but also, as hypothesized in this study, enhances their well-being. In sum, this study's findings link high perceived organizational support to increased employee well-being, effectively demonstrating the operationalization of social exchange theory in a modern organizational context. However, while this study reinforced this framework, it also prompted a re-evaluation of the complexities inherent in employees' perceptions of support. The theory assumed a straightforward reciprocation between contributions and rewards, yet the modern workplace often presents a more nuanced interplay of psychological and social factors that can modify and enhance this exchange. For instance, qualitative insights from Chapter 4 revealed that while gym memberships are appreciated, more personalized support, such as flexible working arrangements and psychological desks, had a more profound impact on employees' sense of well-being. In sum, it becomes evident that while the social exchange theory provides a robust framework for understanding workplace dynamics, the real-world application requires a sensitive approach to capturing the varied and often complex employee perceptions of what constitutes valuable support.

Continuing our exploration, as discussed in previous sections, this research adopted a dual categorization of leadership communication, encompassing transactional and transformational leadership styles (Men & Stacks, 2013, p. 174). Consistent with the existing body of literature, the findings of this study affirmed a positive correlation between transformational leadership communication and employee well-being (Skakon et al., 2010, p. 132), underscoring the premise that contemporary leadership requires a blend of charisma, inspiration, and considerate behavior (Bass, 1990, p. 21) to navigate the challenges of today's dynamic work environments. Conversely, this study's analysis revealed that transactional leadership communication has minimal to no significant impact on employee well-being. This lack of significant effect prompted critical reflections on a potential shift in the effectiveness of transactional leadership within modern organizational contexts, where employee engagement and well-being seem to be increasingly prioritized, suggesting that the conventional transactional approach, rooted in exchanges (Men & Stacks, 2013, p. 174), may no longer adequately address the psychological and emotional needs of modern employees. Instead, there appears to be a preference for leaders who embody transformational qualities such as empathy, vision, and opportunities for personal growth.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings carry nuanced implications for leadership theories. Although transactional leadership retains significance for specific operational functions and short-term goals, its limited impact on well-being emphasizes a need for theories that integrate both styles to capture more accurately the complexities of modern leadership demands. Additionally, the strong endorsement of transformational leadership's effectiveness in enhancing well-being suggests that leadership theories

should further explore how these behaviors can be integrated into diverse organizational cultures and training initiatives to maximize their positive outcomes.

Finally, grounded in the work of Salovey and Mayer (1990), this study adopted the conceptualization of emotional intelligence as the one encompassing the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions (p. 189), possibly positively influencing one's psychological well-being (Carmeli et al., 2009, p. 66). In line with previous literature which expected this attribute to correlate strongly with enhanced employee well-being, this study's empirical findings showed that employees who respond to leaders with high emotional intelligence generally report higher levels of well-being. On a deeper level, the data suggested that emotional intelligence goes beyond mere interpersonal skills, encompassing a broader impact on organizational culture and employee satisfaction. In conclusion, the significant alignment between the theoretical assertions and empirical findings regarding emotional intelligence underscored its importance as a determinant of leadership effectiveness and employee well-being. Finally, this study's findings advocate for a shift in leadership paradigms towards more emotionally aware practices, suggesting that the future of effective leadership is inherently tied to the emotional intelligence of leaders.

5.3   Societal Implications of the Research Findings

From a societal standpoint, this study's findings on leadership communication and employee well-being in the European food industry suggested that leadership styles profoundly influence broader labor practices, public health, inclusion, and equity. This section seeks to critically evaluate how these results can be leveraged to catalyze positive transformations within societies, focusing on the enhancement of workplace environments, labor policies, and overall organizational effectiveness.

5.3.1   Enhancing Public Health through Improved Workplace Mental Health

The predictive relationship between organizational support, emotional intelligence, and employee well-being identified in this study suggests substantial public health benefits. Specifically, it is posited that leadership training programs that emphasize emotional intelligence and empathetic approaches can mitigate workplace-related mental health challenges, consequently alleviating the public health burden associated with occupational stress and mental illness (Yuguero et al., 2022, p. 221). This implies that organizations play a crucial role in societal well-being, underscoring the need for policies fostering the cultivation of supportive workplace environments.

5.3.2   Influencing Labor Policies for Healthier Work Environments

The positive influence of perceived organizational support on well-being highlights the imperative for labor policies to promote comprehensive support systems. By advocating for regulatory frameworks mandating the provision of mental health resources, recognition schemes, and employee development programs, policymakers can ensure organizations implement structures that significantly contribute to employee well-being. This approach is not only set to improve individual workplaces but

also establishes higher industry standards, potentially yielding widespread societal benefits.

5.3.3   *Promoting Work-Life Balance in the Evolving Job Market*

This exploration suggested that leadership styles prioritizing empathy and flexibility may facilitate improved work-life balance (Meiryani et al., 2022, p. 2), potentially reshaping traditional norms across the European food industry, known to exhibit deficiencies in this regard, as evidenced by Gerogiannis et al. (2012, p. 40). Such a transition could heighten employee satisfaction, mitigate burnout, and enhance overall quality of life, warranting a reassessment of work norms in contemporary employment paradigms.

