IMPACT OF CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP ON EMPLOYEE WELLBEING IN SME HEALTH SERVICES: CASES OF TCM IN CHINA AND THE UK

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Copyright Statement

Abstract

Employee wellbeing has been increasingly gaining interest from both academia and practice. Most research on employee wellbeing were conducted in the contexts of large organisations. There is still limited research on employee wellbeing in SME health services, especially in the cross-culture context. Culture has impact on employee wellbeing and so does leadership. The research objectives are to have better understanding of employee wellbeing and gain insight into the impact of culture and leadership on employee wellbeing by studying SME health services of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) in China and the UK. This research is of value to both academics and practitioners. It can be used by academics to deepen an understanding of employee wellbeing in SME health services, which will help advance the field. In practice, the research identified leaders' actions that contributed to employee wellbeing, it can also be used by leaders to better understand employee wellbeing and take action to improve employee wellbeing.

This research takes an interpretivist approach and case studies including four cases of TCM, two located in Beijing in China and two in London in the UK. Data was collected through 24 online video semi-structured interviews with leaders and employees of the clinics. Interviews were conducted in both Chinese and English, each interview was recorded and lasted between 45-90 mins. Interview materials were transcribed and translated into English content analysis was utilised for material analysis.

This research makes several contributions to the existing literature. First, it extends the understanding of employee wellbeing and its variation in different cultural contexts from perspectives of employees and leaders. Moreover, this research reveals the significance of hedonic and eudemonic benefits to employee wellbeing in SME health services sector, provide elements belonging to hedonic and eudemonic aspects from perspectives of leaders and employees in cross-cultural contexts. The research introduces a definition of employee wellbeing that consists of hedonic and eudemonic benefits. Second, the research shows that the degree of cultural impact on employee wellbeing differs in different cultural contexts. Third, culture impact on leadership based on Hofstede's cultural theory from employee wellbeing perspective shows that the power distance and collectivism impact more on leadership styles and leader actions in China, while the individualism influences more on leadership styles and

leader actions in the UK. By applied Hall's theory, high context communication appears to be more influential in the cases located in China than the ones in the UK, while low context communication has more impact in the UK than China. Fourth, the research demonstrates different degrees of leadership's effect on employee wellbeing in different cultural contexts. Finally, the research reveals the significance of certain leader actions in positively impacting employee wellbeing in both China and the UK and contributes to a new model of employee wellbeing. These contribute to improving employee wellbeing, not only helping to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goal No.3 to promote wellbeing, but also contributing to healthcare organisations with their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) development.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Employee wellbeing is increasingly becoming important (Inceoglu et al., 2018). From a grand perspective, No. 3 of the United Nations' sustainable development goals (UN SDGs) proposed to focus on good health and wellbeing, which contributes to healthcare organisations with its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) development (George et al., 2016); from a health service perspective, organisations are often judged by how they treat their employees (Kim et al., 2018). Therefore, business nowadays has to take employee wellbeing into consideration. However, most Western cases have been focused more than the Chinese cases on employee wellbeing (Bertotti et al., 2017). Also, research has indicated there is a lack of attention on SME health services employee wellbeing (Ganster and Rosen, 2013; Wagner et al., 2022), especially in the cross-culture context. Thus, this study will address the knowledge gap in employee wellbeing in SME health services in the cross-culture context. This chapter introduces the research rationale first. Then, it illustrates the overreaching research objectives and two research questions, and a brief review of the existing literature on employee wellbeing, culture and leadership as well as research gaps. After that, it will present how this research will fill these gaps. The final part of this chapter provides an overview of the thesis structure.

1.1 Research purpose

The researcher developed a particular interest in employee wellbeing when she worked in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) clinics in the UK. She witnessed different understandings of employee wellbeing in the UK from China, which led to different impacts on employee wellbeing. Moreover, the researcher observed differences in leadership and culture in the two countries resulted in different impacts on employee wellbeing, such as different ways of communication and work relationships between leaders and employees. The researcher found this fascinating because TCM, a medical knowledge system invented by the Chinese people, is an important part of traditional Chinese culture (Ma et al., 2021), and it impacts on employee wellbeing differently from its operations in China when it operates in the UK. Thus, the researcher was interested to know more about the impact of culture and leadership on employee wellbeing in the two countries, as it may help to develop ways to improve employee wellbeing.

However, even with the increasing importance of employee wellbeing, the researcher found existing empirical research shows limited about how culture and leadership impact on employee wellbeing, especially in the context of small-medium sized health services, and little research has been done in terms of how employee wellbeing could be improved from leader's actions from perspectives of culture and leadership, especially in different cultural contexts. Therefore, due to the researcher's interest, the importance of employee wellbeing, more importantly the knowledge gap in the literature, the researcher decided to carry on this study.

1.2 Research questions and objectives

The research objectives are to better understand employee wellbeing and gain insight into the influence of culture and leadership on employee wellbeing in SME health services, in order to develop better ways for enhancing employee wellbeing by addressing the following two questions:

1. To what extent do culture and leadership have an influence on employee wellbeing in the SME health services of TCM in China and the United Kingdom?

2. What actions do leaders take to improve employee wellbeing from perspectives of culture and leadership and how to achieve?

1.3 Research rationale

Employee wellbeing is a summative concept of working lives, not only the quality and safety of the physical environment but also the psychological health of employee (Haddon, 2018). CIPD (2020) defines employee wellbeing as a state of contentment that allows an employee to flourish for the benefit of themselves and their organisations. Based upon these two widely cited employee wellbeing definitions, this study defined employee wellbeing as the quality of employees' experience from physical, psychological, and social aspects at work. Most studies on wellbeing acknowledge hedonic and eudemonic as two principal philosophical perspectives of wellbeing (Zheng et al., 2015; Xu et al., 2021), and suggested employee wellbeing includes physical, psychological and social perspectives (Guest, 2017).

Culture has been defined by researchers in a multitude of dimensions. Hofstede defined culture as 'the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from another' (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005, p.400). Hall stated culture is a communication that guides the actions and responses of people (Hall, 1976). In this research, culture is defined as the shared values, understandings, and behavioural patterns of groups of people. After defining culture, the researcher explains the importance of national culture, which defined as a set of values among people within a specific nation that distinguishes them from other nationalities (Hofstede, 2011).

Different national cultural impact employee wellbeing differently as historical contexts nurture different cultural values, as well as the perception and needs of employees (Malloy and Penprase, 2010). As discussed in section 2.4.3, Chinese culture under the influence of Confucianism (Pun et al., 2000), emphasises harmony and interpersonal relationships. Chinese focus on the group and relationships with colleagues are cooperative (Hofstede, 2011). Chinese organisations emphasise collective value when employee' personal value is incongruent with the collective value, leading to pressures on employees to comply with, thus a negative impact on their wellbeing (Hoffmann and Stokburger-Sauer, 2017). Opposed to collectivism, the British are high in individualism, emphasising privacy and value personal fulfilment (Dixon-woods et al., 2014). The Hofstede cultural theory has been widely studied and operationalised. However, due to the challenges to their relevancy (Chang and Lu, 2007), this research also employed Hall's and Trompenaars' culture theories to explore the cultural influence on employee wellbeing.

Hall (1976) proposed high context culture and low context culture to refer to how people communicate in different cultures. Chinese belong to the high context culture which implies that Chinese use a lot of indirect messages and non-verbal communication while the British belong to the low context culture which implies information in communication is exchanged explicitly (George et al., 2016). In terms of communication, China has high affectivity, which implies that the Chinese may work better if the communication style is emotional rather than neutral (Trompenaars and Turner, 2004). In contrast, written communication in the UK tends to be better (Lane et al., 2004). In addition, China is highly for diffuseness while the UK is highly for specificity (Trompenaars and Turner, 2004). In other words, communication in China tends to

be more roundabout than in the UK. It suggested that misunderstanding in communication may cause conflicts in the workplace. In turn, the conflicts in the workplace could affect employee emotions, such as causing anger or anxiety, which will negatively affect employee wellbeing (Pot, 2011).

Leadership has also played an influential role in employee wellbeing (Lapointe and Vandenberghe, 2017). Leadership is defined as 'a social and goal-oriented influence process, unfolding in a temporal and spatial milieu' (Fischer et al., 2017, p.1727). As discussed in section 2.5, a strong correlation between leadership and employee wellbeing (Bledow et al., 2013). This research will explore the impact of transformational, transactional, ethical leader styles and their relevant leader actions on employee wellbeing in China and the UK.

Transformational leadership is defined as a process that leaders and followers raise one another to a higher level of morale and motivation (Burns, 1978), and considered as having a positive relationship with employee wellbeing (Fischer et al., 2017). Bass and Bass (2008) identified key factors of transformational leaders, including idealised behaviour, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration. Take individualised consideration impact on employee wellbeing as an example, employees in health services often experience high-pressure situations (Dixon-woods et al., 2014), transformational leaders support employees as they spend time helping employees to deal with negative feelings, thus can medicate employee stress (Chang and Lu, 2007) and have a positive influence on employee wellbeing (Bledow et al., 2013).

Transactional leadership, on the other hand, concerns the power to perform certain tasks and reward or punish for employee's performance (Burns, 1978). Bass and Avolio (1997) characterised transactional leadership as the use of contingent reward and management by exception. Even though these characteristics lead employees to short-term relationship of exchange with the leader (Yukl, 1999), some researchers argued transactional leadership have a positive influence on employee wellbeing (Fischer et al., 2017).

Additionally, Brown et al. (2005, p.20) defined ethical leadership as 'the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement,

and decision making'. Ethical leaders are described as principled and caring (Brown et al., 2005), which enhance employee wellbeing.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) are crucial to sustained economic growth and social wellbeing in both developed and emerging economies (World Bank, 2022). SMEs account for 90% of business globally and provide over 50% of employment worldwide (*ibid*). Additionally, SMEs play a significant role in contributing to the development of employment globally (Iqbal and Piwowar-Sulej, 2022). In the UK, according to the House of Commons Library (2024), there were 5.5 million SMEs in 2023, representing over 99% of the business population. SMEs accounted for 61% of UK employment and 7% of business turnover (*ibid*). In China, SMEs constitute a majority of the enterprises and are the important factor for economic and social development (Zhang, 2021). SMEs becomes the main channel for recruiting new employees (*ibid*). SMEs generate around 50% of the national revenue and 60% of China's gross domestic product (GDP) (EU SME Centre, 2023).

Zahoor et al (2020) indicated SMEs are classified based on the number of employees and revenues. The number of employees has been the most applied criterion (*ibid*). The European Commission's (2021) defined SMEs are limiting those to less than 250 employees and an annual turnover not exceeding 50 million Euros, acknowledging that individual definitions of some publications can be different due to country specifics. In the UK, SMEs are defined as businesses with fewer than 250 employees (House of Common Library, 2024). In China, the classification of SMEs varies in industries and considering criteria such as the number of employees, total assets and business revenue, Chinese SMEs are businesses with more than 50 employees but fewer than 100 employees (Zheng et al., 2009). SMEs are defined as businesses with more than 50 but fewer than 100 employees. This definition used in this research and developed from the literature.

1.4 Research gaps

Employee wellbeing: there are various meaning of employee wellbeing in the literature, as it varies from different research contexts, research objectives and research perspectives (Danna and Griffin, 1999; Grant et al., 2007; Emre and Spiegeleare, 2021). However, previous research

has indicated there is a lack of attention on SME health services employee wellbeing (Ganster and Rosen, 2013; Wagner et al., 2022), especially in the cross-culture context.

Culture: Culture plays a crucial role in determining individuals from different cultures have different understanding of wellbeing at work (Hofstede, 1994). Previous studies indicated Western cultures emphasised the importance of environmental mastery, autonomy and personal emotions in wellbeing. In contrast, Chinese culture places greater emphasis on harmony and social values to achieve a higher wellbeing. However, few studies have been focused on exploring how culture impact on employee wellbeing in SME health services in China and the UK.

Leadership: Previous studies on employee wellbeing have identified leadership as a critical factor influencing employee wellbeing (Rudolph et al., 2020). However, there has not been found any relevant research on how leadership impact on employee wellbeing in the context of SME health service in cross culture context.

SME health services: this research focus on employee wellbeing in the context of SME health services. The value of the study arises from SME's substantial presence in both China and the UK (World Bank, 2022; EU SME Centre, 2023). As explained earlier in section 1.3, the importance of employee wellbeing not only aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goal No.3, which emphasises the promotion of good health and wellbeing, but also crucial to economic development in both China and the UK (Iqbal and Piwowar-Sulej, 2022). This emphasis has implications for healthcare organisations (George et al., 2016). Given the importance of SMEs and challenges identified, however, employees' wellbeing in SMEs has been largely neglected so far both in academia and practice (Zeng et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2019; Iqbal and Piwowar-Sulej, 2022). Moreover, there is a gap in studying employee wellbeing in health services, especially in the cross-culture context (Ganster and Rosen, 2013). As a result, this research aims to bridge these gaps by making contributions to the existing literature. Also, it aims to provide insights that can help SME health services leaders in enhancing employee wellbeing.

1.5 Research methodology and method

According to the research nature, it takes an interpretivist approach and case studies including four TCM cases selected from two different cultural contexts, China and the UK, two from each country. Data was collected through 24 online video semi-structured interviews with both leaders and employees. Interviews were conducted in both Chinese and English, recorded and lasted between 45 to 90 mins. Interview materials were transcribed and translated into English. Content analysis was used for material analysis. The researcher's previous work experience in the sector was drawn into the research to support analysing the material collected in the fieldwork.

1.6 Research contributions

A conceptual framework was initially developed for the research in the context. It explores employee wellbeing, culture and employee wellbeing, culture and leadership, leadership and employee wellbeing, and the relationships among them. A new model of employee wellbeing is developed to better understand the impact of culture and leadership on employee wellbeing in SME health sector.

The research extends the understanding of employee wellbeing to the context of SME health services in China and the UK from perspectives of employees and leaders. It demonstrates the understanding of employee wellbeing varies in different cultural contexts and between employees and leaders. The research highlights the importance of hedonic and eudemonic aspects and provide elements belonging to both aspects from perspective of leaders and employees. Besides, the research demonstrates the significance of employee benefits in understanding employee wellbeing at work. Therefore, the researcher introduces a view of employee wellbeing that consists of hedonic and eudemonic benefits.

The research reveals that **the degree of cultural impact on employee wellbeing differs in different cultural contexts**. Hofstede's cultural theory has been applied in this research and shows varies degrees of its impact on employee wellbeing in China compared to the UK. The

power distance dimension exerts a greater influence on employee wellbeing in China than in the UK, through the analysis of work relationship, decision making and communication channels. The collectivism dimension appears more influential on employee wellbeing in China, while the individualism dimension impacts more in the UK. Hall's cultural theory is also applied in this research and shows that high context (in China) and low context cultures (in the UK) have different impacts on employee wellbeing, the ways of communication have been considered in this aspect. Trompenaars's theory has also been applied in the research, but there are overlapping dimensions between Trompenaars's and Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Due to the thesis space and the relevance of the dimensions, Trompenaars' cultural theory will not be discussed in great detail, as the relevant dimensions will be explained in Hofstede's theories section.

Culture impact on leadership based on Hofstede's cultural theory from employee wellbeing perspective shows that the power distance and collectivism impact more on leadership styles and leader actions in China, while the individualism influences more on leadership styles and leader actions in the UK. By applied Hall's cultural theory, high context communication appears to be more influential in the cases located in China than the ones in the UK, while low context communication has more impact in the UK than China.

The research demonstrates **different degrees of leadership's effect on employee wellbeing in different cultural contexts**. Transformational leadership appears to have more impact on employee wellbeing in China than in the UK. Greater influence of transactional leadership on employee wellbeing in the UK is seen as more than in China. Ethical leadership had a relatively limited impact on employee wellbeing in both China and the UK, especially when compared to the influence of transformational and transactional leadership.

The research reveals **the significance of leader actions in positively impacting employee wellbeing** in both China and the UK and contributes to a new model of employee wellbeing. These contribute to improving employee wellbeing, not only helping to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goal No.3 to promote wellbeing, but also contributing to healthcare organisations with their CSR development.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured into seven chapters, each of which is described as follows:

Chapter 1 provides an introductory overview of the thesis. It sets out the purpose of the research, which stems from the researcher's personal interest and previous work experience. It also indicates the research objectives, questions, rationale, and identifies research gaps and contributions.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature relating to the key research concepts, including employee wellbeing, culture, leadership, and their relations as well as influence on employee wellbeing. In this chapter, first, the literature regarding employee wellbeing includes the understanding of this concept, explains critical factors and model that contribute to employee wellbeing, such as the physical work environment and the Job Demand-Resources model. Second, the chapter provides a comprehensive review of the literature regarding culture and employee wellbeing. This includes the understanding of culture and national culture, and their influence on values, perceptions, and behaviours. The literature on cultural dimensions is then reviewed in order to explore the differences between Chinese and British cultures that impact employee wellbeing in China and the UK. Third, the review of the literature regarding leadership and its impact on employee wellbeing includes an understanding of leadership, different styles of leadership, with a particular focus on transformational leadership and its influence on employee wellbeing, as well as the effects of transactional leadership and ethical leadership. A conceptual framework is presented at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed discussion of research methodology and method. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part is concerned with research methodology and the choice for this research. It outlines the research design, employed research method and ethical considerations. The second part focuses on the practical aspects of research fieldwork. From preparation of the fieldwork, formulation of the interview questions, criteria of the case selection, selections of the participants, gaining access to clinics and participants, conducting interviews to the analysis of collected materials. The chapter concludes with reflexivity, challenges and problems, and limitations encountered of the research.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the materials and analysing related to employee wellbeing in both China and the UK. It includes the perception of employee wellbeing from the perspectives of both leaders and employees. Moreover, it examines the factors contributing to employee wellbeing, with a particular focus on the physical workplace environment, job demands and job resources, and work stress in both countries. This chapter explores employee wellbeing and its influential factors in the context of SME health services in China and the UK.

Chapter 5 explores culture and its impact on employee wellbeing in two countries. In particular, the fieldwork focuses the impact of Hofstede's and Trompenaars's dimensions related to individualism and collectivism, and power distance on employee wellbeing, including aspects of work relationship, decision-making, and communication. Besides, this chapter explores Hall's communication theories concerning ways of communication and their effects on employee wellbeing are explored. By presenting the material collected from the fieldwork and analysing responses from participants, this chapter identifies differences in how leaders in the two countries approach solving problems for employees, resulting in different impacts on employee wellbeing.

Chapter 6 presents an in-depth exploration of leadership and leadership styles. Leadership styles including transformational, transactional and ethical leadership styles, and their respective influences on employee wellbeing in the two countries. By analysing the material collected through interviews with participants in China and the UK, this study identifies the importance of leadership on employee wellbeing. Moreover, an analysis of the interview materials highlights specific leader actions that help to improve employee wellbeing in the two countries.

Chapter 7 draws a conclusion to this research, providing a summary of the overall outcomes from the research questions. It includes an outline of the theoretical contributions that this study has made to the existing literature on employee wellbeing. The chapter presents limitations encountered during the research and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review and Theoretical Development

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the theoretical perspectives on the key concepts in this research: employee wellbeing, culture, and leadership. The discussion begins by examining employee wellbeing, including various aspects such as definitions and perspectives of wellbeing, critical factors influencing employee wellbeing, and relevance of employee wellbeing within the workplace context. Next, the chapter reviews the definitions and dimensions of culture, considering the specific cultural contexts of China and the UK, and how these cultures impact employee wellbeing. Moreover, the concept of leadership is explored, including definitions of leadership, different leadership styles, and their impacts on employee wellbeing. The examination of leadership styles explores how different approaches to leadership influence the wellbeing of employees. Finally, the chapter analyses the connections among employee wellbeing, culture and leadership, highlights the connections among these three key concepts. It concludes by presenting the conceptual framework that underlies the research, providing a comprehensive overview of how these three key concepts influence each other within the scope of the study.

2.2 Understanding of wellbeing

The study of employee wellbeing has evolved from broader considerations of wellbeing. Researchers in the field have provided various definitions of wellbeing depending on their perspectives. For instance, Dolan et al. (2008) defined wellbeing as an overall assessment of one's life, influenced by multiple factors, with a particular emphasis on one's work life. Warr and Nielsen (2018) proposed the scope of wellbeing that included different levels. At the broadest level is general life wellbeing, including overall life satisfaction and happiness. The next level is domain-specific wellbeing, focusing on job-related wellbeing and primarily measured through job satisfaction (*ibid*). The narrowest level, feature-specific wellbeing, relates to positive or negative feelings about specific things, people, or group (*ibid*).

Despite differences in these definitions, both Dolan et al. (2008) and Warr and Nielsen's (2018) studied wellbeing in the field of psychology and emphasised the importance of considering specific contexts in impacting wellbeing. In addition to various definitions of wellbeing, researchers have identified multiple dimensions of wellbeing (Diener et al., 2009; Wright, 2014). Most studies on wellbeing acknowledge two principal philosophical perspectives: hedonism and eudaemonism (Zheng et al., 2015; Xu et al., 2021), which will be explained in more detail in the following sections.

2.2.1 Hedonic perspective of wellbeing

Hedonism refers to the experience positive emotions and feelings of happiness in the work environment (Diener, 2000). In the context of wellbeing studies, hedonism defines wellbeing as the subjective experience of happiness (Ryan and Deci, 2001), with a particular focus on an employee's experience in the workplace. The idea of equating wellbeing with happiness, as suggested by hedonism, has a long history background (Ryan and Deci, 2001). For example, the Greek philosopher Aristippus defined hedonism as the pursuit of maximising pleasure and minimising pain (Tatarkiewicz, 1976; Bunnin and Yu, 2008). Diener (2012) also indicated that wellbeing is often equated with subjective wellbeing, which depends on an individual's experiences of pleasure and pain over a certain period (Ryan and Deci, 2001; Schwartz, 2012). Moreover, Jebb et al. (2018) noted that economic status is with happiness and subjective wellbeing (Howell et al., 2008).

There are differences between Western and Eastern conceptualisations of happiness (Joshanloo, 2014). The Western concept of happiness aligns with the notion of hedonism (Joshanloo, 2014), emphasising an individualistic pursuit of personal happiness (Triandis and Gelfand, 1998). The Western perspective places importance on autonomy and environmental mastery (Joshanloo, 2014), which are considered to contribute to higher psychological wellbeing in an individualistic culture (Kitayama et al., 2007). However, the Western notion of happiness does not hold the same level of prominence in Eastern cultures (Layous et al., 2013).

Considering this research involves China, exploring the Eastern perspective of happiness is crucial, primarily as it is rooted in Confucianism and Taoism (Joshanloo, 2014). In Confucianism, pleasure and positive emotions are not explicitly emphasised in the concept of

happiness (Layous et al., 2013). Instead, they are sometimes seen as emotions that should be controlled or even sacrificed (Joshanloo, 2014). From a Confucian perspective, happiness is associated with benevolence, which is defined as a feeling of compassion and concern for the wellbeing of others (*ibid*). It also emphasises disciplined self-governance and maintaining harmonious relationships with others (Zhang and Veenhoven, 2008; Joshanloo, 2014).

In Taoism, happiness and unhappiness are viewed as interconnected and reliant on each other (Joshanloo, 2014). According to Taoist principles, contentment, peace of mind, and adherence to the principle of non-action play significant roles in attaining happiness (Layous et al., 2013). The concept of non-action encourages individuals to allow events to unfold naturally without excessive interference or inappropriate intervention (Chen, 2006). These values and practices are considered as essential pathways to happiness within the framework of Taoist philosophy (Layous et al., 2013).

While hedonism equates happiness with wellbeing (Diener, 2000; Ryan and Deci, 2001), happiness can be defined differently in Western and Eastern contexts (Joshanloo, 2014). Some researchers argued that measuring happiness can be challenging, as methods employed may not be universally applicable (Diener et al., 2009). Moreover, the Western concept of happiness has faced criticism from Eastern perspectives for being excessively self-focused, leading to negative emotions such as hostility and negatively affecting the social aspects of wellbeing (*ibid*). In contrast, Eastern concepts of happiness placed emphasis on achieving harmony with others and adapting to the environment (Chen, 2006), which are positively associated with the social aspects of wellbeing (Joshanloo, 2014). Therefore, different cultural perspectives influence how happiness is perceived and assessed, highlighting the need for a comprehensive and culturally sensitive approach in the study of wellbeing.

2.2.2 Eudemonic perspective of wellbeing

The eudaimonic view posits that wellbeing involves the fulfilment of personal potential, aligning with deeply held values and perceiving one's actions as meaningful and purposeful (Ryan and Deci, 2001). According to this view, wellbeing is defined not only by the attainment of happiness, but by the pursuit of self-actualisation and the realisation of one's true potential (Ryff, 1995). Aristotle, a key advocate of the eudaimonic view in the West, rejected hedonism

as a means of achieving happiness (Joshanloo, 2014). According to Aristotle, happiness is not merely a fleeting feeling or mood but the result of a well-lived life (Wright and Bonett, 2007). Eudaimonism is associated with the realisation of one's capacities and potential as a human being (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Concepts such as meaning in life and autonomy align with the prevalent Western values of individualism (Joshanloo, 2014) and have been highlighted in eudaimonic studies conducted in the Western context (Ryan and Deci, 2001).

2.2.3 Subjective wellbeing approach

Consistent with the hedonistic perspective, Diener (2000) introduced the concept of subjective wellbeing, which refers to individuals' overall assessment of their life quality based on their personal values. Researchers have identified three key components of subjective wellbeing: high-level positive emotions, low-level negative emotions, and overall life satisfaction (Busseri et al., 2007). However, the term 'life quality' reflects an individual's perception of their position in life within the context of their culture, value system, goal and expectations. Consequently, it is challenging to measure subjective wellbeing universally and apply the concept to different individuals and contexts (Zheng et al., 2015).

Deaton and Stone (2016) proposed that subjective wellbeing includes three levels: evaluative, experiential, and eudaimonic. The evaluative level relates to life satisfaction, the experiential level involves perceived stress, and the eudaimonic level refers to finding meaning and purpose in life (*ibid*). One crucial characteristic of subjective wellbeing is its subjectivity, as the assessment of wellbeing is based on one's value, which can vary significantly across cultures (Danna and Griffins, 1999). For example, in collectivist cultures like China, the presence of harmonious relationships is integral to people's perception of wellbeing (Gao et al., 2010). In such cultural contexts, individuals not only pursue their personal wellbeing but also consider the collective wellbeing of society (*ibid*). Consequently, wellbeing within the Chinese social and cultural context may be influenced by personal views and societal or others' values (Zheng et al., 2015).

2.2.4 Psychological wellbeing approach

Evolved from the eudaimonic perspective, Ryff and Singer (2008) developed the psychological wellbeing approach, emphasising the positive state of psychological functioning and the fulfilment of personal potential (Zheng et al., 2015). They proposed a six-dimensional model of psychological wellbeing comprising autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, personal growth, and self-acceptance. Although the concept of psychological wellbeing originated from Western culture, it can also apply to Chinese culture (Zheng et al., 2015). However, certain cultural differences may influence how psychological wellbeing is understood in Eastern and Western contexts (*ibid*). For example, Western culture places emphasis on aspects such as environmental mastery and autonomy as components of psychological wellbeing, whereas Chinese collectivist culture prioritises harmonious relationships and a societal orientation (Markus and Kitayama, 1998). Studies have indicated that subjective wellbeing and psychological wellbeing are interrelated. Therefore, it appears appropriate to combine subjective wellbeing and psychological wellbeing when studying wellbeing (Zheng et al., 2015).

2.2.5 Employee wellbeing in workplace

Previous research has indicated that general wellbeing does not fully reflect wellbeing in the workplace (Zheng et al., 2015; Xu et al., 2021). Therefore, researchers have emphasised the importance of exploring wellbeing specifically in the context of work (Diener, 2000; Xu et al., 2021). Studies have shown that workplace specific issues, such as long working hours, can negatively impact employee wellbeing (Kowalski and Loretto, 2017). Employee wellbeing in the workplace is important not only for employees' health but also for leaders and organisations, as poor wellbeing at work can have a negative influence on performance and productivity (*ibid*). As a result, there has been growing attention to employee wellbeing and measures to improve it. For example, the Health and Safety Executive developed the Management Standards, which aim to reduce workplace stress (Health and Safety Executive, 2022; Kowalski and Loretto, 2017).

Employee wellbeing is distinguished from other forms of wellbeing (Brunetto, 2011). Employees' subjective experiences and perceptions of their work can influence their feelings of happiness or distress (Cartwright, 2017). However, there is a lack of consensus on the definition of employee wellbeing (Kowalski and Loretto, 2017), leading to blurred and overly broad

definitions of the concept. For example, employee job satisfaction is often used to measure and represent employee wellbeing (Van De Voorde et al., 2012). However, many researchers have criticised job satisfaction for its narrow focus on the specific job role and its failure to consider aspects of life beyond work, resulting in an inadequate operationalisation of happiness in the workplace (Wright and Cropanzano, 2004). The next section will explore the definition of employee wellbeing in more detail.

2.2.6 Definition of employee wellbeing

Scholars hold different views on the definition of employee wellbeing (Danna and Griffin, 1999; Grant et al., 2007; Emre and Spiegeleare, 2021), resulting in a lack of consensus on the definition. However, there are several commonly cited definitions of employee wellbeing. For example, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2020) defined wellbeing at work as the creation of an environment that promotes contentment, enabling employees to thrive and reach their full potential, benefiting both themselves and their organisations. This definition has gained a great deal of attention in practice, as employee wellbeing plays a crucial role in determining long-term organisational development (Pot, 2011). Some researchers aligned with this perspective, considering employee wellbeing as a summative concept of working lives, including factors like the quality and safety of the physical environment and the psychological health of employees (Haddon, 2018). Employee wellbeing also reflected both positive and negative states of personal experience and life evaluation (Chou et al., 2014).

Previous studies have suggested employee wellbeing includes physical, psychological, and social aspects (Guest, 2017). The physical aspect refers to physical health and includes factors like injuries and disease (Danna and Griffin, 1999; Grant et al., 2007; Emre and Spiegeleare, 2021). Psychological wellbeing is associated with experiencing frequent positive emotions, such as joy and happiness, while experiencing infrequent negative emotions, such as sadness and anger (Bakker and Oerlemans, 2011). Psychological perspectives also consist of job-related anxiety and stress. Besides, van De Voorde et al. (2012) indicated workload and work intensification as key stressors that are commonly recognised in HRM literature as indicators of employee wellbeing (Ogbonnaya et al., 2017). Workload and work intensification are assessed through individuals' perceptions of work pressure due to job demands (Emre and Spiegeleare, 2021). The social aspect of employee wellbeing relates to interpersonal relationships at work,

including relationships among employees and between employees and their leaders, such as support from leaders (Grant et al., 2007; Guest, 2017). Social aspects of wellbeing are often measured by assessing perceptions of good management relationships characterised by understanding and fairness (Danna and Griffin, 1999; Grant et al., 2007). For the this study, employee wellbeing is defined as the quality of employees' experiences from physical, psychological and social aspects at work.