5.3.4   *Enhancing Inclusion through Diverse Leadership Practices*

This research also underscored the necessity for leadership practices that are attuned to the diverse needs of the workforce. Demonstrating that different leadership styles have varied impacts on diverse groups, the results advocate for the implementation of more inclusive leadership development initiatives. Such programs should aspire to nurture leaders who acknowledge and incorporate the perspectives and needs of a diverse employee cohort, promoting fairness and inclusivity across all organizational levels.

5.4   Limitations

This study encountered limitations primarily rooted in challenges associated with data collection and sample representation. A notable constraint emerged from the refusal of seven food companies to distribute the survey among their employees, citing concerns over the sensitivity of the requested data, despite assurances of anonymity. This hesitancy may have stemmed from the heightened scrutiny that the food industry often faces in terms of health and safety standards. Consequently, companies might have exercised caution about participating in research that could have exposed vulnerability or portrayed them in a negative light. Nonetheless, this restriction limited the diversity and size of the sample, which ultimately resulted in a modest cohort of 87 respondents, posing constraints on the robustness of statistical analyses. While the study employed various analytical methods, such as multiple linear regression and correlation analyses, the relatively small sample size may have diminished the reliability and generalizability of the results to the wider population of the European food industry.

Moreover, the study also faced limitations in the demographic distribution of participants. Although there was a diverse representation in terms of gender and age, the majority of respondents were from Italy, with only a smaller portion representing other European countries. This geographical imbalance could have potentially introduced bias in the results, making them less applicable to the entire European food industry.

Another limitation is related to the reliance on self-reported data, which can be susceptible to biases such as social desirability or recall bias (Althubaiti, 2016, p. 212). Participants may have provided responses they deemed to be socially acceptable rather than their genuine feelings or experiences,

potentially compromising the accuracy of the data. To tackle this issue of social desirability in responses, the Marlowe-Crowne social desirability scale (MCSDS) can be a useful tool (Lambert et al., 2016, p. 85). Specifically:

> The MCSDS consists of 33 items that were selected to have socially desirable content and low probability of occurrence (sample item 'I never hesitate to go out of my way to help someone in trouble'). Participants respond to each item by indicating whether it is true or false. High scores indicate that a respondent is presenting him/herself in an unrealistic favorable manner. (Lambert et al., 2016, p. 81)

Therefore, future research could include this scale in the questionnaire to improve the overall data quality. Moreover, the study's qualitative component, which involved interviews with four experts from two distinct national backgrounds (Dutch and Italian) may not have provided a fully comprehensive understanding of employee well-being and leadership communication. A more extensive and diverse sample of experts could have enriched the depth and breadth of insights gathered.

Lastly, due to the time constraints of data collection, which included simultaneously both quantitative and qualitative aspects, it was not feasible to obtain experts' commentary on the quantitative findings, making this limitation impact the depth of this study and present an interesting area for future improvement.

5.5   Future Research

Future research in the leadership communication area should aim to prioritize the limitations identified in this study to foster a more holistic understanding of employee well-being and leadership communication dynamics within the European food industry. To enhance the generalizability of findings, forthcoming investigations should strive to secure greater cooperation from a wider range of food companies across different European countries. Overcoming hesitancy among companies to engage in data sharing, particularly concerning sensitive information, may necessitate the refinement of anonymization methods and transparent communication regarding the research's potential benefits to industry stakeholders. Establishing partnerships with industry associations or leveraging third-party data collection entities could also serve as effective strategies to encourage wider participation and bolster research outcomes. Expanding the sample size and ensuring a more balanced demographic representation will improve the reliability and generalizability of the findings. Future efforts should be made to encompass a broader spectrum of job roles, participants from various geographical regions within Europe, and a bigger array of leadership styles. In addition, conducting longitudinal studies would provide insights into how employee well-being and organizational dynamics evolve over time. Such longitudinal investigations can help identify long-term trends (Caruana et al., 2015, p. 538) and offer insights into the sustained influence of different leadership styles and organizational support mechanisms on employee well-being.

While this study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods, future research could

broaden its scope by integrating more qualitative approaches. For instance, conducting follow-up interviews with survey respondents could yield richer insights complementing the quantitative findings. Additionally, future studies could focus on evaluating the effectiveness of specific organizational interventions targeting employee well-being, such as mental health programs, flexible work arrangements, and leadership training initiatives. By examining organizational policies, procedures, and cultural norms through the lens of employee well-being, researchers can pinpoint areas for improvement and develop targeted interventions to enhance overall workplace satisfaction. Moreover, conducting comparative studies across different sectors could offer valuable insights into the industry-specific challenges and best practices within the food industry. Last, exploring whether the findings related to employee well-being and leadership styles are unique to the food industry or consistent across different sectors can help organizations benchmark their practices and adopt strategies to improve employee well-being and leadership effectiveness.

As technology continues to reshape work environments (Trenerry et al., 2021, p. 16), it becomes crucial to understand its implications on employee well-being and communication within organizations. Future research endeavors could explore how technological advancements impact employee well-being, such as stress levels, work-life balance, and job satisfaction. Moreover, studies could explore strategies to effectively integrate digital tools to promote organizational communication and foster a supportive work environment. By addressing these questions, researchers can provide valuable insights to guide organizations in leveraging technology for the betterment of their workforce.

Finally, investigating the policy implications for employee well-being is crucial for shaping healthier and more productive workplaces in the food industry. Future research could explore how regulatory frameworks and government initiatives can inform policymakers about effective strategies to promote employee well-being within the food industry. Ultimately, addressing these areas will enable future studies to expand upon the current study's findings and advance a more nuanced comprehension of the factors influencing employee well-being and organizational success in the European food industry, which in turn will pave the way for more informed policies and practices.

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Appendix A

Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Thesis

I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

X I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically ChatGPT and Grammarly **(NOT Premium)** in the process of assisting with specific aspects of thesis work.

Extent of AI Usage

X I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the thesis were undertaken by me. I have enclosed the prompts of the GenAI tool use in this appendix.

Ethical and Academic Integrity

X I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Used AI Prompts:

1. Check the spelling and grammar of [pasting my own text]
2. An alternative way of saying [pasting my own text] → idea generation.

General note. **NO answer** of ChatGPT has been **copied**, but rather used as a thought-provoking tool to write a final version of the sentence on my own, based on my own judgement and personal liking/style.

Arianna Scarpelli
26/06/2024

Appendix B

Respondents Overview

Table B1

Anonymous and Detailed Overview of Experts Interviewed

Respondent	Age	Gender	Education	Country of Residence	Background	Type of Organization
Expert A	Approximately 50 years old	Male	Master's degree	Zwolle, The Netherlands	Consultant, human resources manager and lecturer	Private companies and universities
Expert B	Approximately 40 years old	Female	Master's degree	The Randstad, The Netherlands	Health and well-being expert	Public university
Expert C	Approximately 50 years old	Male	MBA	Milan, Italy	Chief officer people, organization, communication, happiness, and innovation	Multinational company
Expert D	Approximately 40 years old	Female	PhD	Turin, Italy	Professor of psychology of labor and organizations	Public university

Note. All information mentioned in this table was taken from the interviews and the experts' LinkedIn profiles.

Appendix C
Consent Request for Participating in Research

You are invited to participate in a study about leadership communication and employee well-being. Specifically, the research intends to understand how different leadership communication styles, organizational support, and emotional intelligence influence employees' well-being. Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms, the questions will reflect the aforementioned topics, spanning from general definitions of the concepts to more personal perspectives on the matter. Unless you prefer that no recordings be made, a video recording of the interview will be made. The materials from the interviews and my observation will be used exclusively for academic work, notably to write my dissertation. Before giving consent, you are invited to pay attention to the followings:

1. **Risks and benefits**: as far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. Participants will only be referred to with their job title, and in terms of their nationality. You are always free not to answer any particular questions, and/or stop participating at any point.

2. **Time involvement**: your participation in this study will take between 45 and 60 minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

3. **Payments**: there will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

4. **Participants' rights**: your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

5. **Contacts and questions**: if you have questions about your rights as a study participant or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact researchoffice@eshcc.eur.nl. For any other inquiries regarding the study, you can contact Arianna Scarpelli, arianna.scarpelli@student.eur.nl.

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. To minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

1. Please sign if you give **consent to be recorded** during this study: _____
2. Please sign if you prefer your **identity to be revealed** in all written data resulting from this study:

   _____

Appendix D

Expert Interview Template

Good [morning/afternoon], [Interviewee's Name].

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview.

Before we start, let me introduce myself. I am Arianna, an Italian student in Rotterdam and I moved here after my BA in Labour Consultancy and Human Resources Management.

As mentioned in our previous correspondences, this interview is part of my MA Thesis at Erasmus University, where I am investigating the impact of leadership communication on employee well-being. Today's discussion will focus on gathering your insights and expertise in this field. The interview is expected to last around 45 minutes. Before we begin, may I kindly ask for your permission to record our conversation? This recording will be used solely to accurately transcribe our interview.

Additionally, please know that if at any point you have questions or require clarification, you can always reach out to me.

Your input is immensely appreciated, and I am grateful for your participation.

1. **Introduction and Expertise**
   a. Can you please introduce yourself and briefly discuss your experience in the human resources field/in the psychology of labor?
   b. Could you please define employee well-being in a few words for me?
   c. What does employee well-being mean to you, would you give me the same definition as for the previous question and why so?
   d. From your experience, can you please outline how employee well-being is considered in professional settings?
   e. In your experience, how has Covid-19 changed the concept of employee well-being?

2. **Organizational Support and Well-being**
   a. In your experience, what does effective organizational support look like?
   b. In your experience, how does effective organizational support promote employee well-being?
   c. Can you please share examples of how organizations have successfully supported employee well-being through communication practices?