Researchers have suggested employing a multiple-measure approach to study employee wellbeing (Zheng et al., 2015), considering it should include both family and work domains, as these are interconnected in individuals' lives (*ibid*). However, other scholars have pointed out the inherent challenges in defining and measuring wellbeing, as it is considered intangible (Dodge, et al., 2012) and can vary in meaning among different individuals (Danna and Griffin, 1999; Wright and Huang, 2012). To explores and gain a better understanding of employee wellbeing, this research will employ semi-structured interviews. Further details on the methodology and method will be provided in Chapter 3.

2.2.7 Employee wellbeing in SMEs

Employee wellbeing plays an important role in SMEs and has been defined in different contexts. Pan and Lin (2022) examined employee wellbeing in SMEs in Taiwan and defined wellbeing as a subjective perception of life satisfaction and emotional impact of life experiences, including both positive and negative emotions. Their study focused on the impact of organisational commitment on employee wellbeing in SMEs in the post-COVID-19 time and used questionnaire survey collect and analysed data.

Holt and Powell (2015) conducted research on health and wellbeing in SMEs, highlighted the importance of work condition in improving employee wellbeing in both the public and private sectors. They defined employee wellbeing as productive, happy and healthy workforce. However, they noted that their findings were specific to SMEs in Greater Manchester. Galabova and Mckie (2013) defined employee wellbeing as the needs and resources required for employees to influence and participate in working life. Their qualitative study of 42 SME senior

managers in Bulgaria, Finland and Scotland highlighted the high levels of workplace stress faced by SME employees, which negatively their wellbeing.

Previous research has shown that SMEs are often characterised by lower pay and fewer benefits when compared with large-sized enterprises (Ram et al., 2001), these were negatively related to employee hedonic wellbeing. Moreover, SMEs are frequently associated with limited growth and development opportunities (Lara et al., 2023), lower levels of job security (Li et al., 2023), these were negatively affecting employee eudemonic wellbeing (*ibid*). Besides, rapid societal and technological changes have intensified work demands and increased work stress, SMEs are particularly vulnerable to the consequences compared to large organisations (Cui et al., 2018; Krishnan and Scullion, 2017; Li et al., 2023). As a result, SMEs face challenges in employee wellbeing and attracting, motivating, and retaining high-quality employees (*ibid*).

2.2.8 Health services in SMEs

Health services refer to any services aimed at improving health or contributing to the diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of sick individuals (WHO, 1998). In SMEs context, health services can be defined as those specialised in products and services related to health and medical care (Lagerstrom and Lindholm, 2021). Their research characterised health services as high complexity, highly regulated and localised delivery (*ibid*). However, their research explored SMEs in the healthcare sector address the challenges of entering new international networks, studying 13 firms in the health care sector that established operations in Europe, the USA, Russia, African and Asia.

This research focuses on health services in China and the UK. In China, Liang et al. (2020) reviewed the evolution of health services, highlighting a significant shift in the health service deliver model from hospitals-based care to non-hospital primary services such as community health centres. Moreover, the SMEs health sector in China has grown rapidly and plays an important and growing role in the delivery of health services (Eggleston et al., 2008). Health services in SMEs provide more affordable and accessible options, aiming to address population needs (Liang et al., 2020). In the UK, most healthcare services are delivered through the National Health Service (NHS), which serves as the cornerstone of the country's healthcare system (Stewart et al., 2020). However, there has been a notable increase in health services

provide in the private healthcare sector (Exley et al. 2012). These health services are funded as part of employer funded healthcare schemes or paid directly by the patients (*ibid*).

2.3 Critical factors for employee wellbeing

Previous studies have explored various factors that influence employee wellbeing. Smith et al. (1995) identified that work conditions and work environment result in employees' work-related stress, which negatively affects employee wellbeing. Following the studies of Smith et al. (1995), Danna and Griffins (1999) suggested that antecedent factors such as the work setting and levels of occupational stress significantly influence employee wellbeing. The work setting includes aspects such as ensuring safe and healthy working conditions (*ibid*). This includes physical security, appropriate workplace temperature, cleanliness, access to necessary resources and equipment, and an overall pleasant work environments, such as effective communication in the organisation (Danna and Griffins, 1999; Haddon, 2018). Research also indicated that the work setting of an organisation reflects the commitment and responsibility of leaders and is a crucial determinant of employees' psychological wellbeing (Haddon, 2018). However, some researchers have pointed out that although many companies have improved work settings in the workplace, these may lead to more hazards (Danna and Griffins, 1999). For example, frequent changes in responsibility and the implementation of new technology may result in increased pressure in the workplace (Ogbonnaya and Messersmith, 2018).

2.3.1 Physical environment at work and employee wellbeing

Research has consistently demonstrated that the physical work environment significantly impacts on employees' wellbeing (Dole and Schroeder, 2001). The quality of the physical work environment is a crucial source of job satisfaction and an important factor in work motivation (Public Health England, 2015). However, the importance of the physical work environment can also create pressure, particularly when there is a heavy workload or poor work-life balance (*ibid*). The ambient factors in the physical work environments, such as workplace design, indoor temperature, lighting, ventilation, noise, and cleanliness, play a crucial role in ensuring that the physical characteristics of the work environment have a positive effect on employees' wellbeing, engagement and work performance (Evans and Johnson, 2000). Employees who are

unhappy with those factors in their workplace are more likely to report lower productivity and decreased wellbeing (Otterbring et al., 2018).

The layout of the workplace is a crucial aspect of the physical workplace environment that contributes to employee wellbeing, as it influences both comfort and productivity (Evans and Johnson, 2000). Open-plan design, which refers to placing individual workstations in an open space (*ibid*), has been found to create a flexible environment that enhances work efficiency and facilitates communication and collaboration among employees (*ibid*). However, there are potential drawbacks associated with open-plan design, including issues related to noise, lack of privacy, and distractions that can affect concentration (Otterbring et al., 2018). Several studies have revealed that open-plan workplaces are linked to lower levels of perceived privacy and decreased job satisfaction. Moreover, a disorganised, unclean, and dusty workplace can create pressure on employees and negatively impacting their wellbeing at work (Otterbring et al., 2018).

Research on both lighting and indoor temperature has suggested their important impact on the physical and psychological wellbeing of employees in the workplace (Evans and Johnson, 2000). For instance, employees who experience comfortable lighting in their workplace have reported a more positive mood and higher levels of wellbeing at the end of their workday (Cui et al., 2013). In contrast, inadequate lighting conditions can result in employees experiencing discomfort and fatigue as they try to adapt to the ambient level (Evans and Johnson, 2000). Numerous research has indicated that maintaining an ideal workplace temperature between 22 and 26 degrees Celsius is important, as temperatures outside of this range were associated with a negative impact on work performance and motivation (Cui et al., 2013).

Moreover, noise levels in the workplace also play a critical role in employee wellbeing (Sundstrom et al.,1994). Reduced noise in the workplace has been linked to fewer errors in work and increased productivity (Otterbring et al., 2018). Noise in this context includes sounds from conversations, phones, copiers, is an ambient stressor that influences job satisfaction in the workplace (Evans and Johnson, 2000) due to its potential to cause distractions. However, despite conducting an extensive review, Otterbring et al. (2018) argued that further research is still needed to better understand the types and intensity of noise that impact employee performance.

There are formal rules on working condition, health and safety standard in both China and the UK, to have an influence on employee wellbeing. For example, in China, the law on the prevention and control of occupational disease (the Chinese OD Law) obligates and enables the improvement of working conditions and occupational health (Zhang and Rantanen, 2020). The Law indicated that is the employers' responsibility to create a work environment conductive to the physical and psychological health of employees and take preventive measures in the workplace to protect employees' health, safety and wellbeing (Xu et al., 2021). In the UK, labour regulations regarding occupational health and safety requires employers to ensure that employees work in a healthy and safety environment. The primary legislation covering occupational health and safety is the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HSWA). The legislation includes both physical health and mental wellbeing as work-related stress has a considerable impact on employee wellbeing (Brookes et al., 2013). Although the formal rules hold their weights on impact employee wellbeing, however, that is not the focus of this research, as this research is to better understand informal rules such as values and beliefs impact on employee wellbeing.

2.3.2 The JD-R model and employee wellbeing

The Job Demand-Resource model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) is a widely recognised model for understanding job stress, particularly through differentiates between challenge and hindrance demands (Kowalski and Loretto, 2017). According to the JD-R model, job characteristics consist of job demands and job resources, despite variations in work conditions (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Researchers employed the JD-R model to explain the impact of working conditions on employee wellbeing and proposed that employee wellbeing results from a balance between resources and demands of job characteristics (Schaufeli and Taris, 2014). The JD-R model has its advantages, as it can be applied in various contexts (*ibid*). However, this flexibility also results in limited generalizability (*ibid*). Moreover, the conceptual difference between job demands and job resources is not as apparent as it was initially perceived (*ibid*). Although the JD-R model faced criticisms, it provides an understanding of work-related factors, the way demands, resources and outcomes are associated, as such it can be used in many occupation settings to improve employee wellbeing (*ibid*).

Job demands include various aspects of work that require energy expenditure, such as workload and conflicts (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Workload can be categorised as challenging demands that contribute positively to performance. Conversely, conflicts represent hindrances to job demands that undermine performance (Bakker and Demerouti, 2018). Therefore, job demands may negatively impact employees' physical health if the daily workload leads to chronic overload over a long period (*ibid*). In contrast, job resources refer to aspects of work that help employees cope with job demands and achieve their goals (Bakker and Demerouti, 2018). Resources such as performance feedback and leader support act as motivating job characteristics that provide employees with a sense of purpose and fulfilling their need for autonomy (Deci and Ryan, 2000). As a result, job resources are associated with increased motivation and higher productivity (Bakker and Demerouti, 2018). Despite job demands and job resources impact on employee wellbeing differently, they work in concert (*ibid*). For example, job resources support employees in coping with job demands to moderate the negative impact of job demands on employees (*ibid*).

The scope of the JD-R model is broad as it does not confine itself to specific job demands or job resources that may impact employee wellbeing (Schaufeli and Taris, 2014). Moreover, the JD-R model demonstrates flexibility, enabling its application to a wide range of work settings, thereby suggesting that leaders can positively influence employee wellbeing by modifying job demands (*ibid*). The broad scope of the model appealed to researchers, while practitioners were attracted to its flexibility (*ibid*). However, some scholars argued that some unresolved issues in the JD-R model needed further research. For example, the JD-R model is recognised as a flexible rather than specific model, capable of being applied in various contexts, but this flexibility came at the expense of limited generalizability (*ibid*).

2.3.3 Occupational stress and employee wellbeing

Occupational stress is critical to employee wellbeing in the workplace (Danna and Griffins, 1999). CIPD (2020) stated stress is one of the primary causes of long-term workplace absence. Numerous researchers have conducted on the sources of work-related stress. For example, Johnson et al. (2005) linked work-related stress to factors that influence employee wellbeing, such as work relationships, job conditions, workload, control, job security, resources, and communications (Robertson and Cooper, 2011). According to Johnson et al. (2005), work

relationships cause stress from interactions between employees and their colleagues and leaders. Job conditions cause stress from the nature of the job itself and the work environment.

Workload is identified as a stressor caused by excessive workload and time pressures, while control cause stress based on the amount of autonomy employees have over their work (*ibid*). Job security act as a stressor depending on the level of job security perceived by employees, and resources and communications cause stress due to the availability of equipment or resources at work and the effectiveness of workplace communication (*ibid*). Among the various causes of work-related stress, heavy workloads emerged as the most prevalent, followed by management or leadership style (CIPD, 2020). Although some research argued heavy workloads and demanding targets can be motivating and a source of satisfaction, heavy workloads and time pressures can negatively impact employee wellbeing (Johnson et al., 2005). This highlights the need for balanced workload management to support employee wellbeing in the workplace.

2.3.4 Leader's action and employee wellbeing

Studies in the literature showed that leader support for employees in the workplace can have a positive effect on employee wellbeing (Heaney et al., 1993). Such support can help employees reduce the emotional distress associated with stressful situations by assisting employees in developing a new perspective on a stressful situation. An organisation where leaders consider employee wellbeing is more likely to be taking steps to monitor workloads or create a culture where employees do not work excessive hours (CIPD, 2020). Leader support at work affect employee wellbeing and highlight the role leaders played in promoting employee wellbeing (Johnson et al., 2018). For instance, when leaders spend time helping employees deal with challenging experiences, it can contribute to fostering a positive atmosphere and enhancing employee productivity (CIPD, 2020). Leader's action can also signal organisation's commitment to employee wellbeing. Guest et al. (2021) explored signalling theory as a framework, examining the relationship between management (signaller), messages about HRM (the signals) and employees (the receivers). Their research found that when managers signal the implementation of high-commitment HR practices, employees have more positive attitudes, leading to higher levels of employee wellbeing. For example, leaders send signals to show their commitment to wellbeing through policies and benefits, and employees signal their wellbeing through their engagement.

2.3.5 Job satisfaction and employee wellbeing

Job satisfaction has been a widely studied subject in organisational research (Butler et al., 1999). Despite extensive literature on job satisfaction, researchers argued that a consistent definition for the concept remained elusive (*ibid*). One of the most commonly used definitions of job satisfaction is 'a pleasure or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or experience' (Locke, 1976). Other researchers put more emphasis on the relationship between the work environment and job satisfaction. For instance, Dawis and Lofquist (1984) defined job satisfaction as the result of employees' appraisal of the degree to which the work environment fulfilled the individual's needs. This perspective aligns with Locke's (1976) view of job satisfaction as a positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or experience.

The relationship between job satisfaction and employee wellbeing has received considerable attention in both theoretical and empirical. Previous studies have consistently suggested a positive association between job satisfaction, employee psychological wellbeing, and employee turnover (Wright and Bonett, 2007). Employees with lower levels of job satisfaction and psychological wellbeing were found to be less likely to stay on their job (*ibid*). Moreover, many studies have proposed that employee psychological wellbeing is a broader construct than job satisfaction (Butler et al., 1999). While job satisfaction focuses specifically on one's satisfaction with their job and excludes aspects of life external to the job, employee psychological wellbeing has traditionally been understood as the overall effectiveness of an individual's psychological functioning (Wright and Cropanzano, 2000).

2.3.6 Other factors associated with employee wellbeing at workplace

There are other terms linked with employee wellbeing, such as emotional intelligence, employee engagement, and work-life balance (WLB). Emotional intelligence has been identified as an important predictor of employee wellbeing (Akanni et al., 2020; Karimi et al., 2021). According to Mayer and Salovey (1997, p.5), emotional intelligence refers to 'the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to facilitate thoughts, to understand emotion and emotional knowledge, and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and

intellectual growth'. Emotional intelligence equips employees with the needed skills and abilities to effectively cope with work-related tension, hassles, exhaustion, frustration, fatigue and social interaction within the workplace (Extremera et al., 2018; Mayer and Salovey, 1997).

Employees with higher levels of emotional intelligence are likely to have more confidence and resilience in coping with challenges at work, leading to a higher level of work-related wellbeing (Akanni et al., 2020). Studies also supported a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and employee wellbeing (Agrawal and Khan, 2015; Bowen et al., 2016), highlighting emotional intelligence as a motivational factor promoting employee wellbeing (Akanni et al., 2020). Moreover, emotional intelligence enhances employee wellbeing through perceived person-job fit (Lin et al., 2013), which refers to the compatibility between individual employee abilities, skills, values, needs, and those required by the job (Akanni et al., 2020). Research has indicated that person-job fit significantly predicted the level of employee wellbeing (Choi et al., 2017) and contributed to promote employee wellbeing (Akanni et al., 2020).

Employee engagement is defined as a state of mind characterised by a positive perception of fulfilling tasks (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004), leading employees to work enthusiastically even in the face of workplace difficulties (*ibid*). Research demonstrated a positive association between employee involvement, participation, job satisfaction and employee wellbeing (Crawford et al., 2010). Employees' active participation in decision-making processes increased their perception of control over work processes and nurtured feelings of encouragement, associating with increased employee wellbeing (Huang et al., 2019). According to Brunetto et al. (2014), it is the responsibility of leaders and organisations to provide a working environment that promotes and maintains employee engagement.

Work-life balance (WLB) has become a critical factor for both employees and employers (Wong et al., 2021). It contributes to employees' wellbeing and organisational growth. WLB is associated with lower work-family conflict (Lamane-Harim et al., 2021), greater job satisfaction (Wood et al., 2020), improved employee attitudes (Huo et al., 2020), better relationship with coworkers for employees, and contribute to organisational performance and productivity (Lamane-Harim et al., 2021). WLB refers to achieving equality in time, involvement, and satisfaction between work and family roles (Wong et al., 2021).

The work-life balance supportive culture (WLBSC) is defined as the 'shared assumptions, beliefs, and values regarding the extent to which an organisation supports and values the integration of employees' work and family lives' (Thompson et al., 1999). Studies showed that WLBSC contributes to WLB (Talukder, 2019) and enhance employee wellbeing in SMEs (Liu et al., 2020), as it increases employee retention which has become a crucial challenge for many SMEs *(ibid)*. Perceived organisational support refers to employees' perceptions of the extent of the organisation values their contribution and cares their wellbeing (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Employees who perceived organisational support and perceived their workplace as family-supportive experience greater job satisfaction, greater employee wellbeing (Lamane-Harim et al., 2021). Employees with high emotional intelligence are found to have a better interpersonal relationship at work, harmonious work relationships generate more positive perceptions, experience fewer negative encounters or less intense conflict with coworkers.

Given the discussion on employee wellbeing above, this research will focus on employee wellbeing in the workplace. Employee wellbeing is employees' perceptions of their work and work environment. Culture is an essential factor in employee wellbeing at work (Biron et al., 2014). The following section will explore culture and its impact on employee wellbeing.

2.4 Culture and employee wellbeing

Culture is an extensively discussed concept in management studies, including a multitude of definitions (Johnson et al., 2018). It influences the way individuals think, perceive, and respond in different circumstances (Sweeney and Hardaker, 1994). Moreover, culture plays a pivotal role in determining societal values, and individuals from different cultures have different understandings of wellbeing at work. Culture also moderate work relationships, ways of communication, and influenced the way people and organisations related to each other (Hofstede, 1994). This section will start with providing definitions of culture and explore theories of culture, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each culture theory, and then examine how culture impacts employee wellbeing.

2.4.1 Understanding of culture

Researchers have defined culture in a multitude of ways depending on their research interests and specific focus of their studies (Beugelsdijk et al., 2017). Kluckhohn (1951, p.21) defined culture as 'consists of patterned ways of thinking, feeling, and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols'. This definition emphasises culture as a way of thinking while specifying the method of acquiring and transmission. On the other hand, Hofstede et al. (2010, p.6) defined culture as 'the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others'. In this definition, culture is viewed as a system of collectively held values that set one group apart from others.

Hall and Hall (1990) provided a definition of culture as an intricate computer system that included behavioural programs, including hidden codes that guide the actions and responses of people. Moreover, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2004) stated that the essence of culture is the shared ways in which groups of people understand and interpret the world, as well as how they solve problems and reconcile dilemmas. These definitions reflect that culture is the 'distinctive, enduring pattern of behaviour and/or personality characteristics' (Clark, 1990, p.66) that govern how individuals act, their beliefs and values, and their perception of proper and acceptable conduct and norms (Aquino, 1998; Brett and Okumura, 1998; Fraser and Zarkada-Fraser, 2002).

Although scholars have defined the concept of culture in different ways, there is a consensus among researchers that values are the core element of culture (Hofstede, 1999). Values can be defined as 'broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others' (Hofstede et al., 2010, p.9). This definition simplifies Kluckhohn's (1951, p.395) definition of value as 'a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means, and ends of actions'. Moreover, this definition is in line with Rokeach's (1972, p. 159-160) definition, which defined value as 'an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally and socially preferable to alternative modes of conduct or end-states of existence'.

These definitions conceptualise value as mental programs that guide individuals or groups in decision-making (Schwartz, 1994). Value is what people describe as personally important

(Schwartz, 2012). A change in perception of a situation or different circumstances could cause a change in values, particularly the extent to which a situation was perceived as favourable or critical (Hofstede, 1999). Moreover, Smith et al. (2012) suggested that culture interpret the differences in people's behaviours, which are actions attached to specific contexts. Values enable individuals to explain these contextualised behaviours without referring to specific circumstances. In other words, values link the broad subjective concept of culture with context-specified behaviours and emphasise explaining differences in national culture (Smith et al., 2002).

For the purpose of this study, culture is defined as the shared values, understandings and behavioural patterns of a group of people. National culture is thus understood as a set of collective values among people within a specific nation that distinguishes them from other nationalities (Hofstede, 2011). Different national cultures impact employees' thinking and behavioural patterns differently (Fraser and Zarkada-Fraser, 2002), as historical contexts nurture different cultural values, attitudes, individual work behaviours, as well as the perception and needs of employees (Malloy and Penprase, 2010). The objective of this research is to explore the influence of different national cultures on employee wellbeing in China and the UK.

2.4.2 Cultural dimensions

Previous studies have identified different dimensions of national culture, with certain frameworks gaining significant recognition, such as those proposed by Hofstede, Hall and Trompenaars. This study will discuss these theories, particularly focusing on the cultural dimensions that potentially impact employee wellbeing in China and the UK.

Hofstede's culture dimensions

Hofstede conducted an extensive analysis of employee value scores gathered from a comprehensive survey conducted within IBM between 1967 and 1973, covering more than 76 countries (Hofstede and Bond, 1988). The outcomes of this study provided evidence of the existence of cultural dimensions of national differences in business practices (Hofstede, 2011). Hofstede's cultural dimensions include power distance, individualism and collectivism,

masculinity and femininity, and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2011). Long-term orientation was developed later (*ibid*). Among the dimensions, the individualism and collectivism dimension showed the most significant differences between China and the UK (*ibid*). Moreover, both individualism and collectivism and power distance dimensions play a crucial role in influencing leadership styles and the relationship between subordinates and leaders (Chen and Partington, 2004).

Individualism and Collectivism refer to 'the degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups' (Hofstede, 2011, p.11). In a collectivistic culture like China, people stress group belongings and maintaining harmony, relationships tend to prevail over tasks, and individuals are expected to rely on their relatives or members of a particular ingroup to look after them in exchange for loyalty (Hofstede, 2011). On the other hand, in individualistic cultures like the UK, the focus is primarily on immediate family, with a strong emphasis on the right to privacy, the value of personal fulfilment (Dixon-woods et al., 2014), and task prevails over the relationship (Hofstede, 2011). Hofstede (2011) stated that contemporary management practices are largely influenced by individualistic countries, which may pose limitations when applied in collectivistic countries.

Power distance is another dimension that exhibits large differences between China and the UK (Chen and Partington, 2004). The power distance dimension refers to the extent to which less powerful members of society accept and expect an unequal distribution of power (Hofstede, 2011). This dimension indicates how a society deals with inequalities among people (*ibid*). For instance, in Chinese culture with high power distance, people are more likely to accept a hierarchical order, and subordinates expect to be told what to do (*ibid*). In comparison, in the UK, with low power distance, hierarchy means inequality of roles and subordinates are generally expected to be consulted (*ibid*).

Hofstede and Bond (1988) added a fifth cultural dimension known as long and short-term orientations. Long-term orientation refers to 'the fostering of virtues oriented toward future rewards-in particular, perseverance and thrift' (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005, p.120). On the other hand, short-term orientation was defined as 'the fostering of virtues related to the past and present-in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of face (individual prestige), and fulfilling social obligation' (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005, p.120). Both long and short-terms

orientations contain Confucian values, with Chinese culture tending to align more with a long-term orientation, while the UK displays a more short-term orientation (Hofstede, 2005).

In summary, Hofstede's culture dimensions provide a framework for analysing cultural differences across nations, have been widely cited in academic studies and are highly influential in business practice (Fang, 2003). However, Hofstede's research has been criticised for the research sample and the method used (Faure and Fang, 2008; Thompson and McHugh, 2009). One notable concern is that Hofstede's cultural dimensions were initially developed and tested primarily in Western contexts (Giorgio, 2016), leading to an in-built Western bias (*ibid*). Moreover, Hofstede's research employed quantitative method, which focused on culture of a nation in general rather than a specific and in-depth understanding of national culture. Besides, Hofstede's research outcomes were bound to a specific context and time, and cultural values might undergo since then, potentially conflicting with the cultural values defined by Hofstede (Faure and Fang, 2008). Despite these limitations, Hofstede's cultural dimensions remained widely cited in the majority of cultural studies due to the credible and valid insights derived from his empirical research (*ibid*). Apart from Hofstede's cultural dimensions, there are two other major cross-cultural theories proposed by Hall and Trompenaars.

Hall's cultural dimensions

Hall (1976) categorised cultures into high context and low context cultures according to their ways of communicating. Context refers to 'the information that surrounds an event; it is inextricably bound up with the meaning of that event' (Hall and Hall, 1990, p.6). In high context countries, communication and interaction between individuals tend to be informal, with less emphasis on punctuality, and the division between activities at work and home was ambiguous (*ibid*). In low context countries, communications and interactions between individuals tend to be formal and explicit, with an emphasis on punctuality and work-life balance (*ibid*). Chinese culture belongs to the high context culture category, implying that the Chinese use a lot of indirect messages and non-verbal communication, while British culture belong to the low context culture category, suggesting that information in communication is exchanged explicitly (George et al., 2016).

Trompenaars's culture dimensions

Trompenaars (1993) proposed seven dimensions of national culture to understand cultural diversity in business. The initial five dimensions describe relationships with other people and include universalism and particularism (rules and relationships), collectivism and individualism (the group and the individual), neutral and emotional (the range of feelings expressed), diffuse and specific (the range of involvement), ascription and achievement (how status is accorded). The remaining two dimensions address orientation in time and attitudes towards the environment. Take communication as an example, China shows a high level of affectivity, indicating that Chinese people may work more effectively when the communication style is emotional rather than neutral (Trompenaars and Turner, 2004). In contrast, written communication is generally more effective in the UK (Lane et al., 2004). Besides, China is characterised by higher diffuseness compared to the UK, which scores higher in specificity (Trompenaars and Turner, 2004). This implies that communication in China tends to be more indirect and less straightforward compared to the UK. Moreover, Trompenaars' cultural dimensions emphasise meanings and people's interpretations of scenarios involving ethical and practical dilemmas, thereby reflecting insights into different systems of values.

In conclusion, the cultural dimensions discussed above play important roles in influencing individual values and behaviours in this study. For example, China tends to accept high power distance, while the UK tends to associate with lower power distance. Thus, Chinese leaders possess more authority and power over their employees than their UK peers. Besides, the discussed culture dimensions are largely developed from Western perspectives, which help the researcher to understand the differences in national culture between China and the UK, such as the relationships between each other by individualism and collectivism from the perspective of employee wellbeing. However, further exploration is needed to better understand how these cultural dimensions can be interpreted and applied in the context of this research. In the next section, the researcher will explore the impact of Chinese and British culture in the workplace on employee wellbeing in both China and the UK.

2.4.3 Culture in the workplace

As previously mentioned, national cultural dimensions have diverse effects on individuals across different countries (Hofstede and Bond, 1988; Black, 1994), and these effects may have

important implications for leadership styles (Hofstede, 1983). The following section will explore Chinese and British cultures in the workplace.

Chinese Culture in the Workplace

There are significant numbers of research has been conducted on Chinese culture. For example, Cooke (2009) reviewed the literature on Human Resource Management (HRM) in China, examining 265 articles from 34 major business and management-related journals published in English between 1998 and 2007. Her study explored aspects related to workplace relationship management and interorganisational relationship management, and highlighted that Chinese culture is characterised by Confucianism, collectivism, power distance, Mianzi and Guanxi (*ibid*).

Confucianism is one of the fundamental beliefs and values in China that impact Chinese values and behaviour (Cooke, 2009). It emphasises respect for age and hierarchy, where the fulfilment of individuals derive from the dynamics of interpersonal relationships and a sense of belonging. Moreover, Confucianism highlights group orientation and the importance of group harmony, particularly within hierarchically based interrelationships (Redding, 1990; Flynn et al., 2007). In this cultural context, individuals may be expected to compromise personal needs to contribute to maintain group harmony. According to Kitayama and Markus (2003), the positive evaluation of an individual is not as significant as the recognition from society. This highlights the importance of receiving responses and acknowledgement from groups and society for the wellbeing of individuals in the Chinese context.

Chinese employees exhibit a greater inclination toward hierarchical decision-making and show more respect for societal and managerial rules in work relations compared to their UK counterparts (House et al., 1999). This inclination to a hierarchical management system reflects a high power distance culture (Hofstede, 2001), where acceptance of power inequality is prevalent (*ibid*). In such cultures, employees are encouraged to accustom to leaders who provide precise directions and guidance on how to perform work tasks (Hirst et al., 2009). Employees are encouraged to follow the rules and are unlikely to question their leaders' instructions (Ashkanasy, 2002). Moreover, collective cultures where employees possessed greater control over their work or more involvement in decision-making tend to experience higher levels of

stress (Triandis and Gelfand, 1998), and reduced motivation compared to individualist cultures (Ashkanasy, 2002). Studies also indicate that Chinese employees place a greater emphasis on group goals over individual ones (Lam et al., 2002). Consequently, encouraging individual thinking or behaviour in collective cultures is less favourably perceived in Chinese settings compared to the UK.

The concept of Mianzi and Guanxi are fundamentally important in understanding cultural interactions in China (Buckley et al., 2006). Mianzi is a key cultural feature that influences individual behaviour in Chinese social activities (Lin, 2011). Mianzi is defined as the evaluation and experience of self-worth obtained in the process of social interaction (Zhuo and Ling, 2022), and the recognition by others of an individual's social status or reputation (Buckley et al., 2006), mianzi reflects one's credit, respect, reputation, and dignity in the Chinese context (Cooke, 2009).

Given the importance of mianzi in Chinese culture, it is important to protect a person's mianzi and mianzi plays an important role in employee wellbeing. Improper behaviour can lead to a loss of mianzi, so fear of losing mianzi and maintaining mianzi can produce stress and have an influence on individual behaviour choice (Chen et al., 2019). Mianzi is also related to harmony and work relationships, which held great importance in collectivist cultures, as people are deeply concerned about preserving other's mianzi, especially when dealing with conflict. However, avoiding losing mianzi and maintaining harmony can be frustrating, as it may result in avoiding confrontations without effectively solving problems.

Guanxi is also an important concept in Chinese culture (Smith et al., 2012; Liu and Jia, 2021). Cooke (2009) indicated that guanxi play an important role in influencing and smoothing workplace relationships in Chinese culture. Guanxi also explain the differences between Chinese and Western values, behavioural patterns and the dynamics of workplace relationships (*ibid*). Researchers have defined guanxi in various ways due to different research foci (Liu and Jia 2021). For example, Ambler et al. (2009) defined guanxi as interpersonal relationships based on particular criteria or ties in Chinese culture. Liu and Jia (2021) defined guanxi as informal interpersonal relationships based on Chinese culture that can be utilised to acquire resource advantages. Guanxi is considered a cultural way of conducting business in China (Su et al.,

2003). The purpose of guanxi is to share the limited resources that would otherwise remain inaccessible, thereby facilitating business operations (*ibid*).