3. **Leadership Styles and Well-being**
   a. From your experience, how have you observed various leadership approaches (e.g., a more empathetic leader vs. A more analytical one) impacting the overall happiness and satisfaction of employees in a workplace?
   b. Can you please share examples of how specific leadership styles have impacted employee well-being positively or negatively?

4. **Social Exchange Dynamics**
   a. How do reciprocal exchanges between leaders and employees influence employee well-being?
   b. Can you please share examples of positive exchanges that have improved employee well-being in workplace settings?

5. **Challenges and Solutions**
   a. What are some common challenges leaders face in effectively communicating to support employee well-being?
   b. In your experience, what are effective strategies for overcoming these challenges and fostering employee well-being?

6. **Recommendations**
   a. Imagine you oversee training for future HR leaders, what practical recommendations would you offer to leaders to improve their communication and enhance employee well-being?
   b. Are there any specific communication tools or approaches that you find particularly effective in promoting employee well-being?

7. **Future Trends and Insights**
   a. Looking ahead, what strategies can leaders implement to more effectively incorporate considerations for their employees' well-being?
   b. Are there any emerging practices or developments that you believe will significantly influence the relationship between leadership communication and employee well-being?

8. **Emotional Intelligence**
   a. Could you please define emotional intelligence in a few words for me?
   b. Would you say emotional intelligence is an important quality for a good leader?
   c. Can you please share examples or instances where a leader's emotional intelligence played a crucial role in mitigating stress, fostering resilience, or enhancing overall well-being within the team?
   d. From your perspective, how do leaders' abilities to understand and manage their own emotions, as well as the emotions of their team members, contribute to creating a supportive and psychologically safe work environment?
   e. Have you encountered any strategies or practices employed by emotionally intelligent leaders that have effectively improved team morale, motivation, or job satisfaction, ultimately impacting employee well-being positively?

9. **Closing Remarks**
   a. Finally, based on our discussion, do you have any additional insights you'd like to share regarding leadership communication and employee well-being that might be interesting for my dissertation?

Appendix E

Survey: Italian Version

Caro/a partecipante,

Questa ricerca è condotta da una studentessa del corso di laurea magistrale Media & Business, presso l'università Erasmus di Rotterdam. Lo scopo di questo sondaggio è raccogliere esperienze personali circa il benessere delle risorse umane in relazione alla comunicazione che adotta la propria azienda nel settore enogastronomico in Europa.

Il tempo stimato per completare il questionario è di circa 5 minuti, e la partecipazione è volontaria. I dati raccolti saranno utilizzati esclusivamente per scopi accademici, senza essere condivisi con terze parti e l'anonimato è garantito.

È necessario confermare di avere almeno 18 anni per proseguire.

Se dovessi avere domande prima, durante o dopo il questionario, sentiti libero/a di contattare la tesista, Arianna Scarpelli (arianna.scarpelli@student.eur.nl).

Ti ringrazio per la partecipazione.

- Confermo di avere almeno 18 anni

Indica in che misura sei d'accordo con le affermazioni qui riportate

1. **La mia azienda valuta il mio contributo al suo adeguato funzionamento**

   Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

2. **Se la mia azienda potesse assumere qualcun altro per sostituirmi con un salario più basso lo farebbe**

   Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

3. **La mia azienda NON dà valore al mio impegno**

   Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

4. **La mia azienda tiene in considerazione i miei valori ed i miei obiettivi**

   Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

5. **La mia azienda ignorerebbe ogni mia lamentela**

   Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

6. **La mia azienda NON tiene in considerazione i miei interessi nel prendere decisioni che hanno un impatto su di me**

Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

7. **Quando ho un problema la mia azienda mi dà supporto**

Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

8. **La mia azienda si preoccupa realmente del mio benessere**

Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

9. **Anche se facessi il mio lavoro al meglio, la mia azienda NON lo noterebbe**

Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

10. **La mia azienda è disposta ad aiutarmi quando ho bisogno di un aiuto speciale**

Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

11. **Alla mia azienda importa della mia soddisfazione lavorativa**

Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

12. **Se ci fosse l'opportunità, la mia azienda si approfitterebbe di me**

Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

13. **La mia azienda mostra poco interesse nei miei confronti**

Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

14. **Alla mia azienda importa delle mie opinioni**

Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

15. **La mia azienda è orgogliosa dei miei risultati sul lavoro**

Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

16. **La mia azienda cerca di rendere il mio lavoro il più interessante possibile**

Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

Indica in che misura sei d'accordo con le affermazioni qui riportate

1. **Il mio superiore è sensibile ai bisogni altrui**

Completamente in disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

2. **Al mio superiore sembra piacere devolvere il suo tempo a me**

   Completamente in disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

3. **Sono soddisfatto del tipo di comunicazione tra me e il mio superiore**

   Completamente in disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

4. **Io ed il mio superiore condividiamo la stessa visione di come raggiungere gli obiettivi**

   Completamente in disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

5. **Sento di poter parlare apertamente al mio superiore**

   Completamente in disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

6. **Specialmente nei momenti di difficoltà io ed il mio superiore dialoghiamo più intensamente per risolvere il problema**

   Completamente in disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

Indica con che frequenza si verificano le azioni qui riportate

1. **Il mio superiore mi aiuta a sviluppare i miei punti di forza**

   Mai / A volte / Circa metà del tempo / La maggior parte del tempo / Sempre

2. **Il mio superiore mette in discussione le sue idee e verifica che siano appropriate**

   Mai / A volte / Circa metà del tempo / La maggior parte del tempo / Sempre

3. **Il mio superiore parla ottimisticamente del futuro**

   Mai / A volte / Circa metà del tempo / La maggior parte del tempo / Sempre

4. **Il mio superiore va oltre gli interessi personali per il bene dell'azienda**

   Mai / A volte / Circa metà del tempo / La maggior parte del tempo / Sempre

5. **Il mio superiore considera le conseguenze morali ed etiche delle sue decisioni**

   Mai / A volte / Circa metà del tempo / La maggior parte del tempo / Sempre

6. **Il mio superiore indica in modo chiaro cosa posso aspettarmi se raggiungo un obiettivo di prestazione**

   Mai / A volte / Circa metà del tempo / La maggior parte del tempo / Sempre

7. **Il mio superiore tiene traccia di tutti gli errori**

   Mai / A volte / Circa metà del tempo / La maggior parte del tempo / Sempre

8. **Il mio superiore attende che le cose vadano male prima di agire**

   Mai / A volte / Circa metà del tempo / La maggior parte del tempo / Sempre

9. **Il mio superiore evita di prendere decisioni**

   Mai / A volte / Circa metà del tempo / La maggior parte del tempo / Sempre

Indica in che misura sei d'accordo con le affermazioni qui riportate

1. **La maggior parte delle volte, il mio superiore ha una buona percezione del perché prova determinati sentimenti**

   Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

2. **Il mio superiore sa sempre se è felice o no**

   Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

3. **Il mio superiore ha una buona conoscenza delle emozioni dei suoi dipendenti**

   Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

4. **Il mio superiore è un buon osservatore delle emozioni altrui**

   Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

5. **Il mio superiore fissa sempre obiettivi per se stesso e dà il suo meglio per raggiungerli**

   Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

6. **Il mio superiore si dice spesso di essere una persona competente**

   Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

7. **Il mio superiore è una persona che si motiva autonomamente**

   Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

8. **Il mio superiore ha una buona comprensione delle emozioni che prova**

   Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

9. **Il mio superiore è sensibile ai sentimenti ed emozioni altrui**

   Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

10. **Il mio superiore si incoraggia spesso a fare del suo meglio**

    Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

11. **Il mio superiore riesce a controllare il proprio umore e gestire le difficoltà razionalmente**

    Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

12. **Il mio superiore riconosce sempre le emozioni dei propri dipendenti a partire dal loro comportamento**

   Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

13. **Il mio superiore è abbastanza capace di controllare le proprie emozioni**

   Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

14. **Il mio superiore riesce sempre a calmarsi velocemente quando è molto arrabbiato**

   Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

15. **Il mio superiore comprende davvero ciò che prova**

   Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

16. **Il mio superiore ha un buon controllo delle proprie emozioni**

   Completamente in disaccordo / In disaccordo / Abbastanza in disaccordo / Né d'accordo né in disaccordo / Abbastanza d'accordo / D'accordo / Completamente d'accordo

Indica con che frequenza si verificano le azioni qui riportate

1. **Riesco a concentrarmi**

   Sempre / La maggior parte del tempo / Circa metà del tempo / Mai

2. **Ricopro un ruolo importante**

   Sempre / La maggior parte del tempo / Circa metà del tempo / Mai

3. **Sono capace di prendere decisioni**

   Sempre / La maggior parte del tempo / Circa metà del tempo / Mai

4. **Riesco a godermi le attività quotidiane**

   Sempre / La maggior parte del tempo / Circa metà del tempo / Mai

5. **Sono capace di affrontare i problemi**

   Sempre / La maggior parte del tempo / Circa metà del tempo / Mai

6. **Mi sento abbastanza felice**

   Sempre / La maggior parte del tempo / Circa metà del tempo / Mai

Indica con che frequenza si verificano le azioni qui riportate

1. **Ho dormito poco a causa della preoccupazione**

   Sempre / La maggior parte del tempo / Circa metà del tempo / Mai

2. **Mi sento sempre sotto sforzo**

   Sempre / La maggior parte del tempo / Circa metà del tempo / Mai

3. **Non riuscirei a superare le difficoltà**

Sempre / La maggior parte del tempo / Circa metà del tempo / Mai

4. **Mi sento infelice e depresso/a**

   Sempre / La maggior parte del tempo / Circa metà del tempo / Mai

5. **Ho perso sicurezza in me stesso/a**

   Sempre / La maggior parte del tempo / Circa metà del tempo / Mai

6. **Mi reputo inutile**

   Sempre / La maggior parte del tempo / Circa metà del tempo / Mai

Indica in che misura sei soddisfatto rispetto alle seguenti affermazioni

1. **Le tue condizioni fisiche lavorative (es. rumore, temperatura, sicurezza, pulizia)**