Guanxi exert both positive and negative influences in the workplace (Luo et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2011) and employees' wellbeing (Liu and Jia, 2021). Numerous management studies have focused on the benefits of guanxi provide to individuals at work (Luo et al., 2012). For example, employees with strong guanxi with their leaders are likely to receive more benefits, such as more bonuses or greater promotion opportunities (Zhou and Matrocchino, 2001). In the Chinese context, leaders rewarded employees not only for their performance and contributions, but also for their guanxi with them (*ibid*). However, several scholars have also drawn attention to the potential negative consequences of guanxi at work (Chen et al., 2011). For example, guanxi can negatively impact employees' perceptions of their leaders and companies when employees perceived management is using an organisation's collective resources by wither giving favours or fulfilling obligations to employees who have strong guanxi ties (Liu and Jia, 2021).

British Culture in the Workplace

Britain embraces an individualist culture that encourages individual responsibility, initiative, and competitiveness (Tayeb, 1994). British individualism is also reflected in employee relations at work, particularly in the degree to which relationships are personal (*ibid*). Unlike Chinese employees who expect their leaders to look after them and help them with their personal difficulties (*ibid*), employees in individualist Britain neither expect nor want their leaders to deal with their personal difficulties, as this would be seen as an invasion of their privacy (*ibid*). In British culture, leaders who show concern for employee wellbeing might do so by providing employees with up-to-date equipment to enhance work performance (Tayeb, 1994; Okable, 2002). In other words, work relationships between leaders and employees in the UK are generally characterised as impersonal and task oriented (Tayeb, 1994).

The contrast between individualism and collectivism is also evident in the physical structures and design of the workplace (Tayeb, 1994). For example, most lectures at British Universities have their own offices or workspaces, reflecting a value placed on privacy and individual work environments. Similarly, British leaders emphasise privacy and clearly defined job responsibilities and regulations (Tayeb, 1988). British employees, like many other

individualistic individuals, tend to engage in job-hopping, commonly moving between different companies rather than committing to lifetime employment and demonstrating loyalty to a single company (Okable, 2002). As a result, some British leaders do not view the cost on training as a long-term investment in human resources.

2.4.4 Culture and employee wellbeing

Cultural differences between East and West tend to lead to differences in Chinese and Western beliefs about wellbeing (Zheng et al., 2015). Western cultures emphasise aspects such as environmental mastery, autonomy, and personal emotions as important factors of wellbeing. In contrast, Chinese culture places greater emphasis on harmony and social values to achieve a higher level of wellbeing (Gao et al., 2010). Despite these differences, limited research has focused on exploring more detail to explain and understand the perception and behaviour related to wellbeing in both China and the UK. Therefore, this research aims to explore and gain a deeper understanding of how culture impacts employee wellbeing in both contexts.

Many studies have proved that culture constructs employee psychological wellbeing. Bruner (1990) stated that culture act as a major force in constructing the conception of happiness, which in turn shapes subjective experiences associated with it. Meanings and concepts are shaped by culture, with people's perceptions of happiness being embedded in values construed by their unique cultural traditions (Lu, 2008). According to Diener and Suh (2003), the self-stood at the junction of subjective wellbeing and culture, with culture provide form and shape to the self and influence individuals' feelings and thoughts about various aspects of their lives.

Western theories of employee psychological wellbeing are based on individualism (Lu, 2008). These theories emphasise an individualistic self-conception that highlight independence, autonomy, internal consistency, and stability (Markus and Kitayama, 1998). In contrast, in the Asian context, discussions about the individual are influenced by the Confucian assumption that a person exists in a relationship with others (King and Bond, 1985). Cheung and Leung (2007) acknowledged that collectivism is an overarching predictor of psychological wellbeing for Chinese employees. Individuals in this cultural setting are fundamentally social-oriented, situation-centered, interdependent, and closely bonded with others through emotional ties (Markus and Kitayama, 1998).

Studies have shown that there are culture-specific patterns that influence how different cultures experience and understand happiness. According to Lu (2008), East Asian cultural conceptions of psychological wellbeing have a distinct characteristic of emphasising role obligations, where happiness is perceived as fulfilling social role obligations and accomplishing self-cultivation to ensure group welfare and social harmony. Individuals from Asian cultures also tend to engage in self-criticism and self-effacement (Kitayama and Markus, 2000). The characteristic mode of the social-oriented self is to pursue achievements that are socially desirable and culturally mandated, rather than striving for personal accomplishments (Yu and Yang, 1994).

In Asian cultural conceptions of psychological wellbeing that emphasise social orientation, individuals focused on fulfilling role obligations in interdependent social relationships, maintaining interpersonal harmony, and striving to promote the welfare and prosperity of the collective, even at the cost of one's welfare (*ibid*). However, some researchers criticised this view as incomplete, arguing that wellbeing cannot be solely reduced to immediately gratifying experiences (Ryff, 1989; Waterman, 1993). Happiness is not limited to physical, as it can also be derived from pursuing meaningful goals or valued outcomes (Diener et al., 1998).

2.5 Leadership and employee wellbeing

Previous studies on employee wellbeing have identified leadership as a critical factor influencing employee wellbeing (Rudolph et al., 2020). For instance, Kelloway and Barling (2010) suggested that leaders can enhance or hinder the wellbeing of their employees. Biron et al. (2014) pointed out that leader behaviours in organisations play a crucial role in understanding the effects of leaders on employee wellbeing. Behaviours are defined as actions or lack of actions demonstrated by individuals or groups in response to internal and external stimuli, excluding reactions that are more easily understood as developmental changes (Levitis et al., 2009). Leadership behaviour impact employee wellbeing through the resources that leaders can provide to employees (Inceoglu et al., 2018). More specifically, leaders are able to provide resources that affect the work environment through opportunities for rewards, autonomy, skill development and social support (Halbesleben et al., 2014).

Leaders also play an important role in framing employee experiences related to employee wellbeing (Inceoglu et al., 2018). Employees' perceptions of their interaction and relationships with their leader can act as a form of support and a resource, affecting their wellbeing (Halbesleben et al., 2014). For example, employees who feel they can openly communicate with their leaders on job-related problems without fear of negative impact are more likely to experience better wellbeing (Braun et al., 2013). Moreover, through social interaction with leaders, employees form beliefs about themselves, their work environment, and their ability to acquire and build resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014). In this study, the researcher will further explore how leadership impacts employee wellbeing. This exploration starts with an understanding of leadership and then discusses different leadership styles.

2.5.1 Understanding of leadership

Leadership has been extensively discussed and considered one of the most widely examined practical concepts in the field of management studies (House et al., 2004). There are various definitions of leadership given by researchers in the current literature. Burns (1978) defined leadership as the process of inducing followers to pursue a common purpose that represents the values and motivations of both leaders and followers. Different from Burn's (1978) definition of leadership, Bass (1990) defined leadership not only as a process of leader's influence on others but also as an interactive process that can be influenced by anyone involved.

Yukl (2006, p.8) provided another widely cited definition, describing leadership as 'a process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives'. This definition describes leadership as an interpersonal process in which a leader influences on followers (Dansereau et al., 2013). Similarly, Northouse (2010, p.3) defined leadership as 'a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal'.

These definitions collectively suggest leadership include a leader, a follower, and their relational interactions (Dansereau et al., 2013). Moreover, these definitions defined leadership as a process involving influence on others, occurring within the context of a group, and aiming to achieve shared goals between leaders and their followers (Yukl, 2006). Therefore, for the purpose of this research, leadership is defined as a process that influence others to understand and agree on

what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating followers to accomplish shared objectives (Yukl, 2006).

2.5.2 Styles of leadership

Northouse (2018) stated that leaders influence their subordinates through the use of different styles. Leadership styles are considered as the manner and approach leaders adopt to manage their followers (Basran et al., 2019). There are a variety of leadership styles in the existing literature (Meuser et al., 2016), such as transformational leadership style, transactional leadership style, ethical leadership style and authentic leadership style. However, concerns have been raised about the distinctiveness, overlaps and similarities among different leadership styles (Basran et al., 2019). As transformational, transactional and ethical leadership have been intensively studied (Anderson and Sun, 2017), and are more relevant to this research, the researcher chose to focus on these three leadership styles to explore their impact on employee wellbeing.

2.5.3 Transformational leadership and employee wellbeing

Transformational leadership is one of the most researched leadership styles in scientific literature (Diaz-Saenz, 2011) and has been considered to have a positive relationship with employee wellbeing (Munir et al., 2012). A widely cited definition of transformational leadership is leaders elevate followers, fostering a desire for achievement and self-development, and motivating followers to exceed their initial expectations (Bass and Riggio, 2006). Transformational leadership is comprised of four dimensions: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Bass and Avolio, 1994).

Idealised influence

Idealised influence describes transformational leaders behaving as role models for their followers (Bass et al., 2003). Followers perceive their leaders as having high moral standards and ethical behaviours, emphasising values that engender respect from their employees (Bass and Avolio, 1990). Idealised influence indicates that leaders influence employees' perceptions

of work by attending to employees' needs, attentively listening to their concerns and fostering a supportive climate for individual growth (Bass 1998, Avolio 1999; Wang and Walumbwa 2007). Through such behaviours, transformational leaders positively influence employees' perceptions of their work, thus transformational leadership has been linked with improvements in employees' psychological wellbeing (Weberg, 2010).

Inspirational motivation

Inspirational motivation occurs when leaders motivate employees by conveying an inspiring vision by communicating with symbols (Bass and Avolio, 1994). Leaders encourage employees to explore their potential to strive for higher expectations (Biron et al., 2014). In the workplace, transformational leaders provide more encouragement and inspiration to their employees (Kelloway and Barling, 2010). Moreover, inspirational motivation reflects the eudaimonic aspects of wellbeing, as leaders offer meaningful support to employees and motivated them to perceive their work as meaningful and purposeful. Therefore, employees working under transformational leaders perceive their work as meaningful, even in situations where tasks are routine and low in complexity (Biron et al., 2014). Thus, employees experience a positive association with both their achievements and wellbeing (*ibid*).

Intellectual stimulation

Intellectual stimulation emphasises leaders encouraging employees to adopt new perspectives and explore innovative solutions to their questions (Biron et al., 2014). By providing intellectual stimulation, leaders develop employees' interest and commitment to their work and inspiring them to approach work with new ideas and perspectives (Bass and Riggio, 2006). This not only fosters employee development but also enhances work performance by motivating employees to think critically and creatively (Biron et al., 2014).

Individual consideration

Leaders exhibit individual consideration by treating employees as individuals and providing tailored and meaningful support that aligns with their abilities and needs (Biron et al., 2014). This approach involves recognising each employee's contributions and celebrating their

achievements (Avolio and Bass, 2004). As a result, employees feel their views and behaviours are valued by their leaders. This positive experience of being valued and supported by leaders motivates employees, increasing their willingness to contribute to the organisation (Biron et al., 2014).

Under the guidance of transformational leaders, employees have reported enjoying more job security (Johnson et al., 2018) and lower levels of job-related stress (Podsakoff et al., 1996; Sosil and Godshalk, 2000). Job security is considered a core factor in the workplace that influences and assesses employee wellbeing (Robertson et al., 2015). High levels of job-related stress can lead to depression and anxiety, which have a negative impact on employee wellbeing and decrease employees' life satisfaction (Johnson et al., 2018). Moreover, transformational leaders have been shown to contribute to fostering healthier workplaces, particularly within healthcare (Munir et al., 2012). Employees working under transformational leaders often report a more positive attitude towards their jobs and express higher levels of job satisfaction (Hater and Bass, 1988; Purvanova et al., 2006). Leadership researchers tend to equate wellbeing with job satisfaction (Kuoppala et al., 2008). However, job satisfaction alone does not fully capture the comprehensive concept of employee wellbeing, as the influence of leadership behaviour extends beyond job satisfaction (Inceoglu et al., 2018).

Despite numerous studies indicate that transformational leadership have a positive impact on employee wellbeing, most of these studies have employed quantitative research methods. Moreover, the number of empirical studies of the effects of transformational leadership in SME health services remains limited. This research aims to fill this gap by employing a qualitative method to explore how transformational leadership impacts employee wellbeing in SME health services.

2.5.4 Transactional leadership and employee wellbeing

Unlike transformational leadership, Burns (1978) introduced transactional leadership and described it as motivating followers mainly through contingent rewards, which constitute one of the two conceptual elements of transactional leadership (Bass and Bass, 2008). Contingent rewards involve assigning tasks to subordinates with an agreed reward in exchange for accomplishing the assigned tasks (*ibid*). Studies have found a positive association between

contingency rewards and employee work performance, employee engagement, and organisational commitment (Jiang et al., 2019). However, contingent rewards may also have a negative impact on employee wellbeing (Clarke, 2013). Although contingent rewards involve a reciprocal exchange, leaders are required to establish clear rules and requirements for the exchange, identify employees' needs and capabilities (Bass, 1999), provide rewards that are meaningful and motivationally relevant (Jiang et al., 2019), and deliver rewards and recognition contingent on employees successfully fulfilling their roles (Bass, 1999). The second element of transactional leadership is management by exception, where disciplinary action can be either active or passive (*ibid*). In this approach, leaders make arrangements to monitor employees' performance and take corrective actions as necessary (*ibid*).

Transactional leadership motivates followers through an exchange based on self-interest, focusing more on short-term than long-term relationships between leaders and followers (Bass and Bass, 2008). As a result, this approach may lead employees to aggressively pursue their personal interests at work, potentially causing conflicts (Farahnak et al., 2019). Moreover, transactional leadership is often seen as a limited relationship without a lasting purpose, lacking a specific moral dimension (Yukl, 2010). Kanungo (2001) indicated that transactional leadership is associated with teleological ethics, where leaders behaved morally by seeking to bring the greatest satisfaction to the greatest number of people. Teleological ethics focuses on outcomes, in line with the influence process of transactional leadership, especially the norm of reciprocity (Groves and LaRocca, 2011).

Transactional leaders employ the norms of reciprocity, rely on power, rewards and punishments to influence their subordinates to demonstrate the requisite performance (*ibid*). However, transactional leadership often focuses on the leader's personal interests, such as material benefits and power (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999). The ethical evaluation of leaders and followers depends on the moral legitimacy of their actions and the means employed (*ibid*). As such, transactional leaders are largely concerned with managing outcomes that maximise the mutual interests of both parties involved (Groves and LaRocca, 2011). However, research on transactional leadership remains relatively limited compared to transformational leadership, especially regarding its impact on employee wellbeing. This study aims to address this research gap and further explore how transactional leadership affects employee wellbeing.

2.5.5 Ethical leadership and employee wellbeing

Ethical leadership has received a great deal of attention due to the growing recognition that businesses should promote positive outcomes for all stakeholders (Bank et al., 2021). Trevino et al. (2003) defined ethical leadership as the ability of a leader to influence the ethical behaviours of their subordinates by encouraging ethical conduct. This definition reflects that a good leader possesses integrity and ethical behaviours for sustainable development (Yang, 2014). Brown et al. (2005, p.120) defined ethical leadership as 'the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision making'. The term 'normatively appropriate conduct' indicates the moral element of ethical leaders, who possess ethical values in their actions (Piccolo et al., 2010). This definition assumes the acceptance of norms without contestation (Bank et al., 2021), linking leader behaviours with the adherence to or violation of appropriate norms and positive consequences (*ibid*).

Yukl et al. (2013, p.38) defined ethical leadership as leaders who 'engage in acts and behaviours that benefit others, and at the same time, refrain from behaviours that can cause harm to others'. This definition implies benevolence-oriented behaviours, suggesting that ethical leadership focuses on benefitting others and avoiding harm (Bank et al., 2021). Moreover, this definition suggests a focus on the wellbeing of others rather than on the leader's self-interest (*ibid*). These definitions of ethical leadership are rooted in beliefs and values (*ibid*), reflecting morally appropriate leader behaviours (Wang and Hackett, 2020). For example, Brown et al. (2005) defined ethical leadership as values-based, emphasising 'normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationship' (Brown et al., 2005, p.120). Yukl et al. (2013)'s definition characterised by values that focus on the interest of others over self-interest, such as ethical leaders engage in acts and behaviours that benefit others.

However, the definitions of ethical leadership have been criticised as being vague (Anderson and Sun, 2017), as the phrase 'demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct' lacks specificity in describing what constitutes normative ethical behaviours (Eisenbeiss, 2012). Also, these definitions have been criticised as overly Western-centric in perspective (Anderson and Sun, 2017). Eisenbeiss (2012) stated that when taking both a Western and an Eastern moral

philosophical approach, ethical leadership involves treating others with respect, making fair decisions, being responsible and taking a long-term view of issues. Such ethical leaders are expected to have strong moral identities (Anderson and Sun, 2017). Besides, the existing definitions of ethical leadership have not addressed the impact of ethical leadership on outcomes such as followers behaviours and organisational performance (Bank et al., 2021). This highlights the need to conceptualise ethical leadership that focuses on its effect on various outcomes (*ibid*).

Ethical leadership exhibits ethical styles, communicates the implications of ethics, rewards ethical behaviours, and punishes unethical activities (Brown et al., 2005). In addition, Brown and Trevino (2009) suggested that ethical leadership includes the moral manager aspect and the moral person aspect. The moral manager aspect refers to leaders' efforts to influence their followers' ethical behaviours, while the moral person aspect is defined as leaders' traits such as honesty (*ibid*). Ethical leadership has been shown to positively impact employee wellbeing (Sarwar et al., 2020), and influences employee engagement in their work, as employees feel obligated to reciprocate favourable treatment by improving their work performance (Yang, 2014). The moral atmosphere in the workplace allow employees to perceive the support of their leaders (*ibid*). Leaders' support for ethical behaviours has been found to increase job satisfaction, which is an important indicator of employee wellbeing. According to Mayer et al. (2012), ethical leadership also influences relationships in the workplace. Ethical leaders are described as caring and exhibited active responsiveness (Brown et al., 2005). As a result, in an ethical leadership environment, two-way communication encourages a pleasant work atmosphere and contribute to higher employee wellbeing.

Despite the recognised value of ethical leadership, several critical issues remain unaddressed, with both theoretical and practical implications (Banks et al., 2021). First, there has been limited investigation into ethical leadership behaviours (*ibid*), and most studies on ethical leadership have used survey-based methods (Anderson and Sun, 2017). This indicates a need for alternative approaches to study ethical leadership and its associated behaviours (*ibid*). Second, there is a lack of empirical evidence on the causes and workplace consequences of ethical leadership and ethical leadership behaviours (*ibid*). Last, there is insufficient evidence exists on the role of ethical leadership in relation to employee wellbeing (Sarwar et al., 2020). Such theoretical gaps have impeded the progress of ethical leadership research and reduced the effectiveness of leadership training and development initiatives (*ibid*). Therefore, this study aims to address

these research gaps and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this field of ethical leadership and its impact on employee wellbeing.

In summary, leadership plays a critical role in employee wellbeing. However, questionnaires remain a popular approach in studying leadership (Bank et al., 2021), although the use of questionnaires to measure leadership does not provide a comprehensive assessment of leadership (*ibid*). Moreover, Inceoglu et al. (2018) stated the need for further research to explore leadership and its influence on employee wellbeing, especially in relation to eudaimonic wellbeing, as it has been underrepresented compared to hedonic employee wellbeing. Furthermore, more research is needed to examine the negative aspects of employee wellbeing, such as stress (Harms et al., 2017) and burnout (Montano et al., 2017).

2.6 Culture, leadership and employee wellbeing

Many studies highlighted culture impact on employee wellbeing, the impact of leadership on employee wellbeing, and the relationship between leadership and culture. Karapinar et al. (2020) explored employee wellbeing in Turkey and indicated that differences between Eastern and Western cultures result in different beliefs about wellbeing. For example, Western cultures focus more on autonomy and emotions, Eastern cultures emphasise harmony and social values in wellbeing (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Karapinar et al., 2020). Leadership plays a critical role in impacting EW (Rudolph et al., 2020) through different leadership styles (Northouse, 2018). For example, Arnold (2017) reviewed empirical papers publishes between January 1980 and December 2015 and found transformational leadership positively links to employee wellbeing. Haque (2021) studied the role of responsible leadership in health care and suggested that ethical leadership have shown significant positive relationships with employee wellbeing.

Moreover, culture influences on leadership. This shows in leadership behaviours affect employees' wellbeing in different ways in different cultural contexts (Inceoglu et al., 2018). For example, in China, Confucian values influence leader actions, especially those linked to notions of collectivism and harmony, which underpin relations amongst employees and between employees and leaders (Zhao and Roper, 2011). Confucian values require leaders to be able to inspire and care for their employees, such as taking responsibility for helping them as in a family

(Zhao and Roper, 2011). Leaders can also influence directly to individuals by aligning their leadership approach with the values of their employees (Brown and Trevino, 2009).

Having known culture and leadership impact on employee wellbeing, culture impact on leadership, however, there were limited research exploring the relationships between culture, leadership and employee wellbeing. Muhonen et al. (2013) conducted a study examining the effects of leadership behaviour on employee wellbeing from a cross-cultural perspective. However, these research mainly used questionnaires, and although their result suggested that culture played a mediating role in the relationship between leadership behaviours and employee wellbeing, they did not provide a deeper exploration. Therefore, this research aims to conduct a more comprehensive exploration of the impact of culture and leadership on employee wellbeing. As discussed in section 2.4.2, most cultural theories including Hofstede's and Trompenaars's were originally developed in Western contexts and employed quantitative research methods. While some Chinese researchers have explored these cultural dimensions in Chinese companies, there remains limited research that conduct in both China and the UK, especially in the context of SME health services. This study aims to fill this research gap.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework refers to the conceptual status of the elements being studied and their relationship (Punch, 2013). A well-defined conceptual framework helps clarify the research questions (*ibid*). Throughout the research, the conceptual framework has been refined and developed. The conceptual framework shows that in the context of SME health services in China and the UK, culture impacts on leadership, and both culture and leadership have an impact on employee wellbeing. The conceptual framework has developed in more detail and specifically along with the literature review. For instance, instead of simply mentioning national culture, the current version of the conceptual framework includes the three main theories of culture dimensions. Also, the relationships between the key concepts are presented with greater clarity.
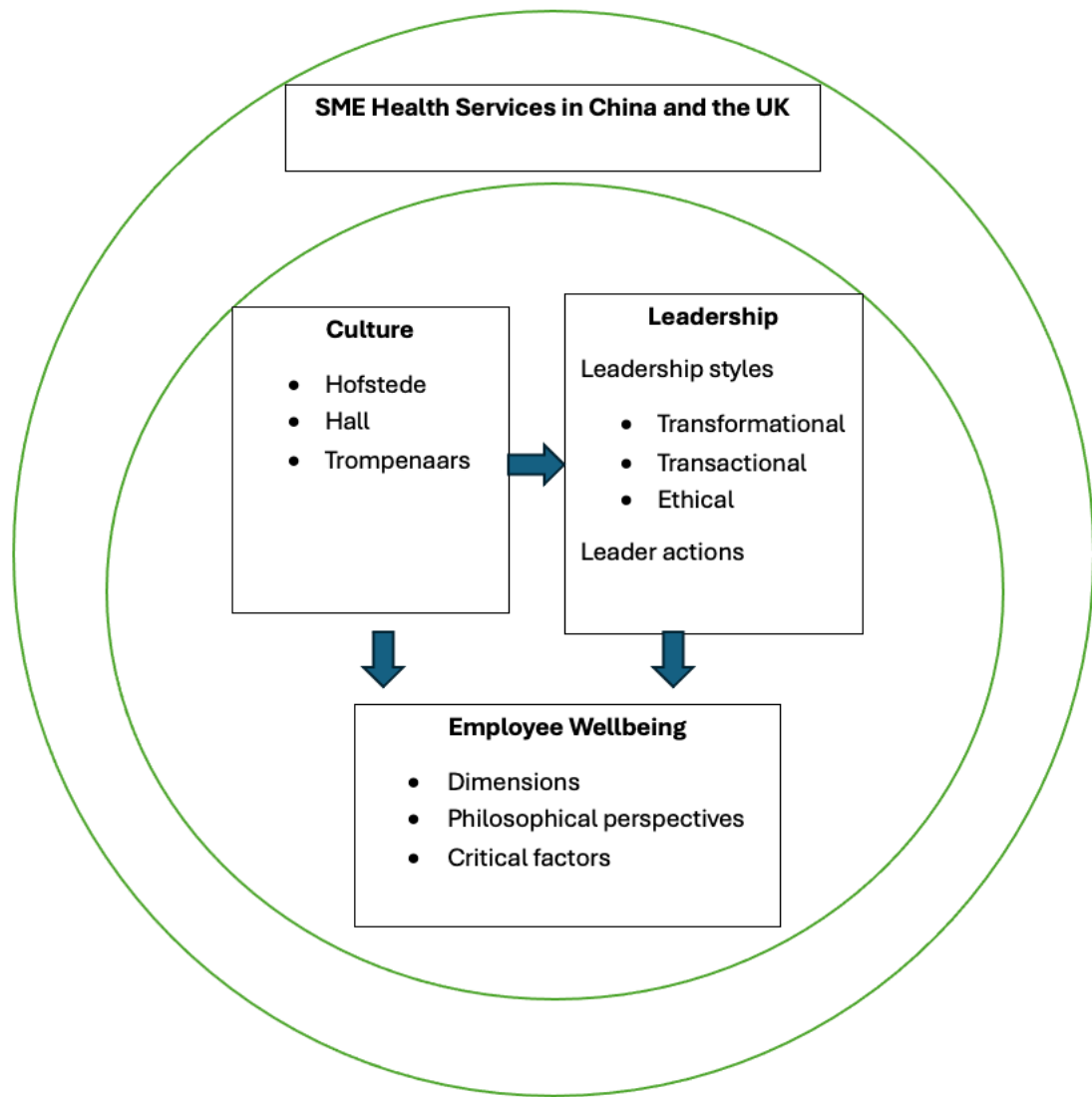
Figure 2-1 Conceptual Framework

2.8 Summary

This chapter reviews the literature on the key concepts in this research: employee wellbeing, culture, leadership, and the relations among them. The chapter begins by exploring the understanding of employee wellbeing, including different definitions and perspectives of wellbeing, critical factors influencing employee wellbeing, and its relevance of employee wellbeing in the workplace context. Next, the chapter explores definitions and national dimensions of culture, exploring the influence of culture on values, perceptions, and behaviours. The literature on cultural dimensions is reviewed to understand the differences between Chinese and British cultures, particularly their impacts on employee wellbeing in China and the UK. The

chapter then explores leadership, including definitions of leadership, different leadership styles, and their impacts on employee wellbeing. The exploration of leadership styles shows different approaches to leadership influence the wellbeing of employees. Finally, the chapter shows the connections among employee wellbeing, culture and leadership, highlighting the relationships among these three key concepts. It introduces the conceptual framework of the research, providing a comprehensive overview of how employee wellbeing, culture, and leadership influence each other within the scope of the study. The chapter concludes with the conceptual framework.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology and Method

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an overview of the background literature relevant to this research. In this chapter, the focus is the research methodology and methods chosen for the study. This includes a rationale for selecting the appropriate research methodology and an explanation of how they align with the research objectives and allow for a deeper exploration and respond to the research questions. The chosen research methodology will be discussed in detail about the advantages and disadvantages in the context of this study. The researcher will justify and select qualitative methods to have an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives and allow for flexibility in material collection. Moreover, this chapter will also evaluate both the advantages and limitations of the chosen research methods. Finally, this chapter presents the detailed research design, outlines the material collection process, describes the material analysis methods, and discusses the limitations of the fieldwork.

3.2 Research methodology and choice for this research

3.2.1 Research philosophy

The philosophical position of a researcher can affect the quality of management and business research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important for researchers to understand the research philosophy and appropriately select one that aligns with the objectives of their research (*ibid*). This is important for several reasons. First, gaining an understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of research helps researchers to clearly define their reflexive role in research methods (Saunders et al., 2019). Second, understanding the philosophical foundations of the research is essential for formulating research designs. This involves considering the type of evidence required and the methods for its collection and interpretation. Third, knowledge of methodologies enables researchers to choose an appropriate approach for the research and recognise any potential limitations associated with the chosen approaches (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

Ontology and epistemology are considered as two main philosophical positions in research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Ontology refers to a philosophical assumption regarding the nature of existence and the components that constitute reality (*ibid*). While ontology embodies understanding what it is, epistemology seeks to understand what it means to know (*ibid*). Epistemology provides a philosophical background for deciding what kinds of knowledge are legitimate and adequate. It also addresses the question of what constitutes acceptable knowledge in the field of study (Saunders et al., 2019). According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2021), epistemology refers to a general set of assumptions concerning ways of inquiring into the nature of the world. Having an epistemological perspective can help formulate considerations related to research design, such as the type of evidence gathered and how the evidence will be interpreted. This research aims to explore the impact of culture and leadership on employee wellbeing by understanding the preferred approaches that employees perceive at work and how to make sense of employees' perceptions. Therefore, the researcher chooses epistemology rather than ontology for this research.

3.2.2 Research paradigm

There are two main research paradigms, namely positivism and interpretivism (Gray, 2021). Positivism is a philosophy grounded in scientific principles, explaining the basis of facts and observations collected by researchers (*ibid*). The basic beliefs of positivism are the world exists externally and objectively, and science remains detached from values. Thus, positivists emphasise facts, formulate and validate hypotheses (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Positivist researchers tend to employ quantitative methods to collect a large amount of data concerning an observable reality to establish general principles like those produced by scientists (Saunders et al., 2019).

Interpretivism developed a critique of positivism from a subjectivist perspective (Saunders et al., 2019). Interpretivism emphasises that individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds construct different meanings and experience different social realities in different situations (Gray, 2021). Interpretivists prioritise the exploration of meanings and tend to use qualitative methods such as in-depth research with small sample sizes (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Interpretivists also highlight the importance of language and culture in shaping interpretations

and experiences in organisational and social contexts, focusing on complexity richness, multiple interpretations, and meaning making (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). This research aims to gain a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions of employee wellbeing, rather than solely analyse statistical data reflecting their views on employee wellbeing. Moreover, the researcher aims to better understand the experiences of participants from both China and the UK, aiming to explore the meaning and experience they have developed due to their different cultural backgrounds. Given the research objectives, the researcher chose interpretivism.

The purpose of interpretivist research is to develop novel and comprehensive understandings and interpretations of social environments and situations (Saunders et al., 2019). For business and management researchers, it suggests examining organisations from the perspectives of various groups of people (Gray, 2021). For example, the perspectives and experiences of leaders, managers, and shop assistants in a large company differ, implying that they could be seen as experiencing different workplace realities (*ibid*). Furthermore, differences that make organisations complex are not confined to different organisational roles (*ibid*). Male or female employees, along with those from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds, may experience workplaces, services, and events differently. Even seemingly identical aspects can be interpreted differently based on historical or geographical contexts (Saunders et al., 2019). The choice of interpretivism impacts the research design. This suggested research design should select participants from various roles, as they are likely to provide different perspectives on employee wellbeing. Also, selecting participants including both genders and from different cultures could potentially enhance the quality of the research.

Considering the world as subjective, interpretivists acknowledge that their interpretation of research materials, along with their values and beliefs, play an important role in the research process (Gray, 2021). Crucial to the interpretivist philosophy is the requirement for researchers to adopt an empathetic stance (Saunders et al., 2019). This requires researchers to immerse themselves in the social realm of the research participants and to understand that realm from the participants' point of view. However, the researcher's previous experience working in TCM clinics enables a more insightful comprehension of the participants' work environments, which could enhance the process of interpretation.

In summary, the choice of the research methodology not only establishes the philosophical underpinnings of the research, but also guides the research design. The selection of epistemology and interpretivism aligns with the research objectives and is consistent with the questions the researcher aims to answer. The subsequent section will provide a more detailed explanation of the research design.

3.3 Research design

Research design is an overarching plan that includes essential elements such as the scope of study, data sources, data collection procedures and methods, and ways to analyse empirical materials (Gray, 2021). Based on research questions, research design provides researchers with a comprehensive understanding of the scope of the research, thereby aiding in the selection of pertinent sources and appropriate types (Saunders et al., 2019). Qualitative and quantitative are two commonly employed research designs (Gray, 2021). The choice of quantitative or qualitative should be based on the nature of the research questions and objectives, consistent with the research philosophy (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.3.1 Quantitative research and qualitative research

Quantitative research is commonly associated with positivism as a research philosophy (Saunders et al., 2019). The focus of quantitative research is to use numerical data to test hypotheses and theories, generalisable findings, predicting one variable from others (Cohen et al., 2018). Quantitative research is primarily associated with research methods such as surveys (*ibid*) to allow the collection of a substantial and representative sample from a sizable population through a systematic and standardised approach (Park and Park, 2016). The advantage of quantitative research lies in its objective, and quantitative research methods are efficient in generating a large amount of data in a short time for a reasonable cost. However, the data might lack contextual considerations (Gray, 2021) or in-depth insights into the subject under investigation (Kelley et al., 2003), might also involve limited with participants (Gray, 2021). These drawbacks restrict the opportunity to probe or reinterview participants (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). Thus, limit the opportunity to gain a better understanding of participants' perspectives regarding employee wellbeing, which contrasts with the research objectives and research philosophy.

In comparison, qualitative research is commonly associated with an interpretive philosophy (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). The focus of qualitative research is to understand and interpret (Saunders et al., 2019). It is interpretive because researchers need to make sense of the meanings conveyed concerning the phenomenon being studied (Gray, 2021). In qualitative research, meanings are derived from words rather than numerical data. Since words can encompass multiple meanings as well as ambiguous meanings, it is often necessary to explore and clarify these meanings with participants (*ibid*). Qualitative research is characterised by advantages such as the ability to understand the meaning that people construct, especially when attempting to extract feelings, emotions, motivations, perceptions, or self-described behaviours (Cooper and Schindler, 2014), having an in-depth understanding of phenomena, considering the cases of individuals, and considering contexts (Johnson and Christensen, 2014). However, qualitative research tend to lack generalisability, as the research findings rely primarily on the researcher's interpretation (*ibid*).

The choice of the research design depends on the research objectives and research philosophy of the study. This research aims to explore the impact of culture and leadership on employee wellbeing in China and the UK, so it is crucial to understand how employees perceive and experience at work. The philosophical underpinning of this research is interpretivism, as it seeks culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the world (Gray, 2021). The interpretivist approach helps the researcher to understand participants' perspectives on employee wellbeing, and how it has been influenced by culture and leadership. In addition, the qualitative research design focuses on how people make sense of their world and reflect on their experiences rather than testing or measuring the impact of culture and leadership on employee wellbeing. Therefore, the qualitative research design is more appropriate than the quantitative for this research.

3.3.2 Qualitative research methods

There are a few qualitative research methods, such as observations and interviews. Observation involves collecting data by observing participant behaviour in a natural setting (Saunders et al., 2019) and is particularly useful to gain insights into a certain setting and actual behaviour instead of reported behaviours or opinions (Busetto et al., 2020). Interview is one of the main material

collection methods in qualitative research (Punch, 2013). It proved to be an effective way of accessing people's perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality (Punch, 2013). Interviews are especially advantageous in situations where participants are likely to willingly share insights about their work and feelings. Moreover, the immediacy of clarifying questions is a feasible aspect of interviews (Gray, 2021).

This research seeks to explore the impact of culture and leadership on employee wellbeing, and the researcher needs to collect relevant details from participants to understand their feelings and experiences, and the meaning they make of those experiences. Therefore, in alignment with these goals, the chosen method for material collection in this research is interviews. Semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews are two main types of non-standardised interviews used in qualitative research to explore and understand in-depth (Saunders et al., 2019). They differ primarily in terms of the degree of structure in the interview, and the depth of exploration pursued (Punch, 2013). Each type of interview has different advantages and limitations, with the selection align with the research objectives and research questions (Saunders et al., 2019). Unstructured interviews are used to understand the complex behaviour of people without imposing predefined categories that could limit the field of inquiry (*ibid*). It commonly commence with general interview questions to initiate the conversation (*ibid*), as the interview unfolds, specific questions will emerge, and the wording of those questions will depend on the direction of the interview took (*ibid*).

Semi-structured interviews often involve a series of open-ended questions and a brief list of prompts (Flick, 2018). These open questions encourage participants to provide extensive and developmental answers, which can be used to reflect attitudes or obtain factual information (Saunders et al., 2019). The sequence of questions may vary depending on the direction of the interview, and additional questions may be introduced as new issues arise in the interview (*ibid*). The use of semi-structured interviews also allows researchers to probe for more detailed responses where participants were asked to clarify what they had said (Gray, 2021). These probing questions may also allow the interview to divert in a different direction from what researchers originally planned, but still help to achieve the research objectives (Gray, 2021). Semi-structured interviews provide the flexibility for questions, procedures, and focus to evolve or emerge naturally during a research process that is both naturalistic and interactive (Gray, 2021).

Some researchers have used semi-structured interviews in similar studies in this field, but in different contexts. For example, Ahmadi et al. (2023) explored managers' and employees' experiences of how managers' wellbeing impacts their leadership behaviours in Swedish small businesses. They chose semi-structured interviews because this method allowed respondents to express their thoughts, experiences and perceptions in a more naturalistic conversation, and also enabled the researchers to pose follow-up questions. In their study, they highlighted the need for a deeper understanding of how managers' wellbeing influences their practiced leadership behaviours and employee wellbeing across different contexts. Cvenkel (2018) conducted research to explore the relationship between employee wellbeing, line management leadership and corporate social responsibility at a local government organisation in England. She selected semi-structured interviews because the research aimed to explore employees' views and experiences regarding line management leadership and its effects on employee wellbeing at work. Given that this research also aims to explore experiences and perceptions, the choice of this exploratory research is semi-structured interviews.

Online video interviewing

Online video interviews have advantages such as time and cost savings due to the elimination of the need for travel to interview sites. This proved particularly advantageous when involving participants dispersed geographically (Saunders et al., 2019). Moreover, online video interviewing exhibits more flexibility compared to face-to-face interviewing, as they can easily accommodate last-minute scheduling adjustments (*ibid*). However, online video interviews also have limitations. For example, technical issues may arise from the use of software applications, which may disrupt the interview process. Besides, not every participant has a reliable WIFI connection or familiarity with the required software, which can hinder their ability to participate effectively online video interviews (*ibid*). The quality of the internet connection is also played an important role, as a poor connection can interrupt the flow of the interview, leading to poor quality recordings of the interview that result in difficulty in transcription (*ibid*).

3.3.3 Method for this research

The worldwide impact of the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted on researchers, exacerbating the normal and expected difficulties of research due to dramatic changes in both research methods and daily life (Lawrence, 2020). The original research design for this research relied heavily on face-to-face interviews in China and the UK. However, with the implementation of global travel restrictions, adherence to social distancing guidelines, and the need to follow public health guidance made face to face interviews became difficult. Therefore, the researcher changed face to face interviews to online interviews, given their increased flexibility, especially during the pandemic. Moreover, the researcher chose online video interviews over online audio interviews because they allow the researcher to capture non-verbal clues such as voice tone and facial expressions, enriching the material collection process (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

3.4 Case studies

Yin (2018) proposed a twofold definition of case study as a research method, focusing on its scope and features. The scope suggests that a case study as an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-world context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined (*ibid*). The feature of a case study refers to its capacity to cope with a technically distinctive situation, where more variables are of interest than data points. As a result, a case study benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide its design, data collection, and analysis (*ibid*). The twofold definition of case study suggests that employing a case study strategy allows researchers to achieve both practical and theoretical objectives (Ebneyamini et al., 2018).

The purpose of conducting a case study is twofold. First, it explores the under researched areas and contribute to theory development. Dul and Hak (2008) noted that many researchers consider case study research as a useful research strategy. Moreover, case studies are suitable when dealing with a broad and complex research topic where limited theory is available, and where the context play an important role. In such situations, case studies enable researchers to closely examine the data within a specific context.

3.4.1 Types of case study

Stake (2006) proposed three types of case study: intrinsic case study, instrumental case study, and collective case study. To be more specific, an intrinsic case study is when a researcher aims to understand a given case driven by an intrinsic interest in that particular case (*ibid*). In contrast, an instrumental case study seeks insights into an issue rather than understanding a particular case, for the purpose of seeking generalisations (*ibid*). A collective case study involves the study of more than one instrumental case study, aiming to seek coordination between the individual studies (*ibid*). Considering this research aims to gain insights into employee wellbeing in SME health services in China and the UK through four cases, the researcher has chosen the collective case study approach.

3.4.2 Research validity and reliability issues

The issue of generalisation is often raised as a critique of case study research. However, Stake (2006) argued that the selection of case study is intended to optimise generalisation. He emphasised that the primary focus of case study is particularisation rather than generalisation (*ibid*). The emphasis is thoroughly examines a specific case, understand its essence and actions, and gain deep insights, instead of primarily focusing on its distinctions from other cases. Yin (2018) claimed that the challenge of generalisation can be overcome, suggesting that theories can be examined through multiple case studies. He highlighted that generalisation should be based on the insights drawn from multiple cases, rather than from individual cases (Yin, 2018). Validity is another issue often encountered in qualitative studies stems from many qualitative researchers working alone in the field (Ebneyamini et al., 2018). Yin (2014) suggested that researchers should strive to maximise both internal and external validity, along with the reliability of the design quality. A detailed discussion on how this research addresses validity and reliability will be explained in section 3.6.5.

3.4.3 Case study in this research

Similar to other qualitative research approaches, the case study approach aims to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the subject in its natural setting, recognising its complexity and

context (Punch, 2013). It adopts a holistic focus, aiming to preserve and understand the wholeness and unity of the case (*ibid*). According to Yin (2014), the selection of a research strategy is based on three main factors: the research question, the extent of control the researcher possessed over actual behavioural events, the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events. Meredith (1998) suggested case studies allow for exploring why, how, and what questions, enabling researchers to understand the phenomenon in their natural setting. Besides, case study approach applies to exploratory investigations where variables and phenomena are not yet fully understood.

In this study, the researcher aims to understand employee wellbeing and how culture and leadership influence employee wellbeing, as well as the actions leaders take to improve employee wellbeing. Addressing these research questions require in-depth explorations of employee wellbeing in workplace settings. While cultural and leadership theories have been extensively studied, the use of case studies to explore the impact of culture and leadership on employee wellbeing in the contexts of China and the UK remains an under-researched area.

This research chose interpretivism as its methodology, which aligns with the objectives of the case study. The chosen method for this research is semi-structured interviews, which are an essential source of evidence in case studies, allowing for the probing of opinions (Yin, 2014). Considering these reasons, case study is considered as the most appropriate research strategy. The researcher employed multiple cases to allow the research more compelling, as it facilitates the replication of results and contributes to a more robust development of theories (Yin, 2014).

3.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are important in research studies, especially in qualitative studies, due to the depth nature of the study process (Arifin, 2018). The researcher considered ethical issues throughout the research to protect participants' information and minimise potential risks. The following section explains the ethical considerations of this research.

The researcher designed the consent form and participant information sheet according to the University's regulations. The consent form provides potential participants with information

about the purpose of the research and their voluntary participation, ensuring they understood that interviews would be video recorded. The participation information sheet provides a more detailed explanation of the research, and detailed how the researcher would protect and store the data safely. After multiple rounds of revisions and improvements, the researcher obtained ethical approval from the University. After that, the researcher started to recruit participants by contacting potential participants through messages and phone calls. The researcher approached each potential participant individually and explained the research objectives and the material collection process. Moreover, potential participants were given opportunity to ask questions and raise any concerns during this interaction.

Potential participants were provided with participant information sheet and consent form that offered further detailed explanation of the study. They were given sufficient time to read the materials and make an informed decision about their participation in the research. Those who agreed to participate were required to sign these forms and return them to the researcher. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the researcher implemented several measures throughout the research. Each interview was conducted individually to maintain privacy. Access to the collected material was restricted to the researcher exclusively. The researcher transcribed the interview material in a private room and used earphones, and the identities of the participants were carefully removed during transcription. Documents containing participant information were stored in an encrypted file, with access limited solely to the researcher.

3.6 Conducting Fieldwork

Having explained the research design, the subsequent paragraphs will explain the practical implementation of the fieldwork. This section involves different aspects, including the preparations made for fieldwork, the formulation of interview questions, the selection of suitable cases and participants, the process of material collection, and a reflective exploration of the insights gained from the fieldwork process.

3.6.1 Preparation of fieldwork

Before conducting the fieldwork, the researcher carefully considered who to interview and how many interviews to conduct (Punch, 2013). These questions were related to the sampling strategy for the research, which was depended on the research questions and objectives (Punch, 2013). A sampling strategy guides the selection of research participants and the methods utilised for material collection (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). In qualitative research, the sampling strategy aims to identify suitable instances of the phenomenon under research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Moreover, the sampling strategy is important as it requires not only the individuals to be interviewed, but also influences the selection of settings and procedures. In case study research, qualitative sampling involves identifying cases where the researcher indicates the aspect to be studied (Punch, 2013). Sampling is also related to the validity of the research design, stressing that the chosen sample need to align with other components of the study (*ibid*). Several factors are considered when designing the sampling strategy. For example, Miles et al. (2014) emphasised that the sampling needs to be relevant to the conceptual framework and research questions. Moreover, the sampling plan aim to enhance the potential generalisability of the research findings.

The researcher assessed the feasibility of the sampling plan by considering time constrains, accessibility, and ethical considerations for participants, as these factors play an important role in the quality of the data (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). The researcher needed to consider when, for how long, and where to conduct interviews. The researcher also needed to consider how to reach potential participants, as this impact the relationship between the researcher and participants, which is associated with the quality, reliability, and validity of the interview (Punch, 2013). Moreover, the researcher needed to consider how the interview material would be recorded prior to the fieldwork. For example, the possibilities of video recording with simultaneous note taking. In addition, conducting fieldwork requires the researcher to have the ability to listen actively and refrain from interjecting her own opinions or feelings regarding the situation (Charmaz, 2014). Lastly, the researcher needed to have the ability to distinguish what participants were willing to share and what they were not (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Non-verbal information could be crucial in providing clues, such as the avoidance of eye contact or changes in facial expression (*ibid*).

3.6.2 Formulate interview questions

Interview questions play a key role in the interview, as they directly influence data collection and analysis (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). It took several iterations of revisions and improvements to develop the interview questions. The researcher started by incorporating the concepts from the research objectives, research questions, and literature review. However, the initial interview questions involved terminology and broad concepts such as employee wellbeing, culture, and leadership. Despite employee wellbeing being the key concept of the research, participants may not have used this term frequently in their daily lives, potentially leading to confusion and subsequently affecting the accuracy of their responses and the subsequent material analysis. Besides, both leadership and culture are expansive concepts, often defined differently depending on the contexts. This variability may confuse participants and affect the accuracy of their responses and the subsequent analysis of collected materials. In response to this concern, the researcher's supervisors suggested the researcher to revisit the literature to identify more specific concepts and aspects within these broad concepts. This would help make the interview questions more focused and easier for participants to understand. For example, instead of asking participants about their perceptions of physical wellbeing at work, the researcher could have framed the question to focus on their views regarding specific aspects of their workplace environment, such as indoor temperatures.

3.6.3 Criteria of the case selection

Stake (2006) noted that the importance of selecting representative cases, highlighted that the primary objective of case selection criteria is to maximise the researcher's potential for learning, which is crucial for the outcome of the research (*ibid*). Equally important are considerations of balance and variety (*ibid*). In the context of researching employee wellbeing in TCM cases in China and the UK, the researcher selected four cases from Beijing and London. To minimise the effects on sample differences, the researcher selected two cases in China and two cases in the UK. Beijing and London are the respective capital cities of China and the UK. These four cases were comparable in size, each involving less than 100 employees who shared similar job duties. More specifically, all four selected cases provided Acupuncture, Chinese herbal medicine, Tui Na massage and Cupping, which are often included in the TCM service (Teng et al., 2015). In all four cases, employees included TCM doctors, receptionists, and massage therapists.

The researcher selected the four cases through her personal connections in the industry. She had previously worked at TCM clinics in London and had maintained contact with these clinics. With the help of her contacts from the London clinics, the researcher identified two TCM clinics in Beijing. Some of these contacts had initially worked in London but had later moved back to China to work. The following section will provide a detailed description of the four TCM cases and further explain the reasons for choosing those four cases.

CH 1 was a clinic established by three partners with non-TCM backgrounds. However, they hired experienced employees. One Chinese doctor, who had experience working in London, was worked at this clinic. It was this doctor who introduced the researcher to the opportunity to conduct fieldwork at the clinic. The chosen employees included a manager, two doctors, a receptionist, and a doctor assistant, forming their core daily team. The manager worked over four years at CH 1, while the remaining selected employees worked more than one year at CH1. Another reason for choosing this case was its characteristic as a TCM service run by non-TCM background leaders. This added variety to the sample and provided a different perspective on leadership.
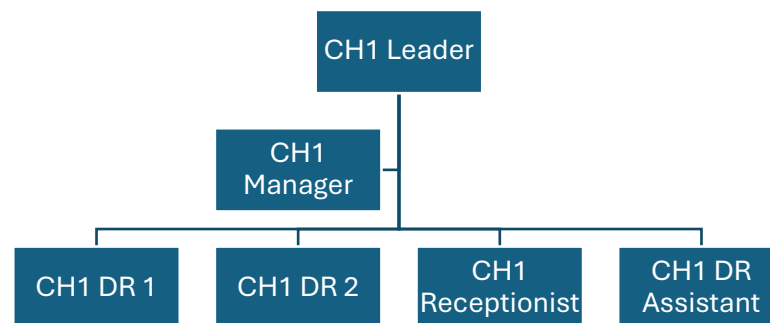
Figure 3-1 Structure of CH 1

CH 2 operated as a family business, owned by a brother and sister partnership. The sister was a Chinese doctor who had previously worked in TCM clinics in London. She held the position of the clinic's leader and was responsible for decisions related to medical services provided at the clinic, as well as conducting training. On the other hand, the brother worked as the manager of the clinic. The business had two branches, primarily managed by the sister, who took the most profit from it. The other one was mainly run by the brother, who thus took the highest profits

from it. Selected employees included a manager, two doctors, a receptionist, and a therapist. They all worked at CH 2 for more than one year. Particularly, CH 2 therapist and the CH 2 DR 2 have worked for over seven years, and CH 2 receptionist worked there for more than four years. The researcher chose this case as it is a family business, and there are differences between the two owners and thus impact on employees differently.

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                        ┌─────────────┐
                        │ CH2 Leader  │
                        └─────────────┘
                   ┌──────────┐
                   │   CH2    │
                   │ Manager  │
                   └──────────┘
   ┌──────────┐  ┌──────────┐  ┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────┐
   │ CH2 DR 1 │  │ CH2 DR 2 │  │     CH2      │  │     CH2      │
   │          │  │          │  │ Receptionist │  │  Therapist   │
   └──────────┘  └──────────┘  └──────────────┘  └──────────────┘
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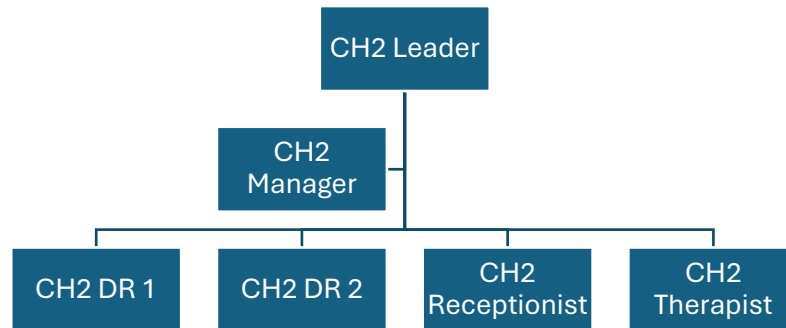
Figure 3-2 Structure of CH 2

UK 1 operated as a family business run by a British couple. The wife was a Chinese doctor and was in charge of recruitment and medical-related matters, while the husband managed the business aspects. The researcher selected this case because of the company used to operate more than fifty branches in the UK, it currently maintains no more than ten branches. Despite such reduction, it remains one of the largest TCM service providers in the UK. The selected employees include a manager, a doctor, a customer service administrator, a receptionist, and an HR assistant. The manager's duties included reaching sales targets of the clinics and help clinics with their sales performance. UK 1 DR is the only Chinese participant, and the rest are British. The researcher intends to explore employee wellbeing by using this company as its circumstances could potentially reflect the typical challenges faced by other TCM services in the UK. All selected employees had worked at UK 1 for more than one year.
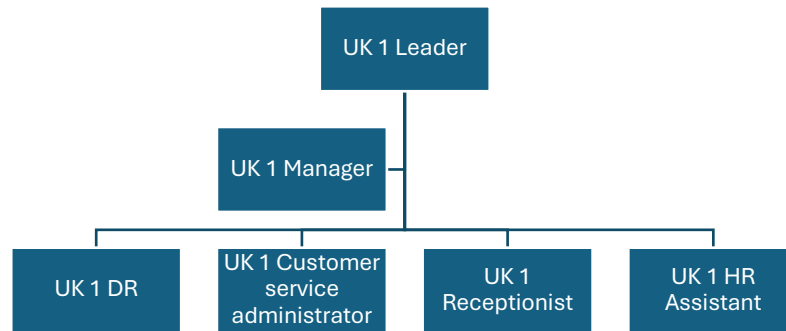
Figure 3-3 Structure of UK 1

UK 2 was owned and operated by an English leader without a background in TCM. The researcher selected this case was driven by the aim of exploring how the leader managed employees' wellbeing and how employees perceived their wellbeing in a TCM service led by a leader with no TCM background and who was not Chinese. With only two Chinese doctors as Chinese employees at UK 2, the researcher was also interested in exploring their experiences at work and understanding how these experiences influenced their wellbeing. The employees chosen for this study included two doctors, a receptionist and two therapists, and they all worked at UK 2 for more than two years, thus providing a basis for gaining insights into their experience.

Figure 3-4 Structure of UK 2

The four selected SME cases were of comparable size, each case including less than 100 employees and engaged in similar business activities, provided similar services while exhibiting varied ownership structures, such as business partnerships and family ownership. The diversity in ownership types aimed to contribute to the overall richness of the study. Employees selected

in clinics were a diverse range of professionals, including TCM doctors, massage therapists, managers, and administrative support staff. This mix allowed the researcher to gain insights from different perspectives, thereby strengthening understanding of cultural and leadership impacts. The main differences among the four selected cases were their geographical locations and cultural contexts, with two cases in China and two in the UK. Notably, some employees in China possessed prior work experience in the UK, while some employees in the UK had previously worked in China. These circumstances allowed the researcher to have a better understanding of employee perceptions of wellbeing in different cultural contexts so that the researcher could compare the similarities and differences in material analysis between China and the UK.

3.6.4 Selection of the participants

There were a total of 24 interviews with 24 participants, including four pilot interviews and twenty interviews conducted at TCM clinics in both China and the UK. To ensure a comprehensive perspective from both leaders and employees, six participants, including both leaders and employees, were interviewed from each clinic.

Having appropriate participants play a significant part in the qualitative research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Participants provided material that allowed researchers to answer the research questions and meet research objectives (Gray, 2021). Therefore, the researcher selected each participant carefully. The selection process for the participants was based on the sampling strategy, as well as taking into consideration their availability and variety (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021. The researcher aimed to select participants from different job positions, different genders, and with different work experiences, in order to attain a relatively comprehensive understanding of employee wellbeing. The following diagram will present an overview of the demographic details of the 24 participants.

Beijing, China (CH)		London, the UK (UK)	
12 Participants		12 Participants	
CH 1	CH 2	UK 1	UK 2
6 Participants	6 Participants	6 Participants	6 Participants

CH 1 Leader	CH 2 Leader	UK 1 Leader	UK 2 Leader
Male	Female	Female	Male
Chinese	Chinese	British	British
CH 1 Manager	CH 2 Manager	UK 1 Manager	UK 2 DR 1
Female	Male	Male	Male
Chinese	Chinese	British	Chinese
CH 1 DR 1	CH 2 DR 1	UK 1 DR	UK 2 DR 2
Male	Male	Male	Male
Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese
CH 1 DR 2	CH 2 DR 2	UK 1 HR Assistant	UK 2 Receptionist
Male	Female	Male	Female
Chinese	Chinese	British	British
CH 1 Receptionist	CH 2 Receptionist	UK 1 Receptionist	UK 2 Therapist 1
Female	Female	Female	Female
Chinese	Chinese	British	British
CH 1 DR Assistant	CH 2 Therapist	UK 1 Customer Service Administrator	UK 2 Therapist 2
Female	Female	Female	Female
Chinese	Chinese	British	British

Table 3-1: Demographic profile of the participants

As shown in table 3-1, the selection of the participants ranged from clinic leaders to employees. This represents one of the potential contributions of this research, as perspectives from both leaders and employees have seldom been explored in previous literature on employee wellbeing in the context of TCM cases. The demographic profiles of the participants were categorised based on their nationality. Prior to the interviews, participant information sheets and consent forms were sent to provide participants with an overview of the research topic and objectives. After selecting participants, the researcher collected their preferred dates and time for interviews. Then the researcher formulated the interview schedules. To maintain the quality of the research, the researcher tried not to schedule more than one interview per day, allowing sufficient time for the researcher to organise notes and capture reflections after each interview.

After setting the interview schedules, the next step was to start interviews for material collection. The following sections will outline how the interviews were conducted.

3.6.5 Access to the fieldwork

Gaining permission to access the research site proved to be time-consuming, but the researcher's prior experience and connections within the industry facilitated the communication process with the clinics. The researcher contacted her connections in London clinics over the phone one by one to inquire if they were interested in taking part in the research. Subsequently, those who had agreed to participate introduced additional potential participants. To establish connections with the clinics in Beijing, the researcher contacted two TCM doctors who had previously worked in London but had returned to Beijing. The researcher aimed to explore the feasibility of conducting her fieldwork through introductions made by these doctors at the clinics they worked at in Beijing. One of the doctors had set up a clinic in collaboration with her brother. After consulting with her brother, they granted permission for the researcher to conduct her fieldwork at their clinic. The other doctor introduced the researcher to his leader who allowed the researcher access to the site.

After the fieldwork was scheduled and before it began, the COVID-19 pandemic started and worsened, the UK government issued national lockdown and travel restrictions. The researcher encountered challenges in accessing the sites in both London and Beijing. Two clinics in London had to temporarily close due to the UK national lockdown, and the researcher was unable to travel to Beijing from London because flights were suspended due to COVID-related travel restrictions. To ensure the research could progress and be completed on schedule, the researcher opted for online interviews as an alternative to the face-to-face material collection methods. Moreover, the researcher chose video interviews rather than audio because it allowed the researcher to capture and respond to non-verbal clues, such as body language and eye contact, which are important elements of qualitative data. Following this decision, the researcher contacted the clinics and participants who had previously agreed to be interviewed, asking for their willingness to shift to online video interviews.

The researcher encountered difficulties and faced challenges in both Beijing and London. In Beijing, the time differences between China and the UK posed a significant obstacle. While

situated in the UK, the researcher had to conduct interviews based on Beijing time. This resulted in difficulties in scheduling interviews, particularly when some participants preferred interview times that aligned with late night hours in the UK, corresponding to their daytime in China. Moreover, there were instances where participants took an extended time to confirm their availability, or they frequently requested changes to the interview schedule. To overcome these obstacles, the researcher extended options to participants, including allowing them to propose suitable interview times or suggest colleagues who could participate in the research. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study if they wished to do so. Overall, the process of obtaining access involved careful consideration of time zone differences and a willingness to be flexible in accommodating participants' availability in the two Chinese cases.

In London, the main difficulty arose from the circumstance that most employees were not working and were staying at home due to the national lockdown. This led to several difficulties for the researcher. Firstly, there were delays in receiving responses when attempting to schedule online video interviews, as participants were preoccupied with shopping for essential stuff or worrying about the ongoing pandemic. This left them with limited time and emotional capacity to participate in the research. Participants also expressed their concerns about discussing work-related issues at home, as they did not want their families to overhear. Some participants had children who were studying from home or had family members working remotely, leading to numerous distractions. Privacy concerns were also raised, with some participants requesting the option to turn off their cameras during interviews to prevent their home surroundings from being seen.

The researcher encountered these challenges and actively worked towards finding solutions to address participants' concerns. In response to these issues, the researcher proactively offered different options to accommodate the participants and ensure the continuity of the research. For example, when participants expressed being busy or constrained during the lockdown, the researcher inquired whether they could suggest rescheduling the interview to a later time so that they would have more flexibility and be better adjusted to the lockdown and pandemic circumstances. This approach allowed the researcher to prioritise interviews with participants who were available, while also accommodating the schedules of those who needed additional time.

3.6.6 Pilot interviews

The researcher conducted four pilot interviews to assess if the interview questions were easily understandable for participants to elaborate on their answers to provide detailed responses, thereby enabling the researcher to collect relevant material for subsequent material analysis. Interview questions were formulated based on a review of the existing literature and research questions. In preparation for the pilot interviews, the researcher highlighted key terms in the interview questions, which helped to keep the interviews on the right track without missing the important concepts. Moreover, the researcher expected to use the pilot interviews to refine and improve her interview skills. The following section will explain in more detail about the pilot interviews.

Selecting pilot cases and participants

The selection of the pilot case site was based on the objectives of this research. To ensure equality representation, the researcher selected one participant from each case for the pilot interviews. Given the aim of exploring employee wellbeing from both leader and employee perspectives, the four participants included two leaders and two employees. Access to the pilot sites was facilitated through the researcher's personal connections. The following section will provide a more detailed explanation of how the four pilot interviews were conducted, as well as the lessons learned from them.

Pilot interviews

The first pilot interview was with a receptionist who worked in CH 1 and lasted about 45 minutes. Before the interview, the participant requested that the interview questions be sent in advance. At the beginning of the interview, she asked the researcher to provide detailed explanations for each interview question and clarify the researcher's intentions behind those questions. After these clarifications, the interview proceeded with the question asked one by one. The participant's responses to the interview questions were short, leading the researcher to ask probing questions to obtain more detailed information. The first pilot interview proved challenging for the researcher. Despite being prepared and mentally ready to adapt, the researcher struggled with the participant's short answers. Knowing the need for more in-depth

responses, the researcher endeavoured to probe the questions to elicit further details by using prepared phrases and follow-up questions. However, some answers remained relatively brief, resulting in the first pilot interview ending up relatively short with fewer details.