   Estremamente insoddisfatto/a / Moderatamente insoddisfatto/a / Leggermente insoddisfatto/a / Neutrale / Leggermente soddisfatto/a / Moderatamente soddisfatto/a / Estremamente soddisfatto/a

2. **La libertà di scegliere il tuo modo di lavorare**

   Estremamente insoddisfatto/a / Moderatamente insoddisfatto/a / Leggermente insoddisfatto/a / Neutrale / Leggermente soddisfatto/a / Moderatamente soddisfatto/a / Estremamente soddisfatto/a

3. **I tuoi colleghi**

   Estremamente insoddisfatto/a / Moderatamente insoddisfatto/a / Leggermente insoddisfatto/a / Neutrale / Leggermente soddisfatto/a / Moderatamente soddisfatto/a / Estremamente soddisfatto/a

4. **Il riconoscimento che ottieni dopo aver svolto un buon lavoro**

   Estremamente insoddisfatto/a / Moderatamente insoddisfatto/a / Leggermente insoddisfatto/a / Neutrale / Leggermente soddisfatto/a / Moderatamente soddisfatto/a / Estremamente soddisfatto/a

5. **La responsabilità che ti viene data**

   Estremamente insoddisfatto/a / Moderatamente insoddisfatto/a / Leggermente insoddisfatto/a / Neutrale / Leggermente soddisfatto/a / Moderatamente soddisfatto/a / Estremamente soddisfatto/a

6. **Il tuo stipendio**

   Estremamente insoddisfatto/a / Moderatamente insoddisfatto/a / Leggermente insoddisfatto/a / Neutrale / Leggermente soddisfatto/a / Moderatamente soddisfatto/a / Estremamente soddisfatto/a

7. **L'opportunità di utilizzare le tue capacità**

   Estremamente insoddisfatto/a / Moderatamente insoddisfatto/a / Leggermente insoddisfatto/a / Neutrale / Leggermente soddisfatto/a / Moderatamente soddisfatto/a / Estremamente soddisfatto/a

8. **Le ore di lavoro**

    Estremamente insoddisfatto/a / Moderatamente insoddisfatto/a / Leggermente insoddisfatto/a / Neutrale / Leggermente soddisfatto/a / Moderatamente soddisfatto/a / Estremamente soddisfatto/a

9. **La varietà del tuo lavoro**

    Estremamente insoddisfatto/a / Moderatamente insoddisfatto/a / Leggermente insoddisfatto/a / Neutrale / Leggermente soddisfatto/a / Moderatamente soddisfatto/a / Estremamente soddisfatto/a

10. **Tenendo tutto in considerazione, come ti senti rispetto al tuo lavoro nel complesso?**

    Estremamente insoddisfatto/a / Moderatamente insoddisfatto/a / Leggermente insoddisfatto/a / Neutrale / Leggermente soddisfatto/a / Moderatamente soddisfatto/a / Estremamente soddisfatto/a

Seleziona la tua età

▼ 18 anni - Più di 80 anni

Qual è il tuo genere?

Femmina / Maschio / Altro

Qual è il tuo livello di istruzione?

Meno di un diploma di scuola superiore / Diploma di scuola superiore o equivalente / Università, senza conseguire la laurea / Laurea triennale / Laurea magistrale / Master o PhD

Quale delle seguenti categorie descrive meglio la tua occupazione?

Impiegato/a, da 1 a 39 ore a settimana / Impiegato/a, 40 o più ore a settimana / Non impiegato/a, in cerca di occupazione / Non impiegato/a, NON in cerca di occupazione

Quale delle seguenti categorie si avvicina di più al livello della tua occupazione?

Personale di base / Personale di supporto / Supervisore / Management e direzione

In che Paese ha avuto luogo l'esperienza descritta?

▼ Austria - Svezia

Appendix F

Survey: English Version

Dear participant,

This research is conducted by a student of the Media & Business master's degree program at Erasmus University in Rotterdam. The purpose of this survey is to gather personal experiences about the well-being of human resources in relation to the communication their company adopts in the food and wine sector in Europe.

The estimated time to complete the questionnaire is about 5 minutes, and participation is voluntary. The data collected will be used exclusively for academic purposes, won't be shared with third parties and anonymity is guaranteed.

You must confirm that you are at least 18 years old to continue.

If you have any questions before, during or after the questionnaire, feel free to contact the researcher, Arianna Scarpelli (arianna.scarpelli@student.eur.nl).

Thank you for your participation.