The second pilot was with a leader in CH 2 and lasted nearly one hour. The leader confirmed the purpose of the research and soon started the interview. During the interview, the leader shared updates about several changes made at the clinic following COVID restrictions in Beijing, including modifications to the clinic's opening hours due to the absence of some therapists who had not returned to work. At one point, the leader began asking the researcher about the pandemic situation in the UK. The researcher felt hesitant to interrupt, concerned about appearing impolite and potentially causing offence. Therefore, the researcher briefly answered the leader's questions and diverted the interview back to the interview topics.

The third pilot interview was conducted with a Chinese doctor in UK 1 and lasted nearly 90 minutes. The interviewee was talkative, using examples and sharing personal experiences when answering the interview questions. However, while talking about these examples and experiences, he also asked questions that were irrelevant to the research. In response, the researcher answered these unrelated questions briefly and diverted the conversation back to the interview.

The last pilot interview was with a leader in UK 2. In comparison to the other three interviews, this one was the most straightforward. The leader did not ask many unrelated questions or seek detailed explanations about the interview questions. Although the interview only lasted 50 mins, it proceeded in a question-and-answer structure. While there were two questions that briefly confused the leader, the researcher's explanations promptly resolved the confusion, allowing the leader to provide immediate responses.

3.6.7 Lessons learned from pilot interviews

The researcher learned important lessons from the four pilot interviews. Firstly, she learned that even with thorough preparation, participants could still ask unexpected questions. This highlighted the importance of adaptability and flexibility. Moreover, the pilot interviews provided the researcher with an opportunity to develop her skills in formulating clear interview

questions to minimise confusion. This facilitated a more efficient interview process and saved time, as the researcher encountered instances during the pilot interviews where clarification was needed due to the lack of clarity in certain interview questions. For example, there was a question 'how do you feel working at the clinic?', participants sought clarification regarding its intended meaning. Moreover, some interview questions did not allow participants enough space to elaborate on their experiences and feelings. Questions that were limited to specific concepts led participants to mainly talk about their perceptions of those concepts. As a result, the researcher was unable to gather enough details for material analysis.

The pilot interviews also helped the researcher improve the interview techniques. For instance, during one pilot, the researcher hesitated to interrupt a participant engaged in a conversation unrelated to the research, partly due to the participant's seniority. However, this hesitation resulted in her unable to gather sufficient materials from the pilot interview. This experience taught the researcher the importance of directing the conversation back to the research focus when it begins to drift.

3.6.8 Interviewing

The earlier sections have discussed the four pilot interviews, and this section will detail how the researcher conducted the remaining twenty interviews, as well as the transcription process for all interviews. Like the pilot interviews, the subsequent interviews employed online video semi-structured interviews. The researcher designed a list of interview questions to guide the interviews, with the sequence of these questions being adaptable based on the flow of the interviews. Moreover, the researcher prepared probing questions for each interview question to explore topics closely related to the research objectives.

A total of twenty-four online video interviews were conducted and recorded, then subsequently transcribed. As participants included both Chinese and English speakers, both Chinese and English language were used in interviews. The interviews conducted in Chinese were transcribed in Chinese by the researcher, and then selectively translated into English. The duration of the interviews ranged from 45 and 90 minutes. Recording the interviews not only increased the accuracy of material collection but also allowed the researcher to focus more on

the participants' responses and reactions, rather than hurriedly taking notes and risking forgetting important details later.

Despite recording the interviews, the researcher still took notes during the interviews to capture any immediate thoughts that arose during the interviews, such as connections to the existing literature or the emergence of new ideas from what participants said, which might be forgotten after the interview. Moreover, the researcher made efforts to organise and write down interview notes immediately after each interview. This included writing details such as the setting of the interview, the interaction between the participants and the researcher, and any comments or thoughts made during and after the interviews.

3.7 Material analysis

Fieldwork was conducted in both China and the UK, rich materials were collected from the twenty-four online video interviews. This section will discuss the methods used for material analysis in this research. There are several methods to analyse qualitative materials, such as content analysis, template analysis, and storytelling (Saunders et al., 2019). Moreover, the researcher used software to organise the materials, which will be described later in this section.

3.7.1 Method of material analysis

There is no standardised approach to analyse qualitative materials, so researchers need to identify a suitable method for material analysis that aligns with their research objectives (Gray, 2021). Researchers using qualitative methods to collect materials generated meaning by interpreting the materials or inductively deriving meaning from them (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Material analysis focuses on key issues, common themes, and patterns to make sense of the information (Gray, 2021).

Content analysis is one method for material analysis. According to Stemler (2001, p.1), content analysis is defined as 'a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding'. Content analysis assist in coding data and identifying common themes (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). It is recognised for helping

researchers analyse large volumes of qualitative data by systematically examining communicative materials, such as interview transcripts (Mayring, 2014) and identifying main themes and patterns (*ibid*). Given its alignment with the research objectives, the researcher conducted 24 semi-structured interviews and collected substantial volumes of communicative materials, content analysis was thus the chosen method for material analysis in this research.

3.7.2 NVivo and the application

Several software has been developed for coding and was commonly used in qualitative research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Considering the availability of these software and the time required to learn their functionalities, the researcher believed that NVivo was appropriate for this research. NVivo is a qualitative data analysis computer software package (Saunders et al., 2019). It is believed that NVivo can improve the quality of research by reducing a great number of manual tasks and allowing researchers more time to identify themes and draw conclusions (*ibid*). Besides, NVivo enable researchers to create graphs that virtually mapped codes and the relationships between codes and corresponding materials (*ibid*).

The application of NVivo played an important role in the material analysis. It allowed the researcher to import the transcribed interview materials, enabling easy access and effective organisation of the large volumes of communicative materials. Through the use of NVivo, the researcher was able to identify nodes, which are essentially themes that facilitated the systematic categorisation of the material according to specific themes and concepts (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Moreover, the search function of NVivo helped the researcher to efficiently locate specific segments of data corresponding to specific keywords. This feature facilitated the process of identifying and comparing themes across the interviews, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the insights shared by the participants. Furthermore, the use of NVivo enhanced the researcher's ability to generate visual representations of the data, which enriched the analysis process and provided the researcher with a systematic and efficient way of exploring and understanding the material collected from the interviews.

3.7.3 Coding

Researchers are required to classify materials and identify any interconnections among them (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). A code is defined as a word or short phrase that summarised the meaning of a chunk of data (Punch, 2013). Coding is, therefore, the process of putting codes to enable the summarisation of materials by pulling together themes and identifying patterns (*ibid*). According to Saunders et al. (2019), there are two types of codes: descriptive codes and inferential (pattern) codes. Early codes often involve descriptive codes, which are characterised as low-inference and useful in summarising segments of data and providing the basis for later higher-order coding (*ibid*). Later codes could be more interpretive, requiring more inference beyond the data (*ibid*).

In this research, the researcher identified codes such as 'Mianzi' and 'Yanlijianer', and then applied these codes to relevant sections of the interview transcripts. For example, under the code 'Mianzi', excerpts were coded where participants discussed factors they considered influential in their interactions with their leaders or colleagues. The code 'Mianzi' was used to capture instances where participants emphasised the importance of giving leaders mianzi in their workplace. This coding process allowed the researcher to effectively organise and analyse the material, uncovering common themes and patterns within the participants' narratives. The use of these codes also enabled the researcher to make sense of the information collected and derive meaningful interpretations.

3.7.4 Translation and transcribing

As this research involved both China and the UK, materials were collected in both Chinese and English. Therefore, the researcher needed to translate the Chinese materials into English before conducting the material analysis. The translation process posed challenges, particularly when translating Chinese idioms into English, due to the difficulty of finding appropriate English words or phrases that effectively convey the meaning of the Chinese idioms. However, the researcher is a native Chinese speaker with relevant work experience, she managed to overcome these translation difficulties.

Interpreting the interview material is related to the validity of the research, such as the possibility of interviewer bias and the accuracy of participants' answers, particularly regarding concerns about dishonesty and social desirability (Punch, 2013). For example, participants might describe

actions that do not necessarily align with their actual behaviours. The challenges of cross-cultural research raise further difficulties in interpreting interview responses (*ibid*). However, these issues are usually overcome by careful design, planning, and training (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

Transcribing, although time-consuming, is important. It is crucial to transcribe not only what participants said, but also their pauses and overlaps (Silverman, 2014), as these aspects often convey meanings related to the research. A distinctive characteristic of qualitative inquiry is its emphasis on interpretation (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Many studies have noted the advantages of transcribing interview conversations. For example, transcribing allowed the researcher to listen to the interview conversations repeatedly and carefully, leading to a better understanding of the meanings of what participants said and helping to make sense of what was said (Silverman, 2014). The process of transcribing also enabled the researcher to understand how culture and leadership impacted on employee wellbeing in both China and the UK contexts. This process emphasised the importance of exploring how participants perceive their experience rather than how they act (Silverman, 2014).

3.7.5 The validity and reliability of the material

Validity and reliability have long been established as important criteria to ensure good quality research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Validity address whether the data collected accurately responded to the research objectives and research questions, while reliability focus on the consistency and reproducibility of the data (Jordan, 2018). However, in qualitative research, both validity and reliability are linked to the issue of generalisability (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). In this research, the transferability of the research outcome is prioritised over generalisation (*ibid*).

To provide a comprehensive view of employee wellbeing at work, the researcher selected a diverse range of participants across four different cases, considering various work experiences, positions, and gender differences. Materials were collected directly from participants, with any confusion during the interviews immediately addressed by either the researcher or the participants themselves. Participants provided detailed insights into how they made sense of their world, reflecting on their work experiences and perceptions of their work. The data analysis

incorporated quotes from the interview conversations as examples to validate the researcher's interpretations and strengthen the credibility of the analysis.

3.7.6 Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to the relationship between the researcher and the research (Gray, 2021). It involves researchers' reflections on their actions, observations during the fieldwork, and the way their feelings become part of the data (*ibid*). According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2021), researchers are required to reflect on their role regarding the impact they exerted on the research process during material collection. The aim of qualitative research is to develop knowledge of how participants' understandings are shaped through their interaction with the social environment. Through reflexivity, the researcher became aware of her influence on the process of conducting and interpreting the interview materials, as well as the research outcomes. Since interviews are conversations guided by the interviewer, interviews are influenced by the personal characteristics of the interviewer (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018).

The researcher benefited from her previous work experience in TCM clinics, which helped her gain a better understanding of the context, including typical daily routines. The researcher's background in the industry also allowed her to gather insider information. For example, during interviews, some participants mentioned, '*you should know this as well, so there is no need to hide from you*', and subsequently shared their true feelings with the researcher. To maintain objectivity in material collection, the researcher engaged in conversations with participants in her role as a researcher. The fieldwork provided valuable insights into how employees perceived leaders' actions, how these actions impacted their wellbeing, and what the perspective of leaders.

During the fieldwork, the researcher used a research diary to stay reflective and maintain a critical mindset about the ongoing research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). After each interview, the researcher listened to the recording and highlighted aspects that could benefit the research. The researcher then made notes and extracted insights from each interview experience. For example, she learned that sharing some of her own experiences encouraged participants to provide more details responses. In one instance, a participant consistently gave short answers and did not elaborate, even when the researcher asked probing questions. To encourage a more

productive interview, the researcher shared some personal experiences, which encouraged the participant to open up and offer more detailed responses. The use of a research diary helped the researcher realised that sharing her experiences with participants encouraged them more open and forthcoming, especially conducting interviews with participants from China. For instance, when the researcher initially asked one participant in China about her experiences at work, the participant responded that she felt 'alright'. However, after the researcher shared her own experiences, the participant disclosed having issues with work relations and provided a more detailed explanation. This change in response led the researcher to explore the reason behind it.

Upon reviewing the recording, the researcher noticed that, towards the end of the interview, some participants expressed surprise at having talked so much to an outsider, especially knowing the conversation was recorded. This suggested that some participants were initially hesitant to speak openly. However, when the researcher responded to questions from participants and briefly shared her own experiences, participants became more engaged in the interviews and started to share more details. This shift allowed the researcher to gather richer materials, highlighting the role of the research diary in facilitating the researcher's learning from the interviews.

The researcher also learned to cope with uncertainty and changes during the material collection process. Although the material collection had been planned before the pandemic, it was carried out during the pandemic, which led to changes in scheduling and participant availability. For example, some participants left the clinics and requested their data be withdrawn, resulting in the loss of some previously collected material. While the pandemic added challenges to the research, it also gave the researcher an opportunity to enhance her ability to manage unexpected changes more effectively.

There was increasing criticism of reflexivity, with some suggesting that it involved too much interpretation on the part of the researcher, which may problematise the research process and paralyse the researcher (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). However, if the researcher remained objectivity of the research in the material collection and analysis process, remained aware of reflexivity when conducting and interpreting interview materials, it could reduce bias and enrich research outcomes.

3.8 Challenges and limitations of fieldwork

Challenges and limitations were inevitable in any research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Like many other doctoral studies, challenges emerged despite the researcher's efforts to minimise them, and limitations existed in this research. This section will further explain the specific challenges encountered, such as changes in ways to conduct interviews, changes of participants and challenges in translations.

3.8.1 Changes in the ways to conduct interviews

The researcher initially planned to conduct 24 face to face semi-structured interviews. However, due to the travel restrictions of COVID-19, the researcher had to adapt and transition to online video interviews. During the lockdown, three participants withdrew from the research due to the closure of the clinic. The researcher managed to recruit three new participants to continue the research. Finding participants during the lockdown proved challenging, even though the researcher had prior experience in the industry and maintained personal relationships with companies. Besides, it was time consuming for the researcher to explain the purpose of the research, particularly when participants needed to be informed about recording and required to sign consent forms. The shift to online interviews also caused certain challenges. Some participants had to conduct interviews from their homes, where they felt uncomfortable discussing work-related issues due to concerns about family members overhearing. Moreover, some participants expressed reluctance when informed that the online interviews would be video recorded.

3.8.2 Changes of participants

Changes in participants occurred due to withdrawal requests from the research. Several participants chose to either withdraw specific parts of the interview materials or completely withdraw from the research. As indicated in the consent form and participant information sheet, participants had the right to withdraw from the research without the obligation to provide a reason. However, most participants did provide reasons for their withdrawals when making

these requests. For example, one participant withdrew after leaving the clinic due to the pandemic. while another participant cited family obligations as the reason for her withdrawal, including the need to look after her children's online learning at home. Besides, she felt uncomfortable discussing work-related matters at home, which led to her decision to withdraw from the research.

Despite the challenges related to participant withdrawals, the researcher managed to overcome these difficulties. For participants who had completed their interviews but requested to withdraw their interview data, the researcher ensured the confidentiality, anonymity, and security of the materials were maintained to addressed concerns about the safety of the interview materials. In the end, with the participants' approval, the researcher was able to retain some of the materials and managed to recruit new participants to replace those who withdrew.

3.8.3 Challenges in translation

As discussed in the material analysis section, this research is comparative in nature, involving both China and the UK, with materials collected in both countries. Therefore, the materials were collected in both Chinese and English languages. To minimise the potential loss of meaning during translation, participants were encouraged to use English if they were capable to do so. Translating from Chinese to English was challenging as the meanings of Chinese expressions are often highly related to the context, with the same Chinese word carry different meanings in different situations. The researcher frequently encountered difficulties in finding precise English equivalents that conveyed the exact meanings of the Chinese expressions. Moreover, the frequent use of idioms in Chinese further complicated the translation process. For example, a few participants used the idiom *Yan li jianer* (眼力见儿) in interviews, which generally refers to someone who is discerning or quick to adapt to circumstance. To overcome these challenges in translation, the researcher spent additional time and effort to finding appropriate translations that accurately conveyed the meanings of the original expressions.

3.8.4 Interruption in the interviews process

Interruptions were inevitable in interviews, particularly in online interviews. There were many short-term disruptions occurred, such as participants' children entering the room and distracted them, pets jumping onto tables or standing in front of the screen, and household noises like conversations or cooking. This was particularly common among participants from London sites, as they conducted their interviews from home.

Technical issues also emerged during the interviews, such as challenges with using the Microsoft Teams app, unstable internet connections, and unexpected phone calls that disrupted the flow of interviews. Unstable internet connections were a recurring issue, especially when conducting video calls, which required a consistent and stable internet signal. The disruptions caused by internet interruptions during the interview affected the continuity of conversations and occasionally led to participant frustration. Despite attempts to reconnect, the conversations often did not proceed as smoothly as desired. Besides, there were a few major interruptions that forced the termination of interviews. For example, there were instances where unexpected phone calls occurred during some interviews, and these calls were important for the participants, so they chose to answer the phone and led to the termination of the interviews.

Interruptions in interviews not only disrupted the flow of conversation but also made it difficult for the researcher during the transcription of recorded interviews. These interruptions negatively affected the quality of the recordings, requiring the researcher to spend more time and effort in reviewing the recordings and transcribing the material. However, the researcher overcame these interruption-related issues by taking notes, especially when interruptions happened. For those interruptions caused by background noises, the researcher spent additional time adjusting the recording volume and listened carefully to the recordings multiple times to ensure accurate transcription.

3.8.5 Lessons learned from interviews

The researcher conducted a total of twenty-four interviews and practised her interview skills by examining the interview questions in the four pilot interviews. Despite this practice and preparation, challenges continued in the remaining twenty interviews. Challenges included interviews that lasted too short, unexpected interruptions during interviews, and a lack of information from certain participants that hindered data analysis. To address these issues, the

researcher implemented measures such as contacting certain participants for a second round of interviews. This allowed her to ask more probing questions and gather additional details. Moreover, the researcher learned important lessons and gained valuable experience throughout the interview process.

First, the interviews taught the researcher the importance of adaptability. Changes in the ways to conduct interviews, participants withdrawals, unexpected interruptions, and challenges arose in interviews. The ability to adapt and adjust in interviews allowed the researcher to continue and maintain the quality of the interviews. Second, the researcher recognised the importance of clearly explaining the research purpose and interview process, as this not only helped in obtaining informed consent but also ensured that participants were aware of what to expect during the interview. Third, the researcher learned taking detailed notes during interviews was crucial, particularly when dealing with interruptions. These notes helped as references during transcription and helped to identify areas where the conversation needed to be revisited. Fourth, the experiences of changes and interruptions highlighted the importance of thorough preparation of interviews, such as ensuring a quiet interview environment, testing technical setups and internet signals in advance, and having backup plans to address potential issues.

Additionally, the researcher found it beneficial to review the recordings immediately after each interview. This practice allowed for the identification of any issues that required immediate resolution and ensured that any unclear parts of the interview could be clarified in subsequent interviews or follow-up communications with participants. Last but not the least, the interviews encouraged the researcher to continually enhance her interview skills. Each interview provided her with an opportunity to learn, with lessons learned from previous interviews informing subsequent interviews. In conclusion, the researcher gained valuable insights from interviews in this research regarding adaptability, clear communication, thorough preparation, and constant learning.

3.9 Summary

This chapter explains the research methodology and methods chosen for this research. This includes a rationale for the selection of interpretivism as the research methodology and semi-

structured interviews as research methods to gain a deeper depth of understanding of the culture and leadership impact of employee wellbeing. The chapter explores the advantages and disadvantages associated with interpretivism and provide a justification for the use of semi-structured interview. Moreover, the chapter provides a detailed explanation of the practical aspects of the fieldwork. This includes a comprehensive review of the preparation for the fieldwork, the criteria applied in selecting research sites and participants, the formulation of interview questions, access to clinics and participants, as well as the conduct of fieldwork and material analysis. Furthermore, the chapter addresses reflexivity, ethical considerations, and a discussion of challenges and limitations encountered in the research.

Chapter 4 Understanding of Employee Wellbeing

4.1 Introduction

Employee wellbeing is a key concept in this research. As discussed in Chapter two, researchers have various views on employee wellbeing, which can be understood as the quality of employees' experiences from physical, psychological and social aspects at work. This chapter will further explore how employee wellbeing was conceptualised in this research from the perspectives of both employees and leaders. It will discuss critical factors, such as the physical work environment and work stress, and their impact on employee wellbeing. Moreover, the chapter will compare the similarities and differences between the research outcomes and the existing literature, contributing new knowledge to the field.

4.2 Perception of employee wellbeing

As discussed in section 2.2, employee wellbeing includes hedonic and eudemonic perspectives. The hedonic perspective refers to individuals experiencing positive emotions and feelings of happiness at work (Diener, 2000). The eudemonic perspective means fulfilling one's potential, aligning with deeply held values or feeling that things people do are meaningful and purposeful at work (Ryan and Deci, 2001). In order to understand employee wellbeing from the perspectives of both employees and leaders, the researcher included perceptions of their experiences, emotions and feelings at work, as well as if they feel purposeful and meaningful at work in the interview questions and probing questions.

4.2.1 Employees' perspective

Previous studies on employees' perceptions of wellbeing, such as Gordon and Adler (2017) and Baluch (2017), have focused on specific contexts like select-service hotels in the Midwest and social serviced NPO in the UK respectively. The literature on employee wellbeing has largely focused on employees' subjective experiences, often assuming that managers' interpretations of employee wellbeing align with those of employees (Vakkayil et al., 2017). However, the

perspectives and practices of leaders perceive and implement employee wellbeing practices have not been sufficiently examined (*ibid*). Although Vakkayil et al. (2017) conducted research to fill this gap, their study was limited to companies operating in the Milan County in Italy. Given the importance of employee wellbeing, especially in the context of SMEs, this research aims to fill the gap by exploring these issues in the context that has not been found in the existing literature.

In the two Chinese cases, most participants viewed employee wellbeing as employee benefits, work environments, and workload. Employee benefits were understood to include financial aspects and leaders' care. The financial aspects included salary, bonus, insurance, and festival shopping vouchers. Participants believed these financial benefits contributed to their happiness, which they related to their hedonic wellbeing. For example, CH 1 Manager said: '*a competitive salary is a good motivator, it makes me happy…. every month, payday is always one of my happiest days'*.

Leaders' care referred to support for employee development and social activities, such as company parties, employees' birthdays celebrations and company family fun days. This type of leaders' care was highly valued by participants, as it positively influenced their work engagement and motivated, linking it to eudemonic wellbeing. For instance, CH 1 DR 1 told the researcher during the interview that he believed: '*employee benefits indicate leaders care about employees, as a person rather than an employee, so we feel happy and more dedicated to our work in return'*.

Similarly, CH 1 DR Assistant linked her learning and development to increased work engagement and motivation at work. She said: '*I have learned a lot from experienced doctors, allowing me to help many patients in need. This sense of accomplishment motivates me to work harder to help more people*'. Social activities were also seen as an important part of leaders' care and contributed to employee wellbeing. CH 2 Receptionist said she enjoyed the activities at CH 2 and believed: '*employee benefits include a variety of social activities for us….it makes me feel we are a big family and being looked after by the leaders…. I think this is also part of the meaning of work'*. She considered feeling being looked after at work enhanced her happiness and commitment to her work.

Work environments were seen as both the physical work environment and work relationships., with more focus on work relationships. For instance, CH 1 DR Assistant said: '*work environment also means work relations…. having a good work relationship is so important….it creates a good work atmosphere that can reduce work stress*'. Similarly, CH 2 DR 2 said: '*having good work relationships makes me feel comfortable and reduces my stress from work…. when you have a good relationship, you get a lot of help and support at work*'.

In the Chinese context, participants experienced happiness when they felt cared for by their leaders, experienced less work stress, and had good relationships at work. This reflects hedonic wellbeing as employees experience positive emotions and feelings of happiness in their work environment (Diener, 2000; Ryan and Deci, 2001). This also aligns with the literature suggesting that happiness in China, from a Confucian perspective, is associated with maintaining harmonious relationships with others (Zhang and Veenhoven, 2008; Joshanloo, 2014).

In comparison, participants in the two UK cases viewed employee wellbeing as employee benefits, work environment, perceived stress levels at work, and personal development. Employee benefits were understood to include salary and bonuses, national insurance, and holiday pay. For example, UK 1 Customer Service Administrator shared: '*employee benefits such as bonuses, holiday pay, and national insurance provide both financial and psychological supports……especially considering my workload*'. Similarly, UK 2 Therapist 1 expressed satisfaction with the benefits, saying: '*I'm happy with the employee benefits because of the good bonuses and flexible working hours*'.

Participants perceived the work environment as aspects related to safety and healthy work conditions. Prior studies have indicated that employees unhappy with workplace safety were more likely to report lower wellbeing (Otterbring et al., 2018). The fieldwork for this study showed that participants in the two UK cases who were happy with the physical work environment experienced higher levels of hedonic wellbeing. For example, UK 1 HR assistant said: '*leaders have a duty to provide a safe work environment as it is an important part of employee wellbeing and helps employees unwind*'. UK 2 Therapist 2 highlighted: '*proper ventilation in the clinic is crucial for employees' health, especially during the pandemic, I want to avoid any unnecessary stress because of it*'.

In addition to a safe and healthy work environment, participants in the UK cases enjoyed autonomy and flexibility at work, linking these factors positively to their hedonic wellbeing. For example, both UK 2 Therapist 1 and UK 2 Therapist 2 said being happy with the flexible working hours and the freedom to decorate the treatment rooms they use at work, which contributed to their happiness and helped reduce their tiredness and stress at work. This supports the existing literature suggesting that the Western conceptual of hedonic wellbeing and happiness places an important emphasis on autonomy and environmental mastery (Joshanloo, 2014).

Work stress was also considered an important factor in employee wellbeing by participants in the two UK cases. For example, UK 1 Manager complained about excessive stress due to high sales targets set by his leaders, he found '*bearing the pressure from the sales targets lead to mental stress*'. He described '*the excessive stress is unhealthy, as I end up smoking too much when the stress becomes overwhelming*'. UK 1 Receptionist also expressed pressure related to high sales target at work. She '*feel anxious about not reaching the sales targets*'. In addition to these factors, some participants also mentioned personal development when expressing their understanding of employee wellbeing.

4.2.2 Leaders' perspective

The researcher also explored leaders' perspectives on employee wellbeing. In the two Chinese cases, leaders viewed employee wellbeing as employee benefits and employee development. For example, CH 1 Leader highlighted CH 1 '*provided a wide range of employee benefits, including competitive salaries and bonuses, a cosy work environment, and regular social activities for employees and their families*'. As part of employee benefits, employees at CH 1 received gifts and shopping vouchers on special occasions, such as birthdays and festivals like mooncakes were given out for the Mid-Autumn Festival. According to CH 1 Leader, offering employee benefits played a crucial role in retaining and attracting high-quality employees, which not only enhanced the clinic's reputation but also had the potential to attract more customers.

CH 1 Leader also highlighted the availability of a wide range of opportunities and activities at CH 1 to support employee learning and develop. Similarly, CH 2 Leader viewed employee wellbeing as employee benefits and personal growth. According to CH 2 Leader, employee benefits included competitive salaries and bonuses, as well as support for employees' personal lives and family needs. For example, employees facing financial difficulties were provided with cash or shopping vouchers. Employees with family responsibilities, such as being single parents or caring for elderly relatives, were offered flexible work schedules to support their circumstances and enhance wellbeing.

To further improve employee wellbeing, CH 2 Leader installed a kitchen in the staff room, creating a space where employees and their family members could cook, eat together, and socialise in the workplace. The kitten was equipped with cooking appliances and stocked with basic ingredients, such as rice, vegetables, and meat. Moreover, she organised outings for employees and their family members every year during the Spring Festival and the New Year celebrations, which helped strengthen the work relationships among employees and contributed to a positive work environment. CH 2 Leader also emphasised the importance of employee development, expressing that: '*it was important to provide opportunities for employees to develop their expertise and skills at work*'. Therefore, she offered various learning and training programs to support continuous professional career development.

UK 1 Leader perceived employee wellbeing as a combination of employee benefits, work environment and employee development. She explained employee benefits included financial benefits and employee health support. UK 1 Leader highlighted financial aspects as an important factor in employee wellbeing, noting that UK 1 offers '*competitive salaries and bonuses to incentivise employees… Chinese employees receive gifts during significant Chinese festivals, and both Chinese and British employees receive extra bonuses for Christmas*'.

UK 1 Leader also emphasised the importance of employee health, she said: '*as health workers, we treat patients, but also need to focus on our own health…. we gave discounts on treatments and herbal remedies for employees to take care their health needs…*'. Moreover, she believed that a nice work environment contributes to both the physical and psychological wellbeing of employees. She improved ventilation and '*decorated UK 1 to high standards*' the UK 1 to positively impact the physical wellbeing of employees and enhanced mood of employees, which

is important for employees' hedonic wellbeing. Furthermore, UK 1 Leader pointed out UK 1 provided training sessions for employees with their career development, which reflects the eudemonic aspect of wellbeing.

UK 2 Leader's view of employee wellbeing included keeping employees happy at work, providing employee financial benefits, maintaining a pleasant work environment, and providing learning opportunities. He explained: '*if employees are happy at work, they carry a positive attitude, then it helps to improve their work performance, and consequently, increases income*'. He emphasised the importance of listening to employees' advice and implementing changes, even when those changes conflicted with the clinic's business interests, to keep employees happy. For instance, the clinic's original working hours were from 11:00 AM to 9.30 PM. However, after receiving feedback from the majority of employees who expressed a desire for earlier finish times, he adjusted the closing time to 8.30 PM. In addition, if there were no late bookings, employees were allowed to finish as early as 8 PM. While this change risked losing those customers who want to come late and lost relevant income, it was made to prioritise the wellbeing and preferences of the employees. As UK 2 Leader said: '*because employees are happy with the change, they work harder, and as a result, incomes are actually better than before…*'.

In addition to adjusting work hours, UK 2 Leader emphasised offering competitive salaries and bonuses to reward employees. He described the work environment as clean and pleasant, which he believed positively impacted employees' wellbeing. He also highlighted the importance of supporting employees' professional growth, said: '*we offer learning courses so employees can get relevant certificates, which helps with their personal development…*'. Overall, the focus on employee happiness, employee financial benefits, and a pleasant work environment reflects employee hedonic wellbeing, while the emphasis on employee personal development shows eudemonic aspects of wellbeing.

In summary, the understanding of employee wellbeing differs between China and the UK, as well as between employees and leaders. The research demonstrates the significance of employee benefits in understanding employee wellbeing at work. In China, participants perceived employee wellbeing as employee benefits, workload, work environments, and with a strong expectation for leaders to take care of them. They also highlighted the importance of workplace

relationships in their perception of wellbeing. In contrast, participants in the UK perceived employee wellbeing as employee benefits, levels of work stress, work environment and opportunities for personal development. From the perspectives of leaders, in the two Chinese cases, employee wellbeing was perceived as employee benefits and employee development, highlighting support and care for employees and their families. In the UK, leaders perceived employee wellbeing as employee benefits, work environment, personal development, and employee happiness. UK 1 Leader highlighted employee benefits, while UK 2 Leader emphasised creating a pleasant work environment and prioritising employee happiness. The research also indicates that leaders' perceptions of employee wellbeing influence their actions, influencing the wellbeing of their employees. For example, CH 1 leader placed great importance on fostering work relationships as a component of employee wellbeing, which led him to organise social activities to enhance the wellbeing of the employees.