- I hereby confirm that I am of age

Indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements

1. **The organization values my contribution to its well-being**

   Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

2. **If the organization could hire someone to replace me at a lower salary it would do so**

   Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

3. **The organization fails to appreciate any extra effort from me**

   Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

4. **The organization considers my goals and values**

   Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

5. **The organization would ignore any complaint from me**

   Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

6. **The organization disregards my best interests when it makes decisions that affect me**

   Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

7. **Help is available from my organization when I have a problem**

Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

8. **The organization cares about my well-being**

    Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

9. **Even if I did the best job possible, the organization would fail to notice**

    Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

10. **The organization is willing to help me when I need a special favor**

    Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

11. **The organization cares about my general satisfaction at work**

    Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

12. **If given the opportunity, the organization would take advantage of me**

    Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

13. **The organization shows very little concern for me**

    Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

14. **The organization cares about my opinions**

    Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

15. **The organization takes pride in my accomplishments at work**

    Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

16. **The organization tries to make my job as interesting as possible**

    Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

Indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements

1. **My supervisor is sensitive to the needs of others**

    Strongly disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Strongly agree

2. **My supervisor seems to like devoting his time to me**

    Strongly disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Strongly agree

3. **I am content with the way my communication with my supervisor is going**

   Strongly disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Strongly agree

4. **My supervisor and I share an understanding of how we would like to achieve our goals**

   Strongly disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Strongly agree

5. **My supervisor and I can speak openly with each other**

   Strongly disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Strongly agree

6. **Especially when problems arise, my supervisor and I talk to one another even more intensively in order to solve the problems**

   Strongly disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Strongly agree

Indicate how often the following actions occur

1. **My supervisor helps me develop my strengths**

   Never / Sometimes / About half the time / Most of the time / Always

2. **My supervisor re-examines critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate**

   Never / Sometimes / About half the time / Most of the time / Always

3. **My supervisor talks optimistically about the future**

   Never / Sometimes / About half the time / Most of the time / Always

4. **My supervisor goes beyond self-interest for the good of the group**

   Never / Sometimes / About half the time / Most of the time / Always

5. **My supervisor considers the moral and ethical consequences of decisions**

   Never / Sometimes / About half the time / Most of the time / Always

6. **My supervisor makes it clear what I can expect to receive when performance goals are achieved**

   Never / Sometimes / About half the time / Most of the time / Always

7. **My supervisor keeps track of all mistakes**

   Never / Sometimes / About half the time / Most of the time / Always

8. **My supervisor waits for things to go wrong before taking action**

   Never / Sometimes / About half the time / Most of the time / Always

9. **My supervisor avoids making decisions**

   Never / Sometimes / About half the time / Most of the time / Always

Indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements

1. **My supervisor has a good sense of why he/she feels certain feelings most of the time**

   Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

2. **My supervisor always knows whether he/she is happy or not**

   Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

3. **My supervisor has a good understanding of the emotions of people around him/her**

   Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

4. **My supervisor is a good observer of others' emotions**

   Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

5. **My supervisor always sets goals for himself/herself and then tries his/her best to achieve them**

   Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

6. **My supervisor always tells himself/herself he/she is a competent person**

   Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

7. **My supervisor is a self-motivating person**

   Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

8. **My supervisor has a good understanding of his/her own emotions**

   Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

9. **My supervisor is sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others**

   Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

10. **My supervisor always encourages himself/herself to try his/her best**

    Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

11. **My supervisor is able to control his/her temper so that he/she can handle difficulties rationally**

    Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

12. **My supervisor always knows others' emotions from their behavior**

Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

13. My supervisor is quite capable of controlling his/her own emotions

Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

14. My supervisor can always calm down quickly when he/she is very angry

Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

15. My supervisor really understands what he/she feels

Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

16. My supervisor has good control of his/her emotions

Strongly disagree / Disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Agree / Strongly agree

Indicate how often the following actions occur

1. I am able to concentrate

Always / Most of the time / About half of the time / Never

2. I play a useful part

Always / Most of the time / About half of the time / Never

3. I am capable of making decisions

Always / Most of the time / About half of the time / Never

4. I am able to enjoy day-to-day activities

Always / Most of the time / About half of the time / Never

5. I am able to face problems

Always / Most of the time / About half of the time / Never

6. I am feeling reasonably happy

Always / Most of the time / About half of the time / Never

Indicate how often the following actions occur

1. I lost sleep over worry

Always / Most of the time / About half of the time / Never

2. I felt constantly under strain

Always / Most of the time / About half of the time / Never

3. I couldn't overcome difficulties

Always / Most of the time / About half of the time / Never

4. I am feeling unhappy and depressed

Always / Most of the time / About half of the time / Never

5. I am losing confidence

Always / Most of the time / About half of the time / Never

6. I am thinking of myself as worthless

Always / Most of the time / About half of the time / Never

Indicate to what extent you are satisfied with the following statements

1. The physical working conditions (e.g., noise levels, temperature, safety, cleanliness, etc...)

Strongly dissatisfied / Moderately dissatisfied / Somewhat dissatisfied / Neutral / Somewhat satisfied / Moderately satisfied / Extremely satisfied

2. The freedom to choose your own method of working

Strongly dissatisfied / Moderately dissatisfied / Somewhat dissatisfied / Neutral / Somewhat satisfied / Moderately satisfied / Extremely satisfied