4.2.3 Physical, psychological and social aspects of employee wellbeing

Previous research has studied employee wellbeing from physical, psychological and social aspects (Guest, 2017), as seen in section 2.2.6 of the literature review. The physical aspect refers to employees' physical health (Emre and Spiegeleare, 2021), the psychological aspect refers to people experiencing frequent positive emotions and infrequent negative emotions (Bakker and Oerlemans, 2011). The social aspect refers to relationship at work between employees or between employees and their leaders (Guest, 2017). This research indicates the importance of these three perspectives in understanding employee wellbeing, particular in the context of SME health services in both China and the UK. The following sections will discuss in more detail about employee wellbeing from the three aspects, based on the fieldwork from both countries.

Physical perspective of employee wellbeing

The physical work environment was perceived as a crucial factor, especially because this research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. In both cases in China, participants expressed satisfaction with their leaders' actions to provide a safe working environment. When asked about their perception of the work environment, CH 1 DR 1 said: '*a safe working environment is important, especially we work in a clinic and deal with patients who have different health conditions…. feeling safe at work helps reduce work stress*'. Similarly, CH 1

Receptionist appreciated that leaders created a safe work environment, which reduced her worries about potentially contracting the virus from work.

Apart from adhering to government regulations, leaders supplied essential items such as hand sanitisers and face masks, which were in high demand at the time. Participants felt reassured by these protective measures and perceived them as indicators of their leaders taking care of them, positively impact on their hedonic wellbeing. For example, CH 2 Receptionist shared her views: '*as a health worker, having sufficient face masks reassure us at work because safety is important... it also shows leaders' care'*.

Similarly, participants in the two UK cases were highly valued their workplace health and safety during the pandemic. Many expressed satisfactions with their leaders' actions, such as implementing social distancing rules and ensuring an adequate supply of face masks. These measures were viewed as reducing their concerns about contracting the virus and alleviating workplace stress. For instance, UK 1 DR said: '*I wasn't sure if it would be safe to come to work because I was worried about catching COVID…but I can see the efforts the leaders have made to keep us safe …and it's reassuring*'. UK 2 Therapist 2 also believed that a well-maintained physical work environment '*reduce anxiety and stress at work'*, which relates to the hedonic aspect wellbeing. The physical aspect of employee wellbeing, particularly in the context of SMEs in the health services sector, has not been extensively explored in the existing literature. Therefore, this study contributes new knowledge by addressing this gap and emphasising the importance of the physical work environment in improving employee wellbeing.

Psychological perspective of employee wellbeing

The psychological aspect of wellbeing includes both positive and negative experiences at work. This research aligns with the existing literature, supporting the negative correlation between negative work experience, job-related anxiety, stress and employee wellbeing. Moreover, the research shows the similarities and differences in the factors that influence work experiences, job-related anxiety and stress between China and the UK. For example, in the Chinese cases, participants often conformed to their leaders due to the high-power distance culture, which led to negative experiences. In the UK cases, work stress was considered as a main factor linked to negative experiences. Robertson and Cooper (2011) identified workload as a stressor at work,

highlighting it as an important factor influencing employees' experiences. However, this research also shows that a heavy workload can relate to reduced work stress in China because of cultural factors such as Mianzi. Some employees in China chose heavy workloads to keep their mianzi at work, which was positively related to their wellbeing. A more detailed discussion of the factors causing employees stress at work and their impact on work experiences and wellbeing will be presented in sections 4.3.

Social perspective of employee wellbeing

The social aspects of wellbeing include interpersonal relationships at work, consisting of relationships among employees and between employees and leaders (Grant et al., 2007; Guest, 2017). The research outcomes highlight the importance of work relationships in China (Zhang and Veenhoven, 2008; Joshanloo, 2014), as participants valued harmonious workplace relationships as a key aspect of their wellbeing. For example, participants in the Chinese cases actively participated in social events organised by their leaders, even outside of working hours, to maintain a good relationship. Besides, participants in China expected their leaders to support them with both work-related and personal issues, which improved their work engagement and contributed to their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. In contrast, work relationships between leaders and employees, as well as among colleagues, were considered as factors influencing employee wellbeing in the UK cases, although they were not considered as crucial as in the Chinese cases. Work relations and their impact on employee wellbeing will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

4.3 Considerations of employee wellbeing

In section 2.3, the researcher reviewed critical factors that impact employee wellbeing, such as the physical workplace environment, job demand and resources, and work-related stress (Danna and Griffins, 1999; Haddon, 2018; Schwepker et al., 2021). The outcomes of the fieldwork align with the existing literature and highlight critical factors such as the physical work environment impact on employees' emotions and experiences at work. The following sections will explain in more detail of how the physical work environment impacts employee wellbeing in this research.

4.3.1 Physical workplace environment

The physical work environment includes aspects such as workplace design, indoor temperature, lighting, ventilation, noise levels and cleanliness (Danna and Griffins, 1999; Haddon, 2018; Schwepker et al., 2021). These ambient factors play a crucial role in ensuring the physical characteristics of the work environment do not negatively impact employees' wellbeing (Evans and Jonson, 2000). They are important sources of job satisfaction and impact work motivation, which can lead to employees' work-related stress and lower employee wellbeing (Schwepker et al., 2021). However, there is limited in the existing literature to explore the impact of the physical workplace environment on employee wellbeing in the context of SME health services in China and the UK, a gap that this research aims to address.

Workplace design

The research shows the significance of workplace design in influencing employee wellbeing. This outcome aligns with the existing literature suggesting that factors of workplace design, such as the layout of workplace space, contributes to employee wellbeing (Evans and Johnson, 2000). Participants frequently highlighted the importance of workplace design during the fieldwork, believing that it positively contributed to their wellbeing at work.

Participants in CH 1 expressed satisfaction with their workplace design, considering it beneficial for reducing work stress. They found the Chinese style decor and the use of traditional furniture in the clinic comfortable, believing that a comfortable work environment improved their mood. For example, both CH 1 DR 1 and CH 1 DR 2 praised the paint colour in the clinic and linked it with reduced work stress. CH 1 DR 2 said: '*the light yellow colour pairs well with the wood tones, helping to calm patients and reduce our stress*'. CH 1 Manager and CH 1 Receptionist found the design of the billboard in the waiting area effective. It not only introduces the clinic and its doctor but also promotes knowledge of traditional Chinese medicine. They noted that the billboard '*helps reduce workload by keeping patients engaged while they wait to see the doctors*'.

Similar to the clinic of CH 1, participants in CH 2 highly commented on their workplace design. They appreciated the spacious treatment rooms, which they found convenient for their work and believed helps to improve their mood. For instance, CH 2 Therapist said: '*the spacious treatment room makes me feel comfortable and happy*'. Participants also enjoyed the traditional Chinese medicine paintings displayed in the clinic, as they created a comfortable and professional work environment. CH 2 DR 2 found '*paintings in the clinic therapeutic, they help me relax and reduce tiredness*'. Besides, the designated reading area for employees at CH 2 was seen as beneficial by participants for their self-development. CH 2 Receptionist said '*I often find TCM books to read when I am not busy, it helps to improve my professional knowledge*'. CH 2 DR 2 also said: '*the books and magazines on the bookshelf help to update and strengthen the TCM knowledge*'.

Most participants in the two UK cases emphasised the importance of having their own workspace, which aligns with the literature highlighting autonomy and environmental mastery in the UK. Participants in UK 1 particularly emphasised the importance of space when discussing the work environment and workplace design. For example, UK 1 DR stated that having ample space in treatment rooms is important for both doctors and patients. He found small or narrow treatment rooms stressful and believed that such conditions negatively affected the quality of treatment. He said: '*We have spacious treatment rooms... it shows that leaders care for us and are not greedy. It is hard to work in tiny treatment rooms, especially some patients may be overweight or have claustrophobia, it can be depressing....*'. UK 1 Customer Service Administrator also noted that having sufficient space at work made her work more effective, thus reducing her work stress. As she dealt with a large amount of paperwork, she was happy that she has '*enough space to organise each category of papers into separate folders and store them in filing boxes, this helps me work more effectively and saves time*'.

In UK 2, both Chinese doctors expressed satisfaction with the clinic's proper consultation room. UK 2 DR 1 emphasised that having consultation room was essential for doctors. He shared that he '*used to work in other clinics that did not have a consultation room, so I had to do consultations in the reception area*'. He described this experience as '*unprofessional and stressful*' because both he and his patients '*had to bear the pressure of potentially being overheard*'. UK 2 DR 2 also highlighted the significance of a consultation room, noting that it '*helps patients talk about their health issues more freely*', which helps him in making accurate

diagnoses. Moreover, both therapists were happy with the decor of the clinic, as they found it created a relaxing environment and improved their mood at work.

In summary, research shows that workplace design is closely related to the hedonic aspect of employee wellbeing. Participants in two Chinese cases found their workplace design helpful in reducing their work stress. Similarly, participants in the two UK cases emphasised the importance of work design, particularly having their own workspace for their happiness, aligning with the literature on hedonic wellbeing, with the emphasis on autonomy and environmental mastery in the UK.

Moreover, the research shows that participants perceived workplace design as a reflection of their leaders' attitudes toward the business and employees. For example, participants in the two Chinese cases believed that workplace design reflected the extent of their leaders' care for their employees, and this perceived care contributed to improved motivation and reduced stress, thereby enhancing their hedonic wellbeing at work. Participants in the two UK cases also saw workplace design as indicative of their leaders' value toward the business and employees, but with lower expectations regarding the extent of leaders should look after their employees compared to the Chinese cases.

In the two UK cases, participants considered when workplace design met their expectations, particularly in terms of their personal workspace, it contributed to their mood and was closely linked to their hedonic wellbeing. For instance, when they see leaders sacrifice space, such as converting a consultation room into a treatment room, it upsets and disappoints them, as they felt their leaders prioritised money over the quality of the treatment and employees' wellbeing. Apart from room issues, other physical factors, such as indoor temperature and lighting in clinics will be discussed in the following sections.

Indoor temperature

The research shows the importance of indoor temperature at work for employee hedonic wellbeing. Evans and Johnson (2000) found indoor temperature significantly impacts on the physical and psychological wellbeing of employees in the workplace. However, their study

focused on psychology and participants were forty female clerical workers, which differs from the context of this research.

In this research, most participants in the two Chinese cases were satisfied with the indoor temperature at work, as both workplaces had air conditioning for summer and central heating for winter. However, a few participants mentioned instances when they were unhappy with the indoor temperature because they had to accommodate their leaders' and seniors' preferences, which negatively impacted on their wellbeing. For example, CH 1 DR Assistant said: *'it's too hot in the summer… but I can't turn the temperature down because my seniors preferred a higher temperature….'*. When asked why she did not discuss it with her seniors, CH 1 DR Assistant explained because of the hierarchy at work, she was afraid to ask her seniors to lower the temperature lower as her position was lower. Also, because her seniors were older than her, she felt obliged to follow their preferences. As a result, she had to bear the heat that she found challenging. She added: '*I am a bit scared of working in the summer because the heat often makes me irritable and exhausted*', which negatively affected her wellbeing. Similarly, CH 2 Receptionist said she often experienced discomfort during the cold winter days at work. She felt particularly cold because the reception area was near the door, and it became chilly when customers opened the door. Despite this, CH 2 Receptionist had to consider her seniors and follow the most at work, adhering to the workplace hierarchy and Chinese cultural norms. As a result, she chose to use hot water bottles to keep herself warm instead of adjusting the heater to a higher temperature.

Compared to the two Chinese cases, neither of the two UK cases had air conditioners at work. They used electric fans instead in the summer to keep the workplace cool, central heating was used in the winter to keep the workplace warm. Participants in both UK cases mentioned the importance of indoor temperature in the winter. However, some participants in UK 1 complained that the central heating set by leaders was not warm enough, leaving them feeling cold and stressed. For example, UK 1 DR said: '*We were not allowed to turn the electric heaters on unless we had customers, I have to wear my coat to keep warm when it's not warm enough, which is bad for my health and mood'*. UK 1 Receptionist also felt that '*it is harmful to my blood circulation and leaves me stressed'*. When the researcher asked if they reported this issue to their leaders, UK 1 Receptionist said: '*we complained to the leader that it was not warm enough, but they did not make any changes*'. The employees held negative attitudes toward this situation,

believing it showed their leaders did not care about employees' wellbeing, as they felt the decision was made to save money on electric bills at the expense of their health.

Participants at UK 2 were satisfied with the indoor temperature, especially in the winter. Their leader set the central heating to start half an hour before the clinic opened, ensuring that the workplace was already warm when they arrived. Employees appreciated this consideration from the leader and found it motivating. For example, UK 2 DR 1 told the researcher during the interview: '*apart from the central heating, every room also has an electric heater. We can turn it on if we feel it is not warm enough or if customers require a higher temperature*'. UK2 Receptionist was also pleased with the indoor temperature at work, stating that it '*reduces the physical discomfort of cold working conditions and uplifts my mood in the winter*'.

In summary, most participants in the two Chinese cases were satisfied with the indoor temperature at work. However, those who had concerns or complaints did not voice their unhappiness due to the hierarchy at work and adherence to Chinese cultural norms. This research shows that employee wellbeing is influenced by cultural factors. In comparison, in two UK cases, participants in UK 1 who were dissatisfied with the indoor temperature did raise the issue with their leaders but did not see significant changes, which negatively impacted their hedonic wellbeing. Participants in UK 2 were satisfied with the indoor temperature, particular in the winter due to the proactive actions taken by their leader. This suggests that leader actions play an important role in influencing employee hedonic wellbeing.

Lighting

Lighting appeared as another important factor influencing employee hedonic wellbeing in this research. This outcome supports the existing literature that employees who perceive the lighting in the workplace as comfortable could contribute to a more positive mood (Cui et al., 2013) and improve their wellbeing (Evans and Johnson, 2000). Participants in the two Chinese cases expressed satisfaction with the lighting at work. For example, CH 1 DR 2 stated that she '*enjoyed the natural light in the reception area due to the glass door*', which she believed enhanced her mood. CH 1 Manager was also satisfied with the light at work, noting that '*the soft lighting in the waiting area helped to calm the patients and reduce staff's stress*'. In CH 2, the adjustable lighting received high praise from participants, as they found it convenient. For

example, CH 2 DR 1 appreciated the lighting intensity was adjustable because '*it helped me work more efficiently with light-sensitive patients and reduced hassles in my work*'.

In comparison, some participants in UK 1 complained about the lighting at work, stating that insufficient light added to their stress. For example, UK 1 Receptionist felt that there were too many posters on the clinic's windows, which blocked natural light and added to her stress. When the researcher asked her why she did not remove some posters to allow more natural light, she explained that she had tried but her leader insisted on keeping the poster to attract people's attention and promote the clinic's business. As a result, she put the posters back on the window. Similarly, UK 1 DR complained the lighting due to the broken bulbs in the clinic. He said:

> '*Nearly half of the lighting is not working in the clinic… it looks dark from outside…one time, a customer called from outside because he was not sure if we were open. I found that very embarrassing, and it is not a good feeling to work in a dark place...*'.

The researcher asked him why the lighting had not been fixed. He explained that he had reported it to the head office twice but had not receive further response. Then he felt reluctant to ask again as he believed the delay was due to the clinic's recent poor performance. He further explained that reported issues were normally resolved swiftly, especially when the clinic was performing well.

The clinic of UK 2 consists of a ground floor and a lower ground floor, with more rooms located on the lower ground floor. As a result, participants working on the lower ground floor needed to come upstairs to have natural light, which they found inconvenient. Both UK 2 Therapist 1 and UK 2 Therapist 2 mentioned that they felt they lacked Vitamin D as they spent most of their time on the lower ground floor without exposure to natural light. Similarly, UK 2 DR 1 and UK 2 DR 2 said that despite the artificial lighting available on the lower ground floor, they preferred to stay upstairs because of the importance of natural light for both physical and mental health. They felt lucky that doctor's consultation and treatment rooms were located on the ground floor.

In summary, participants in the two Chinese cases expressed satisfaction with lighting at work, and they attributed this positive experience to their leaders. Participants in UK 1 complained about the lighting at work and placed the blame on their leaders. In UK 2, although participants

mentioned a lack of natural light, they acknowledged that it was due to the structure of the building. They understood that their leaders had installed adjustable lighting on the lower ground floor as a compensation, which they acknowledged leader' efforts ad reduced their dissatisfaction. This suggests the significant impact of lighting and leaders' actions on employee hedonic wellbeing.

Facilities at work

In this research, facilities at work refer to the facilities that are important to employees and provide convenience for them to have at work. For example, participants in CH 1 praised the ventilation system at work. CH 1 DR Assistant said: '*it helps reduce the smell from the moxibustion treatment*'. CH 1 DR 2 shared a similar view, she expressed concern over the potential health risks if the ventilation system were ineffective: '*it would be worrying if the ventilation system did not work well, as many patients come for moxibustion treatment. Employees should not have to worry about their own health while treating patients*'.

Participants in CH 2 were pleased with the kitchen facility at work. They found it convenient as they could cook meals and eat with colleagues to improve work relationships. For example, CH 2 Receptionist said: '*It makes me feel like we are a big family… and I eat very well at work because they cook delicious food… I used to order takeaway, and they told me it was not healthy and asked me to join them to eat together*'. Participants also found that cooking and eating together helped them to socialise at work, which helped to strengthen work relationships and reduce work stress.

Participants in UK 1 appreciated having the Thermal Design Power (TDP) infrared lamp in the staff room, as they could use it to improve circulation and relieve symptoms such as muscle pain. Both UK 1 Manager and UK 1 Receptionist found that the TDP infrared lamp helped reduce their lower back and leg pain caused by long time standing at work. UK 1 DR also highlighted this in the interview and said: '*the TDP lamp is essential in treatment rooms as it supports acupuncture treatment but having it in the staff room shows leaders care about employees' health*'.

The clinic of UK 2 offered a storage cabinet for each employee, to allow them to store their belongings at work instead of carrying them to commute. Participants found it convenient and appreciated that leaders provided extra space for employees' convenience, especially considering that UK 2 is a small clinic with limited space. For example, UK 2 Therapist 2 said: *'our leader is considerate because I don't have to carry my uniform and belongings when commuting'*. UK 2 DR 1 also believed it showed '*an indicator of leader caring for employees*'.

In summary, this research shows the importance of the physical work environment and its impact on employee hedonic wellbeing, with cultural factors and the role of leaders playing key roles in this impact. When leaders consider their employees' wellbeing, it is vital to consider factors that impact employee wellbeing, such as creating a pleasant physical work environment that contributes to job satisfaction. Therefore, the physical work environment is seen as an indicator of leaders' values and attitudes toward employee hedonic wellbeing. The researcher will discuss it in more detail in Chapter 5 and 6.

4.3.2 Job demand and job resources

As discussed in 2.3.2, a large number of studies have used the Job-Demand-Resources model (JD-R model) to study how work conditions impact employee wellbeing (e.g. Schaufeli and Taris, 2014; Radic et al., 2020). Job demands are defined as 'the aspects of work that cost energy, like workloads and complex tasks', associated with negative impacts on employees' physical health (Bakker and Demerouti, 2018, p.593). Job demands are considered as work-related stressors indicative of leaders' lack of concern for the wellbeing of their employees (*ibid*). In contrast, job resources are 'the aspects of work that help employees to deal with job demands and achieve their goals'(*ibid*). In this section, the researcher will discuss how the JD-R model is reflected in this research and how it impacts employee wellbeing.

Workload

Workload is defined as variables that reflect the difficulty level of one's work (Bowling et al., 2015). Excessive workload has been considered a work stressor that indicates leaders' lack of concern for the wellbeing of their employees (*ibid*). In addition, a heavy workload may exhaust employees' emotional or physical energy, which is expected to negatively impact employee

wellbeing (*ibid*). In the fieldwork, the researcher found that most participants experienced heavy workloads. However, the factors causing the heavy workload varied, the impacts on employee wellbeing differed, and leaders' actions made a significant difference.

In CH 1, participants expressed different attitudes toward heavy workloads when asked by the researcher about their workload and its impact on their wellbeing. Different from the literature, the researcher found that participants with lighter workloads felt more stressed than those with heavier workloads. For example, CH 1 DR 1 described himself as one of the busiest doctors in CH 1, as he often fully booked with patients. When asked about the impact of his wellbeing, he said although he sometimes felt physically tired, he preferred staying busy at work, he: *'enjoy treating patients, and they come to see me, it means they recognise my professional skills, it adds to my mianzi, makes me feel valued and motivates me'*.

In contrast, CH 1 DR 2 felt concerned and stressed because he was not as busy as his colleagues. He expressed: '*leaders hired me here to work... I want to be busy, at least with a similar workload as others ...I feel really stressed when I am not busy while others are...it makes me feel like I am losing mianzi'*. CH 1 DR Assistant preferred a heavier workload and working with busier doctors, as it '*allowed me to learn more so I could develop myself*'. She added that working with busy doctors boosted her confidence and helped her to gain mianzi. When the researcher asked her about how her workload affected her wellbeing, she said '*it affected my stomach as I often unable to eat on time when it got busy, but it would be more harmful to me if I were not busy, as I would suffer mentally from a lack of work'*.

CH 1 Receptionist shared a similar view with CH 1 DR Assistant, preferring a heavier workload over the stress of being not busy. She said: '*I would rather be busy so I could learn and gain experience than hear complaints about the lack of patients, which I find depressing*'. As can be seen, participants in CH 1 preferred a heavier workload because they found it more stressful when they were not busy. They emphasised the importance of mianzi and noted that being busy helped them earn mianzi and reduced their stress by lowering the chances of hearing complaints from their leaders about the lack of patients.

Excessive workload has been considered as a work stressor that reflects leaders' lack of concern for the wellbeing of their employees (Bowling et al., 2015). This was addressed in CH 2, where

working overtime was the most significant issue affecting employee wellbeing, and most participants complained their leaders for their excessive workloads. Participants who performed well could still be blamed for not working hard enough. For example, CH 2 Manager said: *'the leader believes that spending more time is equal to working hard…she expects others to work as hard as she does…so she asked employees to work overtime…'*.

CH 2 DR 1 often '*felt exhausted and stressed when working with the leader because she always keeps me busy*'. He felt reluctant but had to comply when his leader asked him to practice techniques, even when there were no customers. When the researcher asked if they had tried to discuss their concerns with their leaders, they said that it would not make any difference but left an impression on their leaders that they were unwilling to make efforts at work. For instance, CH 2 DR 1 said: *'One time she asked me to see another customer after I had already worked overtime for about an hour. I was busy the whole day and felt exhausted. Although she let me go home, she told me she thought I was not passionate about my job…I was speechless …'*.

Participants also complained that their leaders often took up their personal time for work, such as sending messages to the WeChat group chat outside of working hours to discuss work-related issues. Participants found it tiring and stressful. For example, CH 2 DR 2 complained her leader sent texts to the WeChat group chat outside working hours and expected prompt replies. She often: '*pretended not to have seen the message unless my name was mentioned'*. This approach caused pressure to her, and she expressed her confusion in the interview: '*what she said could be easily addressed during working hours! Why say it outside working hours?'*.

The researcher asked about the possible outcomes if they chose not to respond to messages outside of working hours. CH 2 DR 2 shared a negative consequence with the researcher by providing an example. She recounted a situation when her leader posted learning materials in the WeChat group and asked them to read and share their views. She didn't reply because she was busy and eventually forgot to reply. When she arrived at work the next day, her leader asked her in front of other colleagues why she had not replied and questioned if she had read the materials. She described this experience as '*extremely embarrassing and distressing', as it caused her to 'lose mianzi in front of others'* and added to her stress at work.

Participants in UK 1 perceived that their stress and excessive workload were mainly from their leaders. They believed that their leaders gave priority to employees who generated higher profits and put pressure on those who failed to meet sales target. As a result, employees felt that they were mainly judged by how much money they made for the clinic, which led to stress about their lack of workload when they did not bring in enough profit. For example, UK 1 DR chose to work longer when he did not have enough bookings or generate enough income. He said:

> *'It is frustrating, as doctors are judged by the number of bookings and the profits they make ...when I do not have many bookings, I get stressed because it could mean the day will ends with not much income... The mental stress is harsher than physical tiredness, especially when the boss checks the daily income. A busy day but not much income is bad, neither money nor customers can guarantee a stressful day...so I always hope at least a busy day'.*

UK 1 Receptionist shared a similar view with the UK DR, saying that failing to meet the sales target due to a lack of workload made her lose confidence, especially when her leader would call to check the daily income. She felt that her confidence was depended on how much money was in the till. She explained:

> *'She often calls the clinic to check how the business is doing, and sometimes she calls more than once...she calls frequently to push us to work harder...we send her the daily record at the end of the day, but obviously, she can't wait for that... when she asks how are you doing, I know she's not interested in how we are, she just want to know the income of the clinic'.*

UK 1 Customer Service Administrator dealt with customer complaints and refund issues. She described her workload as heavy and expressed frustration at being contacted by staff for issues outside her job duties. For example, she mentioned that each month, when the clinic orders herbal products, she gets headaches because branches that do not receive their full orders contact her for help and adds to her workload. She said:

> *'Leaders decided that the better performing clinics can receive more of the products they order, the staff know this, but they still expect me to help them get more of their*

orders, as those products can help them to make money…but that's not my job and it take up my time'.

UK 1 Receptionist also mentioned an increased workload due to the lack of product availability in certain branches. Because she worked in different locations, she was often asked to take products from one branch to another. She recalled: *'One time, I carried 12 boxes of tea from one branch to another… I told them I am a receptionist not a delivery person'*. She found it upsetting to be asked to carry products between different branches and believed it was the leaders' responsibility to ensure enough stock or to balance the supply among branches. She was also disappointed that leader had not addressed this issue, despite it happening frequently. UK 1 Receptionist felt this might be because leaders wanted to create competition among branches to improve sales.

UK 1 Manager described his concerns about the unnecessary workload, specifically mentioning issues with the ordering of herbal products. He worried this could become a vicious circle, as branches that performed well received more products, helping them to generate more profits. Meanwhile, branches generated less were left needing to work harder to reach sales target without enough herbal product stock. UK 1 Manager raised this issue of insufficient stock for certain branches with the leaders, but he found that leaders did not consider stock shortages a factor when reviewing clinic performance. He said:

> *'She has eyes only for the profits…she will put more pressure on you if you fail to reach the sales target…I told her the need to provide enough products, otherwise it would affect sales and add to staff workloads and work pressures… but she told me she didn't want those excuses…'*.

As shown, most participants expressed disappointment over this long-standing yet unsolved issue, which added to their workload and stress.

Most participants in UK 2 were satisfied with their workloads, especially valuing the flexibility available to them at work. For example, UK 2 Therapist 1 was happy that she could ask to finish 30 minutes earlier than others because her long commute. She also requested 15 minutes breaks between each booking so she could take her time to prepare rooms and have a short break. She

emphasised the importance of this flexibility, saying: *'I appreciated that my leader allows me to have breaks between bookings. Most employers I have worked for expected me to take as many bookings as possible to maximise their profits'*.

Similarly, UK 2 DR 2 expressed satisfaction with both his workload and the flexibility he had at work. Initially, he found the workload challenging due to issues with booking arrangements. He sometimes had no bookings in the morning but four or five in the afternoon, which left him feeling tired with limited time to eat or rest. He suggested to his leader that receptionists should leave breaks between bookings and learn to manage bookings effectively. UK 2 DR 2 said his leader accepted his suggestion, and even though his overall workload continued to increase, he felt happy as the leader listened, made bookings more manageable, and an increasing number of patients also proved his work ability. He said:

> *'Although the days I work are still busy. but I now have breaks between bookings…I feel less tired and less stressed because I don't need to rush…customers are also happy because I have enough time to do their treatments'.*

UK 2 DR 1 and UK 2 Therapist 2 also expressed their happiness during the interviews about being able to request a maximum number of daily bookings. For instance, UK 2 DR 1 said that he asked receptionist to book no more than seven bookings per day for him, as taking on more would make it difficult for him to cope. Most participants at UK 2 appreciated their leaders for providing flexibility with their workloads, which enhanced their job satisfaction, reduced their work stress, and motivated them to work harder in return.

According to CIPD (2020), a heavy workload is one of the most common reasons that negatively impacts on employee wellbeing. As discussed above, a heavy workload can lead to employees feeling stress, anxiety, headaches, exhaustion, and other issues. The research supports the outcomes of the CIPD report and the existing literature. However, it also shows that a lack of workload can negatively affect employees' hedonic wellbeing, such as causing employees to feel panic and stress. Many participants experienced heavy workloads at their clinics. While some perceived this as having a negative impact on their wellbeing, others, in contrast to the existing literature, perceived it as a positive influence. For example, participants in the two Chinese cases expressed that a lighter workload caused them more stress than a heavier

workload. The main concern was the fear of losing mianzi in front of colleagues or leaders, especially among senior employees, who felt more stress with lighter workloads compared to when their workloads were heavier. They preferred heavier workloads over the anxiety associated with having less work to do.

The researcher further explored other concerns apart from losing mianzi. Participants attributed their increased stress from lighter workloads to their leaders. For example, participants in CH 1 stated that having a lighter workload resulted in increased stress and frustration because their leaders would criticise them and even question their professionalism. Similarly, participants in CH 2 related their preferences for heavier workloads to their leaders' actions. When they were not busy at work, their leaders assigned additional work tasks to keep them busy. Moreover, they perceived that their leaders valued hardworking employees, so they felt compelled to keep busy, sometimes even pretending to be busy to please their leaders. Participants in the two Chinese cases believed that heavy workloads helped them reduce work-related stress. This outcome contributes to the literature by highlighting that heavy workload can also have a positive impact on employee hedonic wellbeing in the context of SME health services.

In contrast, participants in UK 1 related their excessive workloads to their leaders' actions. Apart from UK 1 DR preferred a heavier workload, fearing that having less work would result in a loss of mianzi and increase his stress, other participants expressed that the excessive workload negatively impacted their wellbeing. They believed their heavy workloads were due to their leaders' failure to effectively monitor their workloads and make relevant adjustments to reduce them. In addition, participants in UK 1 perceived their leaders prioritised sales targets over providing adequate support to help them achieve those targets. This lack of support disappointed them and increased their stress levels, which had a negative impact on their hedonic wellbeing. This outcome aligns with the literature that excessive workload and a lack of job resources, such as support from leaders, negatively affect employee wellbeing (Bakker and Demerouti, 2018).

On the other hand, participants in UK 2 expressed their satisfaction with their workloads. They particularly appreciated the flexibility and control they had in managing their workloads, which was supported by their leaders. This aligns with the literature indicating that the level of control employees have over their work can influence their stress levels (Robertson and Cooper, 2011).

In addition, leader support acts as a motivating job characteristic that provides employees' need for autonomy (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

4.3.3 Work stress

Stress plays a crucial role in influencing employee wellbeing in the workplace (Danna and Griffins, 1999). Work stress is linked to factors that influence employee wellbeing, including work relationships and job security (Robertson and Cooper, 2011). The fieldwork shows that participants in the two Chinese cases perceived maintaining good relationships with their leaders and colleagues adding to their word stress. Many participants in CH 1 appreciated having various entertaining activities at the clinic, as these gave them opportunities to impress their leaders and form good relationships with their colleagues. However, they also experienced stress from the demands of forming and maintaining good work relationships. Participants perceived work relationships were important to their work, with both positive and negative impacts on their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing.

Similarly, participants in CH 2 experienced stress from forming good relationships with their leaders to gain job security. While achieving job security helped reduce stress in some respects, they suffered stress in maintaining good work relationships, which impacted both positively and negatively on their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. In comparison, participants in the two UK cases expressed limited concerns about stress related to work relationships and job security, which identified by Robertson and Cooper (2011) as key factors influencing employee wellbeing. This research shows that work-related stress significantly impacts employee wellbeing in SME health services. The following section will explore in more detail how job security and work relationships impact employee wellbeing in this research context.

Job security

Job security causes stress from the level of job security perceived by employees (Johnson et al., 2005). This research shows participants perceived their job security from different aspects, each with different impacts on their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. Most participants in CH 1 perceived work relationships as crucial to gaining job security. CH 1 Receptionist said: *'in addition to performing well in my job, it is crucial to have a good relationship with others at*

work'. She shared an example and explained how a good work relationship helped her to make a good impression on her leader:

> *'One of my close colleague told me our leader would be coming in the afternoon to discuss the marketing campaign… I used my lunch break to organise the necessary documents, and when the leader arrived, I was able to hand them over promptly. He praised my efficiency…. without my good relationship with my colleague, I would not have known about that information…. I grasped that opportunity to show my capabilities and left a good impression on the leader that I believed helped reinforce my position….'.*

CH 1 DR Assistant also found that forming a good relationship with others at work enhanced her sense of job security, as it helped her to leave a good impression on her leaders. She felt that the good relationships provided reassurance of lowering the possibility of being laid off. She explained: '*having good relationships at work allows you to receive immediate information, especially when you have a good relationship with leaders, it ensures the security of your job*'.

Most participants in the clinic of CH 2 linked their job security with their leaders' attitudes, such as leaders' satisfaction towards them. Many found it stressful to meet their leaders' expectations to gain job security. For example, both CH 2 DR 1 and CH 2 DR 2 noted that their leaders had preferred ways of working. In order to make their leaders happy, they felt compelled to praise their leaders' ways of working, even when they disagreed with their leaders. CH 2 DR 1 said: '*I have my own ways for diagnosis and treatment, but I need to listen and follow the leader's approach to make prescriptions and to show I am listening and following what the leader says'.*

CH 2 Receptionist also complained to the researcher, saying she often had to do things she *'hate'* to please the leader. For example, her leader asked her to go through patient records to find those patients who had not visited recently and to contact them to encourage booking future appointments. She found it stressful as she felt it was not polite and professional. She explained:

> *'She wants those clients back, especially those with prepaid treatments…I find it embarrassing and stressful to call customers and ask them to come, it makes me feel like a salesperson…. but if I don't do what she asks, she will get angry and ask me if that means I don't want to work here or want this job anymore'.*

Therefore, despite bearing the pressure, CH 2 Receptionist said she followed her leader's instructions to keep her leader happy so that she felt more secure about her position. She said: *'I tried to make as few call as possible to reduce my embarrassment and pressure....she wouldn't check one by one....'.*

CH 2 Manager expressed feeling stress when asked by leader to select the best monthly report written by staff to receive rewards. He said: *'I know staff put a lot of effort into writing these reports because the leader highly value it, and the best one always gets a reward...but it is stressful for me to make the decision because I know it affects them'*. He added that every month, before making his selection on the best monthly report, employees would often approach him to ask if he could favour their reports. He noted: *'those whose reports have been selected before are less worried, but those who haven't been selected are very anxious about their job security'*. Similarly, CH 2 DR 2 shared her reluctance to write the monthly report, saying that she felt it *'takes up my time, but I have to do it'* to meet the leaders' expectations to ensure her job security. She said: *'the leader believes writing monthly reports helps us improve our skills by allowing us to review our performance and identify areas for improvement...but many of us find it time-consuming and only the best report gets a reward'*.

Most participants in UK 1 did not expressed concerns about job security. They perceived that their leaders at UK 1 valued employees based primarily on the profits they generated for the clinic. Therefore, they linked their job security to their work performance. In other words, employees who performed better felt they had higher job security. For example, UK 1 DR said: *'I know as long as I make money for the clinic, my job is safe.... the leader values profit the most'*. Some participants in UK 1 who also gained their sense of job security from getting paid on time. For instance, UK 1 Customer Service Administrator said: *'This may sound ridiculous, but there are many places that do not pay employees on time, which makes them worry about job security... here, we always get paid on time, so I feel secure working here...it boost our job satisfaction'*.

When the researcher asked participants in UK 2 about their job security, most expressed confidence in their job security. They said even on less busy days at work, they felt secure, and they credit the job security to their leaders. For example, UK 2 DR 2 said: *'there was one bank*

holiday when I had no customer or booking, I was distraught that I would be blamed for not doing any work and it would affect my work here, but the leader did not blame me and paid me as usual'. UK 2 DR 2 felt grateful for not being blamed by his leader, so he suggested to his leader that he would prefer not to work on bank holidays when there were no customers booked in advance. He said: '*the leader is so kind, when I told him my suggestion, he even asked me, are you sure, I told him definitely, and I am happy to adjust my days in return for his kindness, I don't want to come in to do nothing but get paid'*.

Work relationships

Work relationships include relations among employees and between employees and their leaders (Johnson et al., 2005). Work relations cause stress due to the contacts employees have at work with their colleagues and leaders (*ibid*). Participants in the two Chinese cases valued the importance of work relationships, showing that the effort to form and maintain these relationships was a significant source of stress that negatively affected their wellbeing. They considered work relations as a main stressor in the workplace.

In CH 1, participants highlighted the importance of maintaining good work relationships, especially for employees who are not performing well. They often need to work harder to develop their skills and improve their relationships with their superiors, even though it cause them stress. For instance, CH 1 DR Assistant shared how she learned to have Yanlijianer (an ability to read the room) to maintain a good work relationship. She said:

> *'I often buy my coffee and bring it to work, one of my colleagues said she likes this coffee as well but hasn't drunk it for a while…I sensed she expected me to buy one for her… so I did next day…she looked surprised, but since then, she has helped me more at work'.*

CH 1 Receptionist said she socialises with colleagues outside of working hours to form a good work relationship. She described it as stressful but worthwhile, because she noticed that those who do not socialise often face more difficulties and inconveniences at work as they were not being seen as 'part of the group' (合群 hequn). As a result, they are often assigned more challenging tasks at work, such as checking inventory.

Most participants in the clinic of CH 2 described their work relationships as harmonious, with colleagues helping each other to maintain a good work relationship. For example, CH 2 DR 2 said:

> *'We have good relationship at work, if my colleagues have health-related questions, they will come to me for advice…and I will ask them for help if I need it…for example, the receptionist always helps me place online orders as they are good at technology…it saves me a lot of time'.*

CH 2 DR 1 shared a similar view to CH 2 DR 2, as he told the researcher that he often learn new things from young colleagues at work, such as how to download apps on his iPad. However, he expressed frustrations with his leader, who criticised him in front of others, causing him lose mianzi at work.

In contrast, participants in the two UK cases did not consider work relations as a main cause of stress at work. They viewed the workplace as a place for work rather than socialising. For example, UK 1 Customer Service Administrator said:

> *'I come to work not to make friends…it would be nice to get along with others, otherwise I just concentrate on my work. My job is solve customer complaints, which is stressful enough, I don't want to get more stress from my colleagues'.*

UK 1 DR compared his TCM work experience in the UK to China, noted that the main difference he found was in work relationships. He further explained that in China, he needed to spend time and make efforts to form and maintain a good work relationship. While in the UK, he mainly focused on work itself. He said:

> *'It is important to have a good work relationship with others at work in China…Socialising with colleagues is normal because you don't want to exclude yourself from the group…I used to go out with them and drink a lot…even though I knew it was not healthy…but in the UK, I can have time for myself'.*

UK 1 Receptionist said that while she values good relationships at work, it is not her priority. If she finds it challenging to work with someone, she feels comfortable asking the leader to change her schedule to work different days without worrying about how it may impact on work relationships. She said:

> *'It doesn't bother me much as you can't expect your colleagues to share your value, especially with colleagues from different countries… at the end of the day, you get paid on your work performance not on your relations with others…'.*

UK 1 DR found it shocking to see how branches fought to get herbal products and how orders were allocated in UK 1. He said:

> *'No matter who you are or how long you have been working…they don't care…branches that perform the best always get the popular products first, and the popular products sell quickly then make more money….'.*

He further explained that he found this approach shocking because in China, leaders will consider mianzi, especially for those senior employees. In contrast, at UK 1, leaders valued work performance and profits the most, with less concern for how their decisions may affect employees.

Participants in UK 2 rarely complained about their relationships at work, whether with their colleagues or leaders. For example, UK 2 Receptionist told the researcher she has worked in UK 2 for over three years and finds her leader easy to work with. She said:

> *'I don't see my leader often, but I feel comfortable with him. When I send him the daily record, he always responds, if I did well, I often get a thumbs-up emoji or well done, and it was an average day, I will get an ok. I also I feel comfortable to text him if I have any work-related questions'.*

UK 2 DR 2 also said that he felt comfortable working with others, including his leader. He said:

'I rarely contact him… I don't need to worry about maintaining relations with him like I did in other TCM clinics, I feel less pressure and I don't have to force myself to do things I don't want to…I can have my own time and enjoy my life working here'.

When the researcher asked him to elaborate on what he meant by 'force myself to do things I don't want to'. UK 2 DR 2 said, in other TCM clinics, he used to do night shifts and was often asked by colleagues to cover additional shifts, especially during school holidays, because he lives alone in the UK without family. He said: *'They assume I have nothing to do apart from working here, as my family is in China. When I tried to explain that I had things to do, they would question me as if I were lying or making excuses just to avoid doing them a favour…'.*

4.4 Meaning of employee wellbeing

The fieldwork shows the importance of hedonic and eudemonic aspects in understanding employee wellbeing from the perspectives of leaders and employees in the context of SME health services in China and the UK. Hedonic aspects include elements such as happiness, the physical work environment, workload, work stress, job security, and work relationships. Eudemonic aspects include employee development, work relationships, leaders' care, and work engagement. Moreover, the research shows the importance of employee benefits, and the different understanding of employee benefits in different cultural contexts from the perspectives of leaders and employees, reflecting both hedonic and eudemonic aspects. For example, in the Chinese context, employee benefits include financial aspects and leaders' care including employee development and social activities. In the UK context, employee benefits mainly refer to financial aspects and employee development. Therefore, the meaning of employee wellbeing consists hedonic and eudemonic benefits.

4.5 Summary

This chapter discussed the understanding of employee wellbeing from the perspectives of both leaders and employees, which varies in different cultural contexts and between employees and leaders. The research reveals the importance of employee benefits, which are understood

differently in different cultural contexts and between employees and leaders. Besides, the literature indicated that workload is negatively related to employee wellbeing. This research supports the literature and shows a negative impact of workload on employee hedonic wellbeing. However, it also shows a positive relationship between workload and employee wellbeing in the Chinese context due to the influence of cultural factor mianzi. Moreover, work relationship is emphasised more in the Chinese context than in the UK context regarding the impact on employee hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. These outcomes show the role of culture in influencing how employees perceive the effects of workload on their hedonic wellbeing.

The research also shows the importance of culture and leadership on employee hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. Leaders' understanding of employee wellbeing influences their actions that impact on employee wellbeing. Moreover, leaders took different actions to enhance employee wellbeing based on their understanding of employee wellbeing. For example, in the Chinese context, leaders perceived harmonious work relationships as important in employee wellbeing, thus CH 1 organised social activities for employees, while CH 2 provided a kitchen and encouraged employees to eat together. In the UK, the leader at UK 1 perceived employees benefits as important in employee wellbeing and therefore offered competitive bonuses to incentivise employees. UK 2 Leader emphasised employee happiness in employee wellbeing. Therefore, he listened to employees' suggestions and made relevant adjustments to keep employees happy.

The research highlights the importance of the physical, psychological and social aspects of employee wellbeing in the context of SME health services in China and the UK. It explores how the physical work environment affects employee wellbeing in different cultural contexts and uses the JD-R model to explain critical factors that impact employee wellbeing, including workload, work stress, job security and work relationships. The research also indicates the important role of leader support in promoting employee wellbeing (Johnson et al., 2018). For example, participants who expressed concerns about their workload suggested that leaders should monitor workload levels and make relevant adjustments if they cared about employee wellbeing. Besides, participants perceived certain leader actions, such as providing the required resources for their work, contributed to their work engagement and job satisfaction, thus contributed to their wellbeing. This outcome supports the literature indicating a positive

association between employee involvement, participation, job satisfaction and employee wellbeing (Crawford et al., 2010).

Chapter 5 Culture and Employee Wellbeing

5.1 Introduction

The research shows culture impact on employee wellbeing differs in different cultural contexts such as in China and the UK. As stated in section 2.4.1, culture in this research is defined as shared values, understandings and behaviours patterns of groups of people. There were cross-cultural studies on differences in cultural values in China and the UK, such as Chen and Partington (2004) and Ju (2013). However, previous studies were not particularly focused on the culture impact on employee wellbeing and were conducted in different research contexts from this research. For example, Ju (2013) examined online advertising effectiveness. There were also studies, such as He and Filimonau (2000), used Hofstede's and Trompenaars' culture theories to explore the effect of national culture in China and the UK, however, their research were focused on consumption and in specific consumption markets. There is limited research on culture impact on employee wellbeing in the context of SME health services in China and the UK, where this research is to address this gap. Moreover, this research applies cultural theories of Hofstede, Hall, and Trompenaars to explore the impact of cultural dimensions from these three theories on employee wellbeing in China and the UK and analyses the similarities and differences between the outcomes of the fieldwork and the existing literature.

5.2 Hofstede's cultural theory and employee wellbeing

Hofstede's cultural theory has been applied in this research and shows various degrees of its impact on employee wellbeing in China compared to the UK. Previous studies on Hofstede cultural theory impact in China and the UK were conducted in contexts different from this research. For example, Chen and Partington (2004) identified power distance as one of Hofstede's cultural dimensions that shows significant differences between China and the UK, but their research conducted with construction project managers and did not focus on the cultural impact on employee wellbeing. There were also studies that examined values of individualism and collectivism in China and the UK, such as Sun et al. (2004), however, their study focused on consumer lifestyles differences in the subject of marketing. The context of this research is

SME health services in China and the UK, and the following sections will explain in more detail on how Hofstede cultural theory impacts on employee wellbeing in the research context.

5.2.1 Power distance

This research shows the power distance dimension exerts a greater influence on employee wellbeing in China than in the UK. Power distance, as explained in section 2.4.2, indicates how a society deals with inequalities distributions of power among people (Hofstede, 2011) and manifests in different ways at work, including work relationships, decision-making, and communication channels (Hofstede, 2005). The fieldwork outcomes align with the existing literature as these three aspects also show their important influence on employee wellbeing and will be discussed below.

Work relationships

Work relationships appear to have a stronger impact on employee wellbeing in China than in the UK. In both Chinese cases, employees preferred to receive instructions from leaders and senior colleagues, as it demonstrated their respect for authority and helped to maintain a harmonious relationship with them. This agrees with the existing literature that in high power distance culture, the acceptance of power inequality and the emphasis on respect for age and hierarchy are prominent (Hofstede, 2001). However, when the researcher asked participants to share their perceptions and feelings about following instructions from their leaders and seniors for the purpose of a good relationship, many expressed that they felt obliged to comply with their leaders and seniors and associated it negatively with their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. For example, CH 1 DR Assistant acknowledged that: '*I do what leaders tell me, even tasks beyond my job responsibility, such as tidy up their office or pick up their parcels....to maintain a good relationship with them*'. When asked by the researcher how it affected her wellbeing. She said:

> '*I don't feel happy or motivated doing things that I felt obliged to…it is frustrating when I have new ideas but have to hold them back because I fear they may clash with theirs and damage the relationships*'.

CH 1 DR 1 similarly expressed dissatisfaction with feeling obliged to adopt his leaders' ways of working. He said:

> *'I have my preferred way of working…. I don't like they always correct me and tell me their way is better and want me to follow …, but because they are leaders, I tend to hide my frustration to avoid tension in the relationship'*.

When asked to elaborate on his unhappiness and its impact on his hedonic wellbeing. CH 1 DR 1 explained: '*I find maintaining work relationships tiring. Arguing or expressing different opinions with leaders or seniors are stressful and distract me from my work*'. Therefore, he chose to tolerate and follow leaders and seniors, at least in front of them.

CH 1 Receptionist also complained about the instructions from her leaders and seniors that she was unwilling but had to follow but felt obliged to, such as leaders asked her to share their workloads. She said: '*my senior always leaves some of her work for me to do…it upset me as she takes it for granted and makes me feel my time is not valuable…, but I can't question her, it will ruin the relationship'*. CH 1 Receptionist said sometimes she found it challenging to cope with her seniors' work, especially when it clashed with her own timetable. She said: '*even when I am busy, I still need to prioritise her work and spend more time and efforts on them to maintain a good relationship with her'*. When asked by the researcher how this affected her wellbeing, CH 1 Receptionist said: '*questioning leaders or seniors could be seen as a lack of respect for authority and age, it will add more stress as well as affect the work relationship…but you can also get stress when you need to tolerate them to obey them to consolidate the relationship*'.

CH 1 DR Assistant shared a similar view to CH 1 Receptionist on the importance of a good work relationship and its impact on her wellbeing. She described her early experiences at work as difficult because she was assigned a heavy workload and felt neglected by her leaders and seniors. This situation changed when she learned to have Yanlijianer (眼力见儿), a phrase that means being discerning or acting according to circumstances. This term frequently mentioned by other participants in the two Chinese cases during the fieldwork. The researcher asked her to elaborate on how she found Yanlijianer beneficial for her work relationships and how work relationships impacted on her wellbeing. She explained that when she first started work, she

mainly focused on her assigned job duties and neglected the importance of forming good work relationships with others. She overheard her leaders talked about how she lacked Yanlijianer as she lacked the awareness to help and build good relationships with others, especially her leaders and seniors. This led her to reflect on herself and realise that her hard work alone was not enough, and she had been isolated by her colleagues and overlooked by her leaders. She said:

> *'Having Yanlijianer is not easy, as it needs constant observation of what is happening...but I realised I had failed to form a good relationship with others which may cost me my job...but to be honest, I don't like it, I feel tired even just think about it'.*

She provided examples of how she learned to have Yanlijianer, such as arriving early to clean the clinic, making tea for her leaders, and offering help to her leaders and colleagues. Although she found it tiring, she forced herself to tolerate it to form a good relationship with others. Over time, she noticed improvements in her work relationships as she received more attention and praise from her leaders and colleagues, which enhanced her hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing at work. She said: *'I feel happier now as I used to be assigned tasks that no one else wanted ...but now I have more opportunities to take on tasks that allow me to I learn and develop'*. When discussed how these changes affected her wellbeing, CH 1 DR Assistant said:

> *'On one hand, I am glad to have a good work relationship as I now get better tasks, but on the other hand, I am not happy about always having to tolerate and follow my leaders and seniors by doing things that I did not want to, just to maintain a good work relationship'.*

She said she often felt exhausted after work and stayed up late, even though she knew it was harmful to her health. She said: *'I just need some time to be myself because I can't be myself at work…. doing things I don't want to do drains my energy'.*

The presence of power distance in work relationships perceived by participants also shows that senior employees hold priority over junior employees, even when they are not in managerial positions, this is seen as negatively impact to their wellbeing. For example, CH 1 DR 2 complained that *'younger employees and those worked for shorter time need to give priority to their seniors'*. He gave an example of scheduling work, noted that leaders always give priority

to senior doctors. Thus, he often had to work on the days left by senior doctors and handle the tasks that seniors left behind. CH 1 DR 2 expressed his frustration:

> *'The senior doctor I work with always leaves the treatment room messy, so I have to go to work early to prepare the room…he should make it ready for others, but I know leaders would not blame him as he is a senior and has a good relationship with leaders'.*

This quote represents just one of many examples provided by participants during the fieldwork that indicates the unequal treatment among employees and its negative impact on employee wellbeing. Despite employees like CH 1 DR 2 expressing complaints, when asked if they would voice their dissatisfaction or concerns to their leaders, they expressed they were reluctant to do so due to the potential risk of damaging work relationships. Instead, they expected their leaders to identify problems and implement relevant changes to improve their wellbeing. They preferred not to engage in gossip or discussion behind others' backs as such actions could negatively affect work relationships, and thus their wellbeing. For example, CH 1 Receptionist expressed her stress when her leaders asked her to provide information about what was happening in the clinic. She said she struggled to share her real thoughts with leaders as she feared if others found out that she had shared information with leaders, it would damage her relationship with them.

Similarly, CH 1 Manager experienced stress when she needed to meet with her leaders, because leaders often scheduled or cancelled meetings on short notice or at the last minute. As a result, she found it stressful to approach her leaders unless it was urgent because she feared to bother leaders or face blame from leaders. She said:

> *'They blamed me for not mentioning some problems earlier…but I can't say it is because they didn't give me much chance to tell them… but I have to take the blame and pretend it is my fault because leaders are always right'.*

The phrase 'leaders are always right' reflects CH 1 Manager's acceptance of unequal power. It also explains why employees prefer to follow their leaders' instructions rather than express their different opinions, even towards the unequal power. Employees choose to endure pressure from their leaders as they believe that challenging their leaders would create more problems or worsen

the situation. For example, CH 1 DR 1 said: *'You are Chinese as well… will you challenge your leader?... unless you don't want to work for them anymore'*.

In CH 2, participants expressed experiencing varying degrees of tiredness and demotivation from following their leader's instructions and maintaining work relations, which were negatively associated with their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. For example, CH 2 DR 1 said:

> *'I used to share my thoughts when leaders sought alternative ideas, but I soon realised that they saw it as disrespect and not unhappy with me expressing different ideas, especially if my ideas clash or better than theirs'.*

He adapted himself by choosing to stay quiet and follow the directives of his leaders, but then he found it resulted in reduced work motivation and job satisfaction. CH 2 Receptionist experienced stress and frustrations when she was told by her leaders and seniors about '*what is the right thing to do*' and she had to act what her leaders and seniors expected her to do to maintain a good relationship with them. However, she said she felt tired of obeying her seniors, especially when they interfered with her non-work-related decisions. She gave an example of receiving criticism for ordering milk tea and fast food, and she being told that they were unhealthy and wasted money. She said:

> *'I work hard and like to treat myself sometimes, but I don't like they criticise about how I should spend my own money, whenever they lecture me on how to spend wisely, I really want to say it is my money, and you are not my parents! but I can't…it would break the relationship, so I have to tolerate it even if I am not happy about it'.*

Similarly with participants in CH 1, participants in CH 2 also complained about the negative impact that maintaining work relationships had on their wellbeing, such as sharing their leaders' or seniors' workloads. For example, CH 2 DR 2 described it as '*a thankless job that only resulted in criticism*'. CH 2 Receptionist also said:

> '*I felt frustrated and stressed with the additional workloads especially I could be blamed for not performing well.... I can't show my unwillingness as it will ruin the relationships, but I feel drained because I receive one wage but do more than one person's work*'.

These quotes show that although employees were unwilling to take on their leaders' or seniors' workloads, which added to their own workload and stress without receiving rewards, they still followed their leaders and seniors to maintain work relationships. When the researcher asked them about the impact on their wellbeing, they used negative words to describe, such as 'stress', 'suffer', 'tolerate' and 'frustrations'. For example, CH 2 Receptionist expressed that she found it challenging to question her leaders and seniors, and she needed to continue obeying them at the cost of her own wellbeing, unless she decided to leave the job. CH 2 DR 2 shared a similar view as she said:

> '*You don't want to challenge your leaders as long as you still work for them and want to keep your job...for me, it not easy to get this job, and I don't want to lose it just because I am not happy with someone at work or because I can't express different ideas to my leaders....*'.

Participants in CH 2 frequently mentioned Yanlijianer and emphasised its importance in forming good work relationships and impacting their wellbeing. For instance, CH 2 Therapist said she not only followed her leaders' instructions, but also sometimes volunteered to take on extra work to maintain a good relationship with leaders. She said: '*When working with leaders, it is important to have Yanlijianer, it helps me to know what to do to impress them...the leader values hardworking and obedient employees....so I work hard in front of her and never doubt her decisions*'. When the researcher asked her how this impacted on her wellbeing, she said:

> '*It is tiring because I need to observe and assess what helps to build a good relationship, but it is worth it. Good relations give you more opportunities at work, such as increases in bonuses or promotion opportunities*'.

CH 2 Receptionist also highlighted the importance of good relationships at work. She said it took her time to learn how to work with leaders and described the learning process as '*painful*' because she often received blame from her leader, which made her doubt her competence to

continue her job. However, she gradually noticed that when she stayed busy or worked hard while working with her leader, she received less blame:

> *'You can't wait for her to give you work to do because it will annoy her…I often leave some work on purpose to keep myself busy when I work with her…she is happy when she sees us busy… sometimes I even volunteer to take on extra work when working with her to show I am hardworking'.*

CH 2 Receptionist believed that having Yanlijianer helped her work with leaders like CH 2 Leader. She said:

> *'Working in small clinics is less stressful than working in big hospitals as the work relationships are relatively easier…. the most important thing is to have a good relationship with leaders as they pay your wages and support your career development'.*

She added that in order to form and maintain a good work relationship with her leaders, she had to give up some of her preferred ways of working, such as behaviours that she felt comfortable with. Despite these changes and challenges, she found it worthwhile because she received less blame so that less stress at work.

The fieldwork in the Chinese cases suggests that employees chose to endure pressures and comply with their leaders' directives to maintain harmonious work relationships. They were reluctant to express their dissatisfaction because they feared that it would be perceived as a lack of respect towards their leaders, which could negatively affect their relationship with their leaders. Employees perceived a good relationship with their leaders helped them with their employee benefits, such as wage increases and more opportunities for career development, which were directly linked to their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. However, the endurance and tolerance towards their leaders also result in a negative impact on employees' wellbeing.

To better understand how to improve employee wellbeing in SME health services in China, the researcher not only explored the impact of work relationships on employee wellbeing from the employees' perspectives of in the two Chinese cases, but also from the perspectives of leaders. CH 1 Leader acknowledged the importance of work relationships. He said he did not often work

in the clinic with employees, so he recruited experienced managers to manage the daily work of the clinic. While he was aware of some work relationships issues in the clinic, he stated his schedule was too busy that he dislike the idea of employees could approach him directly to report what he considered '*unnecessary*' issues. He said: *'I am the leader… I only need to deal with problems that cannot be solved by managers… as for who don't like work with who, I don't have time for that'*. He believed that '*having a good relationship at work is considered as a kind of work ability'*, and he encouraged managers to improve their problem-solving skills and appreciate those who identified problems and proposed solutions. CH 1 Leader acknowledged the hierarchical structure in addressing problems. That is, employees reported their issues to managers, and managers reported those they can't solve themselves to leaders. CH 1 Leader perceived employees reporting directly to leaders about their concerns as 'jumping the level', which he perceived as a lack of respect.

CH 2 Leader often works in the clinic with employees. She highlighted the importance of hierarchy in work relations and expressed her disappointment about the current trends. She said:

> *'Nowadays, employees are showing less respect for hierarchical norms and authority, increasingly disregarding traditional norms…. They have been influenced by Western culture…which has led to a lack of respect for their leaders and seniors…. In our Chinese culture, it is very important to obey and respect leaders'.*

She expressed her concerns about the trend of employees deviating from established norms. Reflecting on her own experience, she said: *'If my leader asks me to go east, I will never go in the opposite direction. I would not say the word 'no'…. This is what we call adhering to norms'*. The quotes from CH 2 Leader indicates her belief that employees should conform to the established norms and follow the directives set by leaders as a display of respect. CH 2 Leader also expressed that she highly values employees who proactively find tasks to do at work. She considered this initiative as a crucial quality of a good employee, believing that spending more time at work shows greater commitment. She explained: *'when you are not busy at work, what do you do indicate your future…some people just sit there and play with their phones, while others make the best of their time to practice and learn'*.

CH 2 believed a good work relationship can help employees to learn and develop faster, but she also recognised it may cause problems, such as employees covering each other. She said: '*I know some of them do not like to work with me and behave differently when I am not in the clinic, because I often check the clinic's CCTV to monitor their work performance*'. She gave an example, on one occasion, she noticed that no staff were visible on the CCTV, she thought they were busy, as the cameras did not cover the treatment rooms. However, when she went back to the clinic, she found that the receptionist and doctors were watching a movie in the treatment room. She recalled: '*they panicked when they saw me, obviously they knew they were wrong...I was angry and realised good work relationships can also create problems, such as enable them to cover for each other*'. CH 2 Leader believed employees were taking advantage of the treatment rooms not being covered by CCTV, deliberately staying out of the camera's view and pretending they were busy. She said: '*they thought they could cover up each other's laziness because the daily sales records only noted when payments were made...*'. Since then, she decided to tighten her management in the clinic, such as periodically changing employees' work schedules to prevent them from forming good relationships that could potentially enable them to deceive her.

The research shows that participants in China prefer to receive instructions from their leaders, as they believe it demonstrates their respect for authority and helps to maintain a harmonious relationship with their leaders. This supports the existing literature identified in other research contexts that employees in high power distance cultures are encouraged to follow the rules and guidance provided by leaders, rarely questioning their instructions (Ashkanasy, 2002). Moreover, this research shows that employees in China are willing to express their opinions or raise concerns as long as it does not negatively affect their work relationships. This suggests that Chinese employees also value autonomy at work, but due to the influence of the high-power distance culture, they tend to prioritise following their leaders' instructions, leading to negative effects such as demotivation and unhappiness that relate to their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. This outcome is different from the existing literature that harmony is emphasised in China to achieve higher levels of wellbeing in contrast to Western cultures that emphasise autonomy in wellbeing (Gao et al., 2010).

In comparison to the Chinese cases, work relations in the UK cases appear to have less impact on employee wellbeing. Participants in the UK cases did not highlight the importance of

maintaining work relationships to the same extent as those in the Chinese cases. Participants in the two UK cases perceived work relationships as having a limited impact on their wellbeing and did not expect their leaders to look after them with their personal difficulties. This aligns with the literature that work relations between leaders and employees in Britain are characterised as impersonal and task oriented (Tayeb, 1994). Moreover, British employees often perceive leaders interfering with their personal difficulties as an invasion of privacy (*ibid*).

In the clinic of UK 1, participants including the Chinese participant perceived a limited impact of work relationships on their wellbeing. For example, UK 1 DR has experience of working in both China and the UK, he believed that Chinese employees experience less unequal power at work in the UK compared to China. He shared his experience and highlighted the significant differences he perceived and experienced in work relationships between the two countries. He described work relationships in China as stressful and emphasised that employees were often judged based on their work relationships in addition to their work performance. While in the UK, he experienced less hierarchical in work relations with his leaders and colleagues, with work performance holding greater significance and decisive value than work relationships. He provided an example of his response:

> '*When I worked in China, I rarely confronted my leaders or colleagues, even when facing pressure or unequal treatment, because I knew it would cause me trouble, especially regarding work relationships*'.