3. Your fellow workers

Strongly dissatisfied / Moderately dissatisfied / Somewhat dissatisfied / Neutral / Somewhat satisfied / Moderately satisfied / Extremely satisfied

4. The recognition you get for good work

Strongly dissatisfied / Moderately dissatisfied / Somewhat dissatisfied / Neutral / Somewhat satisfied / Moderately satisfied / Extremely satisfied

5. The amount of responsibility you are given

Strongly dissatisfied / Moderately dissatisfied / Somewhat dissatisfied / Neutral / Somewhat satisfied / Moderately satisfied / Extremely satisfied

6. Your rate of pay

Strongly dissatisfied / Moderately dissatisfied / Somewhat dissatisfied / Neutral / Somewhat satisfied / Moderately satisfied / Extremely satisfied

7. The opportunity to use your abilities

Strongly dissatisfied / Moderately dissatisfied / Somewhat dissatisfied / Neutral / Somewhat satisfied / Moderately satisfied / Extremely satisfied

8. Your hours of work

Strongly dissatisfied / Moderately dissatisfied / Somewhat dissatisfied / Neutral / Somewhat satisfied / Moderately satisfied / Extremely satisfied

9. The amount of variety in your job

Strongly dissatisfied / Moderately dissatisfied / Somewhat dissatisfied / Neutral / Somewhat satisfied / Moderately satisfied / Extremely satisfied

10. Now, taking everything into consideration, how do you feel about your job as a whole?

Strongly dissatisfied / Moderately dissatisfied / Somewhat dissatisfied / Neutral / Somewhat satisfied / Moderately satisfied / Extremely satisfied

Select your age

▼ 18 years old - More than 80 years old

What is your gender?

Female / Male / Other

What is your level of education?

Less than a high school degree / High school degree or equivalent / University, but no degree / Bachelor / Master / PhD

Which of the following categories best describes your occupation?

Employed, 1 to 39 hours per week / Employed, 40 or more hours per week / Not employed, but looking for employment / Not employed and NOT looking for employment

Employment type Which of the following categories best describes your level of occupation?

Frontline staff / Support staff / Supervisor / Management and leadership

In which Country did your experience take place?

▼ Austria - Sweden

Appendix G

Thematic Analysis: Phases Overview

This section intends to provide the reader with an overview of the phases undertaken for this study's thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach. Specifically:

1. Prior to delving into the analysis, transcription of the interviews proved to be essential to become familiar with the material (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87).

2. Once transcripts were prepared, the coding phase commenced (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). This process involved identifying recurring themes, patterns, and key concepts observed throughout the interviews as common ideas or topics (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79).

3. Following this, the results were organized under potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89).

4. Phase four entailed the refinement of these themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92).

5. Themes were clearly defined and named (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92).

6. Finally, phase six involved the write-up of the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93).

Appendix H

Codebook

Table H1

Thematic Analysis: The Codebook

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes	Quotes
Employee well-being	Physical well-being	Gym access, physical health support	"For me well-being is about the physical and mental health of people"; "The example of the physical health I mentioned and giving people the opportunity and the room […] to work on their physical health"
	Mental and emotional health	Psychological safety, emotional support	"I think mental health and maybe emotional health as well, like psychological safety and all those kinds of things"; "There is specific expertise, through psychologists and in the building where you can go to sort of help desk"
	Work-life balance	Remote work challenges	"Covid made us aware, as I say, the the downside of it, because you need people around you"
	Job satisfaction and motivation	Employee recognition, job role fit	"Placing people at the right position in the right situation"
The impact of COVID-19	Remote work and isolation	Remote work, isolation, technological adaptation	"You need people around you, etc, but also the upside because the technology, technological possibilities"
	Organizational adaptation	Changes in policies, remote work infrastructures	"I heard about a this in [The Netherlands] I think they decide well why do we have an office in the first place that people can work from home"
	Changing employee needs	Flexibility, mental health awareness	"The awareness of the importance of it is, is, has grown since Covid"

Thematic Analysis: The Codebook

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes	Quotes
Perceived organizational support	Physical and mental health resources	Gym memberships, mental health services	"I think for a few years ago, it was primarily the physical health and giving people, uh, the possibility to go to a gym"
	Managerial responsiveness	Leadership awareness, support systems	"You can say something, but you have to be aware of all the nonverbal things going on with a person"
Leadership communication styles	Transactional leadership	Goal oriented, performance focus	"Focus on results, delivering instead of feeling happy"
	Transformational leadership	Empathy, employee potential	"When you have some sort of awareness and feeling and intuition about uh, give room to people"
	Situational leadership	Adaptability, context-specific approaches	"Should be able to adapt his/her leadership style based on the individuals' needs"
Emotional intelligence	Empathy and understanding	Leader empathy, employee support	"I think it's becoming more and more normal and having the awareness that's important to show gratitude"
	Social skills and communication	Interpersonal skills, effective communication	"Of course there is a lot of verbal communication, checking in, asking"