However, in the UK, he noticed that '*work relationships are not a crucial factor because leaders placed more emphasis on employees' abilities and work performance*'. He said the emphasis on work performance in UK 1 motivated him and reduced his work stress on work relationships, as he '*can focus on work itself*' rather than other factors. UK 1 DR said because he contributed the most to the clinic's high income, he received higher bonuses than some of his senior colleagues. In addition, he expressed happiness and motivated that he could choose the employees he preferred to work with to achieve the high sales targets set by leaders, regardless of their seniority. He said:

> '*I used to work with another Chinese doctor, he thought his longer tenure gave him the right to ignore me and not cooperate with me at work…. I told this to the leader, who*

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then transferred him to another branch…. Can you imagine the consequences of doing this in China? Calling the leader directly to request the replacement of a senior colleague?......I would tolerate it if I were in China because of the emphasis on work relations and maintaining mianzi….'.

UK 1 DR believed that he had been influenced by British culture since working in the UK for nearly twenty years. He learned to separate his work and personal life, and perceived this change in his perceptions and attitudes toward work as positively related to his hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. He felt that these changes improved his job satisfaction, work motivation, and work performance. He said:

> *'I experience less stress as I worry less about maintaining work relationships. It took me a while to adapt to this mindset…when I spoke to my previous colleagues in China, they were surprised by the differences in how I work here…. I have my own time after work, but it is not easy to separate work and personal life in China…work relationships are so important there'.*

When the researcher asked UK 1 DR to elaborate on how his perceptions and experiences in the UK affected his wellbeing, he shared several examples with further explanations. Take an example of how he was influenced by one of his British colleagues. He said:

> *'Our customer service administrator is English, and she deals with refund-related matters. As the number of refunds directly affects my bonus, I made a lot of efforts to maintain a good relationship with her…. I often offered my help and brought her Chinese food, which she always accepted and appreciated, I assumed that she would help me with my refund cases….however, there was one time when I urgently needed her help with a refund case, but she was off that day, I texted her but did not receive a response until she returned to work the next day…'.*

UK 1 DR said he was shocked and found it difficult to accept this situation in the beginning because he expected the customer service administrator to help him, even though she was not working on that day. He explained:

'In China, there is a cultural norm of reciprocity, if you help me today, I owe you a favour, and next time you need help, I will help you in return. By helping each other, we builds relationships at work, which is referred to as the exchange of human relationship (ren qing wang lai,人情往来 in Chinese). If someone reject this exchange, it can break a relationship or indicates a tense relation, and ultimately affects work'.

UK 1 DR also emphasised that employees in China were unlikely to refuse requests from colleagues directly, even if they were busy or it was outside of work hours due to the importance of maintaining a good work relationship. In contrast, he noticed that such direct refusals were more common in the UK, even if it may damage work relationships. He shared that he learned an important lesson from this experience and realised the culture differences between the UK and China and understood that not receiving a response outside of work hours is normal in the UK. He acknowledged that this does not affect work relationships, but he admitted: *'It is a practice that can only be applied here and not in China due to cultural differences'.*

When the researcher asked him about how the cultural differences in work relations between China and the UK impacted on his wellbeing, UK 1 DR noted that both approaches had their advantages and disadvantages. He explained: '*although it takes time and effort to maintain work relationships in China, it also brings advantages, such as leaders taking care of employees and their families both at work and outside work*'. He highlighted that this aspect is important for employee wellbeing in China. However, in the UK, where work relationships are perceived as less important, he experienced less stress on work relationships, although he also faced disappointments when he needs help outside of work from his leaders and colleagues.

UK 1 HR Assistant viewed work relationship as a factor that can help reduce work stress, which positively impacted the hedonic aspect of wellbeing. He noted: '*a good work relationship can help to improve mood*', but he preferred not to '*become friends with his colleagues'* as it reminded him of work outside his working hours that he found stressful. UK 1 Receptionist and UK 1 Manager expressed similar views with UK 1 HR Assistant on the impact of work relationship on their wellbeing. They believed that forming good work relationships could improve the work atmosphere. However, they were '*not keen on maintaining work relations with colleagues or leaders outside of working hours*', considering that time as their personal

time. Approaching them outside of work hours was perceived as a disturbance and a lack of respect for their personal boundaries.

The researcher also interviewed UK 1 Customer Service Administrator, who shared her experiences working with two Chinese colleagues in the head office. She discussed the differences in work relationships with her Chinese colleagues: '*initially, I thought they had known each other for a long time because of their strong bond…. they often eat together, work together, and even socialised outside of work*'. UK 1 Customer Service Administrator found working in health services stressful, as it required her to be patient and caring when dealing with vulnerable patients. She said: '*When I finish work, I want to switch off my work phone and distance myself from work-related people to relax…although they invited me out for dinner a few times, I turned down their invitations*'. Additionally, she noticed that: '*they seem to appear nervous in front of the leaders and rarely express themselves in meetings…I don't understand why they are nervous, as they are working hard and performing well in their jobs*'.

Similar to the clinic of UK 1, participants in the clinic of UK 2 perceived that good relationships at work contribute to their hedonic wellbeing, but they did not consider work relationships as an important factor that impact on their wellbeing. Participants described their relationships with colleagues as they worked in the same clinic, unlike the two Chinese cases where maintaining a good relationship at work was emphasised. When the researcher asked participants in the UK 2 about their work relationships with their leader, they said they have their leader's contact number and found their leader easy to approach when they needed to discuss work-related issues, and they perceived their leader was easy to approach.

Participants in the UK 2 considered that they did not feel much pressure to express their concerns or voice their opinions to their leader. This reduced their work stress and enhanced their hedonic wellbeing. For example, UK 2 Receptionist said she texted her leader if she encountered with work-related questions and always received quick responses. This helped her work '*easier and more efficient',* and she related it positively impact her hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. Similarly, UK 2 Therapist 2 expressed that she '*feeling less work stress in UK 2 compared to other places I worked because of UK 2 Leader'*. She said a few times when she was stuck in traffic on her way to work, instead of '*panicking about being late and missing appointments'*,

she texted UK 2 Leader to inform him about the potential delay and did not get blame from her leader.

Two Chinese participants in the clinic of UK 2 are UK 2 DR 1 and UK 2 DR 2. They both had previous work experience in China. When the researcher asked them about their work relationships in the UK and how these relationships impacted on their wellbeing. They both shared their views and experiences and compared them with their previous work experience in China. For example, UK 2 DR 1 felt less pressure when working with his leaders in the UK because he did not feel his leaders using their '*leader identity*' to put pressure on him, nor did he feel compelled to develop a good relationship with them. He said: '*I knew he respected me from the day one…he just showed me around the clinic and left me to do my job…*'. UK 2 DR 1 also mentioned that his colleagues did not treat him differently even though he felt his English was '*not good enough*'. Moreover, UK 2 DR 1 was '*surprised but very happy*' when his leader asked for his advice on TCM. This motivated him as he felt his leader respected and valued his opinion, and he perceived this positively impact his hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing.

UK 2 DR 2 also shared positive experiences working with his leader. He highlighted that he normally preferred not to work directly with leaders, because he associated this with being monitored by leaders and having his work interfered with. However, he told the researcher that he enjoyed working with his leader at UK 2 because his leader respected his decisions. He said: '*If a patient came in, he would leave the patient with me without interfering with my work…*'. UK 2 DR 2 was also impressed by his leader's consideration. He said: *he asked me if I want to leave early when I don't have late appointments…in return, if I have walk-in customers arrived late, I will offer to stay late…*'. UK 2 DR 2 believed the consideration and respect he received from his leader contributed to his hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. He also believed it benefited the clinic, as his leader motivated him to willingly share his experience and provide his advice to improve TCM performance in UK 2, ultimately contributed to the clinic's income.

Decision-making

Decision-making highlights another difference in power distance between China and the UK. Research shows that Chinese employees tend to emphasise hierarchical decision-making and are accustomed to leaders to provide precise direction and guidance on how to perform work

tasks (House et al., 1999; Hirst et al., 2009) compared to their UK counterparts (House et al., 1999). Although the context of this research is different from previous studies, the outcomes of the research agree with the existing literature, as details are seen in the following sections.

In the two Chinese cases, most participants said they were not given many opportunities to make decisions at work and often followed decisions made by their leaders. Some expressed that even when they had the opportunity to make decisions, they found it stressful because they worried their decisions might clash with their leaders' expectations. However, there were also participants who wished for more opportunities to make decisions at work, as they believed that doing so would motivate them. For example, CH 1 Manager said:

> *'Following leaders' decisions makes my work easier as employees are more likely to obey them as they know it is leaders' decision... still, I would also like to make some decisions if I have leader's support because it proves my abilities and reflects my value at work'.*

When the researcher asked her to elaborate on her view, she explained: '*I don't want to always copy and paste what my leader says, even though I know my own decisions still need to be in line with my leaders' direction'.* She expressed disappointment when her views conflicted with her leaders but felt compelled to follow her leaders. She described her situation as challenging, because 'a decision that right for employees may not be a good decision for leaders'. As a manager, even though she is an employee herself, she often had to make decisions that in favour of leaders to show her obedience.

Participants in CH 2 often work with their leaders and expressed frustrations about their leaders interfering with their decisions regarding their patients. For instance, CH 2 DR 1 said his leader checked and questioned his prescriptions, treatment plans, and even listened to his conversations with patients. He felt that showed a lack of respect for his role as a doctor. He said:

> *'I usually compromise and tolerate her involvement, but I can't bear her interference in my decisions on how I treat my patients...she questioned me a few times and even tried to make me adjust my prescriptions to increase income...such as adding more herbs...as a doctor, I want to give my patients only what they need, without unnecessary cost'.*

CH 2 DR 1 expressed his frustration about his leader's interference with his patients, as he strongly believed it showed ignorance of his professionalism and disrespected him. He said: '*I wish my leader would let me do my job…I confronted her once as she questioned me in front of my patients, which made me lose mianzi*'. He told the researcher that the experience was upsetting enough to make him consider leaving, and when he confronted his leader, he was already prepared for the possibility of quitting. CH 2 DR 2 also expressed her frustrations about her leader's interference in her decisions toward her patients. She said: '*As an employee, I follow her decisions on regulations at work, but I wish she could interfere less with my decisions with my patients, otherwise what is the point of hiring me*?'.

Considering participants' complaints in the Chinese cases about having limited decision-making chances or experiencing interferences from their leaders, the researcher found that Chinese employees working in the UK appreciated the chance to make decisions and felt positively that they can make decisions at work. For example, UK 1 DR said: '*being allowed to make my own decisions at work makes me happy, as it makes me feel recognised and respected…I feel a sense of achievement*'. UK 2 DR 1 believed being involved in decision-making made him felt '*happier*' and '*more motivated*', which he related positively to his hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. British participants in the two UK cases also valued decision-making at work and found it helped them reduce work stress. For example, UK 1 Customer Service Administrator believed that making her own decisions '*improves work efficiency, as I can work in the way I prefer*'. UK 1 HR Assistant believed that making decisions at work increased his job satisfaction: '*when I approach my work in the way I prefer that meet my targets, I feel happier and gain a sense of achievement*'.

Participants in the two UK cases valued having decision-making autonomy and control over their work, as long as they aligned with workplace regulations. They believed this autonomy positively contributed to their wellbeing. For example, UK 2 Therapist 2 said she decorated the treatment room she used, as it lifted her mood at work. She appreciated that her leader did not interfere but instead praised her initiative. The two Chinese participants in UK 2, UK 2 DR 1 and UK 2 DR 2, also expressed satisfaction with their leaders' support to allow them to make their own decisions at work. They felt this support increased their work motivation and reduced work stress.

The differences suggest that leader supports can influence employees' attitudes toward decision-making at work and significantly impact on their wellbeing. This outcome aligns with the existing literature showing that when employees actively participated in decision-making processes, they perceived greater control over their work, nurturing feelings of encouragement that enhanced employee wellbeing (Huang et al., 2019). Moreover, participants in both China and UK cases highlighted the importance of leader support in their work and wellbeing, as they believed it contributed to increased motivation, engagement, job satisfaction, and reduced work-related stress. These outcomes are consistent with the literature highlighting that leader support acted as motivating job characteristics that provided employees with a sense of purpose and fulfilling their need for autonomy (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

In summary, the research shows employees in China have limited autonomy in decision-making at work. They tend to follow their leaders' instructions but perceived it negatively impacted their wellbeing, especially when their leaders interfered with their decisions in front of others, as it resulted in a loss of mianzi. In contrast, participants in the two UK cases, including Chinese participants employees, enjoyed decision-making at work and perceived it positively in relation to their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing, as it enhanced their job satisfaction and motivated them with an increased sense of achievement.

The outcome from the fieldwork supports the existing literature about Chinese employees following their leaders' decisions, while participants in the UK cases have more decision-making autonomy. In addition, the research explores the impact of decision-making at work on employee wellbeing in these two countries. In the Chinese cases, participants perceived that following leaders' decisions increased their work stress and workload, which were negatively affected their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. Some expressed a desire to have more decision-making opportunities, as it would improve their job satisfaction and motivation, but felt constrained by the high-power distance culture. In contrast, participants in the UK context, including Chinese participants, expressed satisfaction with their decision-making opportunities at work, further highlighting the cultural impact on employee wellbeing.

Communication

Communication is another important factor that reveals the differences in the power distance dimension in China and the UK, particularly in the ways of communication between employees and leaders in the two countries.

In the clinic of CH 1, most participants found communication with leaders hierarchical and stressful. For example, CH 1 DR Assistant said she rarely had chances to speak to her leaders and did not even have some their contact numbers. She believed this because her position as an employee rather than at the managerial level. Also, she felt '*more than enough just coping with my manager*'. When the researcher asked her to elaborate on feeling '*more than enough*' to cope with her manager. She explained: '*having leaders' contacts means I will receive texts from them outside my working hours, such as give me extra work to do, and I will have no excuse for not replying…*'. CH 1 Receptionist also found hierarchical communication with leaders stressful. Although she had some leaders' contacts numbers, she knew her manager would not be happy if she contacted leaders directly, as her manager may consider it as jumping the level or talking behind her back. Then it could negatively affect their work relationships. She further explained the hierarchical structure of communication at work: employees communicate with managers, and managers communicate with leaders. Jumping the hierarchy level means employees speak directly to leaders, which could create tensions in work relationships.

Both CH 1 DR assistant and CH 1 Receptionist's experiences indicate the hierarchy of communication in CH 1. When the researcher asked about the impact of communication with leaders on her wellbeing, CH 1 Receptionist to said: '*I often feel communication with leaders harder than doing my work because the relationship with them is crucial when they evaluate my work performance*'. She also perceived communicating with managers as stressful because she needed to be cautious about what she said and the potential consequences. For example, she said after she said she lived close to the clinic, her managers often asked her to work extra time because '*they think it is convenient for me*', She added: '*I regret saying that and get nervous whenever I see new message notifications from her…so I tend not to open them immediately and pretend I am busy…*'.

Participants in CH 2 told the researcher that they had their leaders' phone numbers and were also part of a WeChat group chat that includes all leaders and employees at CH 2. However, they said that they would rather not have leaders' contacts nor be in the same WeChat group

with them, as this could reduce the frequency that they were contacted by their leaders, no matter inside or outside working hours. Participants in CH 2 also complained about the high frequency of messages sent by their leaders in the group chat. For instance, CH 2 DR 1 said: *'It is exhausting to listen to her at work…you can imagine how we put up with her as she continues that after work as well…'*.

CH 2 DR 1 said he used his family as an excuse when he did not want to respond in time to messages from leaders in the group chat after work. CH 2 Receptionist also complained that her leader sent messages in the group chat without considering the time. She said: *'She can send messages in the early morning or at midnight….once I wake up and see more than 20 unread messages in the group…I feel overwhelmed'*. CH 2 Receptionist said she became anxious when she saw new message notification, as she worried that they could be from her leader. To reduce communication with her leader, she posted pictures of herself in places far from the clinic during her days off, hoping her leader would see that she was away and busy. Then she would not be considered a priority when her leader wanted to find someone to discuss work issues or asked someone to work extra time. When the researcher asked CH 2 Receptionist if she had tried to discuss her concerns with her leader, she responded, like other participants, that she wanted to but would not do so because she was afraid it would annoy her leader.

As discussed in the communication in the two Chinese cases above, despite some differences in communication ways between employees and leaders due to differences in clinic structures, the communication remains hierarchal in both cases. Participants expected to follow the one-way communication and follow instructions from their leaders. From the perspectives of leaders, they acknowledged the hierarchy in the way of communication in the workplace and believed that employees should follow their instructions.

In comparison, participants in the two UK cases found it easy to approach and communicate with their leaders, which they perceived positively with their wellbeing, such as with reduced work stress and increased work motivation. Participants in the clinic of UK 1 felt limited difficulties when approaching and communicating with their leaders. However, they preferred to communicate with their leaders more often when they were performing well, especially regarding issues at work. For instance, UK 1 Receptionist noted that she felt more confident communicating with her leaders when she performed well at work, as this made her less stressed

about discussing her work performance. Similarly, UK 1 Manager preferred to communicate with his leaders when he was not under sales pressure, as conversations with leaders often involved discussions about sales targets, which increased his stress and added pressure.

Both UK 1 HR Assistant and UK 1 Customer Service Administrator worked closely with their leaders in the head office. UK 1 HR Assistant said the office atmosphere was more relaxed when clinics performed well, and he preferred to discuss challenging issues with leaders during these times, as issues tended to be more easily solved than usual. UK 1 Customer Service Administrator explained that her work involved processing refunds and handling customer complaints. She tended to assess her leaders' moods before approaching them, as she found refund requests were approved easier quicker when they were in a good mood, thus saved her time and effort.

Participants in UK 2 found communication with their leader easy, regardless of the clinic's performance. They agreed that their leaders did not put extra pressure on them even on days when they did not perform well. Both Chinese and British participants in UK 2 said feeling comfortable contacting their leader to discuss work-related issues and were satisfied that their leader only contacted them for work matters. For example, UK 2 Therapist 1 appreciated the straightforward communication with UK 2 Leader and noted that prompt responses from her leader reduced her stress and increased her work efficiency. In return, she shared her ideas and experiences with her leaders, which was beneficial to the clinic's income and performance. She said: *'If I have ideas that I think will help the clinic, I just text my leader…easy and straightforward'.*

UK 2 Therapist 2 also valued the easy communication with UK 2 Leader. She said because of parking restrictions around the clinic. She had to move her car between 2-3 pm, she texted her leader to explain and request an hour off from work between 2-3 pm. She said:

> *'I knew it would cause inconvenience, as someone may want to book me around that time, it would cost him as we would lose customers… but he agreed and even checked the parking options around for me…I really appreciate it'.*

Participants used positive words like 'easy', 'happy' and 'flexible' to describe their communication with their leaders at UK 2. Both British participants and Chinese participants in UK 2 were impressed by the easy communication with their leader. For instance, UK 2 DR 2 said he has over 15 years of experience in TCM clinics in London and working at UK 2 was his first time working with an English boss. He described communication with UK 2 Leader as *'easy and straightforward'*. He said: *'I don't see him often as he usually works one day here, that is my day off work, which happens to be my day off. I only text him if I need to tell him about my holidays and confirm I have received my payments…'*. UK 2 DR 2 said the easy communication with his leader at UK 2 made him less stressful and work more efficient compared to his previous workplace, where communication with leaders had been more challenging.

The discussion above on communication differences in China and the UK shows how different ways of communication impact on employee wellbeing. In CH 1, participants were discouraged from directly communicate with leaders unless they were at managerial positions. As a result, even those who wanted to communicate or express concerns had to endure their worries in silence and put their hope in leaders to recognise their concerns. Besides, even participant at the managerial level in CH 1 felt stress when communicating with leaders as she feared that her opinions might clash with her leaders'. Due to the cultural norms associated with high power distance, employees felt obligated to conform to their leaders' opinions, making communication with leaders ad stressful experience that negatively affected their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing.

In CH 2, while participants had their leaders' contacts and were in the same WeChat group chat with leaders, they remained reluctant to express their unhappiness to their leaders, such as what they complained to the researcher that they were unhappy with being frequently contacted by their leaders outside their working hours. Participants in both Chinese cases expressed that they hoped leaders to proactively recognise and address their concerns to reduce work stress, as the hierarchical structure made them reluctant to express their concerns directly. This suggests that if leaders in high power distance culture took measures to identify and respond to employees' concerns, such as encourage open communication and provide opportunities for employees to provide their feedback and suggestions, they could reduce the negative impact of power distance and hierarchy on employee wellbeing and thus improve employee wellbeing.

Compared to the Chinese cases, participants in the UK cases experienced fewer difficulties in approaching and communicating with their leaders. In the clinic of UK 1, participants felt less stress to make requests or express their concerns to their leaders, especially when they performed well at work, as they perceived their leaders highly valued work performance. In the clinic of UK 2, participants perceived their communication experiences with their leader positively, recognising that the easy communication with their leader as a key factor contributing to the improvement of their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing.

5.2.2 Individualism and collectivism

Hofstede (2011) identified significant differences in the dimensions of collectivism and individualism dimension between China and the UK. This research explores a different context and the fieldwork outcomes also show that individualism and collectivism impact on employees' wellbeing in the context of SME health services in China and the UK. In the two Chinese cases, participants highlighted mianzi, which is a strong collectivist concern. Mianzi is closely related to group harmony that strengthens hierarchically based interpersonal relationships (Redding, 1990; Flynn et al., 2007), especially when dealing with conflict (Faure and Fang, 2008).

In CH 1, participants perceived mianzi as a crucial factor in the wellbeing of both employees and leaders at work. They encountered difficulties in expressing their real thoughts to their leaders, particularly in front of others, as it had the potential to hurt others' mianzi. Some participants experienced instances where their actions hurt someone else's mianzi, leading to workplace tension and increased work stress. For instance, CH 1 Receptionist mentioned that when her leader asked her about any issues she had identified at work, she chose to remain silent in front of others to avoid hurting others' mianzi and preferred to have a private conversation with her leader if necessary. She said: *'I can't say it in front of others, even if there is something I want to say. I am cautious because I need to consider others mianzi...it could easily offend someone if I am not careful'*.

CH 1 Receptionist learned her lesson at work when she took the initiative to address an issue that she and her colleagues had been complaining about. Initially, she believed her colleagues

would appreciate her for raising the matter to leaders' attention. However, she soon realised that her actions caused her to be excluded by her colleagues. Her colleagues perceived her actions as a betrayal and felt that she should not have disclosed their conversations to the leader. Moreover, since she was the only one who brought up the issue, it resulted in her colleagues losing mianzi. As a result, CH 1 Receptionist described feeling stressed even before starting her workdays, as she wanted to avoid confronting her colleagues' cold attitudes toward her. She learned from this experience and found herself spending a considerable amount of time trying to make amends.

CH 1 Leader emphasised the importance of preserving his employees' mianzi as he believed it contributed to work relationships and employee wellbeing. When face with different suggestions during meetings, he would intentionally refrain from making immediate decisions. Instead, he would express the need for additional time to consider all options before reaching a conclusion. This approach aimed to prevent any potential harm to anyone's mianzi in front of others during the meeting. After making his decisions, CH 1 Leader would privately communicate with the individual whose suggestion he had chosen, ensuring that they remained considerate of others' mianzi. Then, he would inform the manager about his choice and ask her to convey his decisions to the rest of employees. Furthermore, CH 1 Leader mentioned that if a decision needed to be made during a meeting, he would approach those who held different opinions before meetings to discuss and address their concerns. If disagreements persisted, he would ask them to refrain from mentioning dissenting views during the meeting to preserve others' mianzi. CH 1 Leader believed that reaching agreements among employees indicated a shared goal, which was important for the success of the clinic.

Participants also emphasised the importance of giving mianzi to leaders in communication at work. Firstly, giving mianzi to leaders is seen as a demonstration of employees' recognition and respect for their leaders' authority. This practice also implies that employees should refrain from pointing out mistakes made by leaders, especially in front of others, as such actions can be interpreted as challenging leaders' power. Even when employees offer suggestions or help to leaders, they need to consider leaders' mianzi. For instance, CH 1 DR Assistant highlighted the importance of giving leaders' mianzi during communication. This includes accepting blame from leaders without showing disagreement, even in situations where employees are wrongly accused. Employees are also expected not to confront or argue with their leaders, nor express

different opinions. However, CH 1 DR Assistant acknowledged that putting this into practice is easier said than done. She felt wronged when she was wrongly blamed by her leader but felt constrained from explaining herself, as it may indicate a lack of consideration of leaders' mianzi or challenge leaders' authority.

Secondly, giving mianzi to leaders required participants to careful evaluate what should and should not be said to leaders. For example, CH 1 Receptionist told the researcher that she had learned not to say 'I don't know' to her leaders. When she once responded with 'I don't know', her leader reacted with anger and perceived it as a lack of effort and questioned why she had not tried to find an answer instead. This experience showed her that saying 'I don't know' might be perceived as disrespectful and failing to give mianzi to her leaders. Similarly, CH 1 DR 1 said he learned not to say 'it is not my fault' to his leaders. Through his experiences at work, he noticed that leaders appreciated employees who maintained leaders' mianzi by taking responsibility and actively working to resolve issues. Therefore, instead of saying 'it is not my fault' when blamed by leaders, he adapted his response to: 'I am sorry, I could have done better, and I will learn from my mistakes to improve'. Participants in CH 1 shared with the researcher that considering leaders' mianzi left them feeling emotionally drained, as they often had to suppress their real reactions and opinions when communicating with their leaders.

Thirdly, giving leaders mianzi also implies consistently giving credit to leaders. Participants shared their experience with the researcher that simply working does not always get rewards. It is equally important to make leaders feel happy, which includes crediting leaders for their contributions. For example, CH 1 DR Assistant said when her work is recognised or praised, she always attributes her success to her leaders, acknowledging their valuable instructions, even when she has not received actual help from them. She explained:

> *'Of course, they know they did not really help me much, but by giving them credit, I give them mianzi, which helps me leave a good impression… so they will remember and be more inclined to support me in the future'.*

When the researcher asked her about the impact of giving credit to leaders on her wellbeing, she considered it affected her both positively and negatively. On the one hand, it improves her relationship with her leaders, which contributed to her hedonic wellbeing. On the other hand, it

reduced her motivation as she could not fully enjoy all the recognition for her efforts, which negatively impacted her eudemonic wellbeing. She said: *'I guess no one likes to attribute their hard work to others…but in China, you have to credit your colleagues and leaders …you just have to endure it'.*

In CH 2, participants experienced stress in communication due to their leader's lack of consideration for their mianzi. CH 2 Manager pointed out that the leader often neglected to give others' mianzi in when she talked to them. He said: *'Many of them do not want to work with her because she doesn't consider others' mianzi, it upset everyone'.* Both doctors in CH 2 mentioned they had to tolerate working with their leader because the leader neglect their mianzi at work often caused them losing mianzi in front of their colleagues. CH 2 DR 1 expressed his frustration: *'I wish she would leave me some mianzi, especially by not blaming me in front of others…it makes it challenging for me to work with others after losing my mianzi'.* He explained that he had to hold back his anger and tolerate his leader, but when the pressure became too much, he would approach his leader privately to ask not to blame him in front of others. He said: *'But her response would be why can't you focus more on work so that I don't have to blame you?'.*

CH 2 DR 1 noted that being blamed by his leader in front of colleagues increased his work stress. He felt that he needed to meet his leader's expectations to avoid being blamed. Similarly, CH 2 DR 2 experienced instances where her leader would blame her and point out mistakes in front of others. She explained: *'Sometimes it is just we have different ways of working, but she would say I was wrong without consider my mianzi…I respect her as the leader and always take her mianzi into account'.* CH 2 DR 2 found it difficult to deal with her leader's harsh blame and expressed that losing mianzi in front of others '*reduce my confidence and motivation at work, as it made me feeling embarrassed when working with colleagues'.*

Participants in the two Chinese cases frequently mentioned mianzi during interviews and highlighted the negative impact of losing mianzi at work, particularly when they held different opinions from their leaders or faced pressures from them. Participants felt compelled to tolerate their leaders to save mianzi and give mianzi to their leaders. Besides, they felt that tolerating their leaders helped to reduce potential conflicts and maintain workplace harmony. However, participants noted that in doing so, they often had to force themselves to act against their own

desires. They chose to tolerate and conform to others' expectations, which added to their work stress and negatively affected their wellbeing.

Compared to the Chinese cases, participants in the UK cases including the Chinese participants showed more autonomy and initiative. They perceived that their personal achievements were recognised at work and did not emphasise the concept of mianzi as much as participants in the Chinese cases. This supports the existing literature explained in section 2.4.3, UK have an individualist culture that encourages individual responsibility, initiative, and competitiveness (Tayeb, 1994). In the context of this research, participants in UK 1 showed more autonomy in decision-making, expressing their ideas, and recognising personal achievement. For example, UK 1 Manager said employees who demonstrated outstanding performance in meeting sales targets are rewarded and recognised in clinic meetings. UK 1 HR Assistant highlighted the promotion are based on employees' individual work performance and contributions to the company.

Participants also expressed confidence in making requests or voicing disagreements with their leaders, especially when they performed well at work. For example, UK 1 DR felt comfortable sharing his honest thoughts and expressing different opinions and offering different opinions at work without worrying about the need to preserve mianzi. Besides, participants in UK 1 showed less concern about losing mianzi, even if their proposals were not approved. UK 1 Customer Service Administrator acknowledged that although her initial plan regarding customer refunds often required further amendments based on her leader's feedback, she saw it as an opportunity to improve her problem-solving skills, as part of her personal growth.

In UK 2, participants expressed satisfaction in communicating with their leaders. When disagreements arose with colleagues, participants in both UK cases said they preferred to express their real thoughts. When the researcher asked the Chinese participants in the UK cases about the differences they found when communicating with leaders and colleagues in China and the UK. They said they had adapted to British workplace culture, following the adage of 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do'. However, they acknowledged that their thoughts and behaviours still influenced by the leader they encountered. For instance, UK 1 DR noticed how his colleagues talked to leaders and understood that their leaders valued high performance and profitability for the clinic. Therefore, when the clinic performed well, he felt more comfortable

making requests. Similarly, UK 2 DR 1 said he could share his opinions directly with his leader because he knew UK 2 Leader would listen and consider his suggestions. When asked Chinese participants if working in the UK had changed them or if they would behave differently when returning to work in China, they said they would adjust their behaviour according to leaders and work environment.

5.3 Hall' cultural theory and employee wellbeing

Hall (1976) classified cultures as high context and low context cultures based on the ways of communicating. Chinese culture is considered high context, which means that Chinese people often rely on indirect messages and non-verbal cues in communication. In contrast, British culture is classified as low context, where information is exchanged explicitly in communication (George et al., 2016). The research outcomes agree with the literature. In the Chinese cases, participants showed a preference for indirect communication and placed high value on maintaining harmony in workplace relationships. For example, CH 1 DR 2 said: '*We Chinese only speak about three percent, the remaining is left for guessing…which can cause misunderstandings and add stress at work*'. CH 1 Receptionist perceived communication at work '*inefficient*'. She said: '*we are busy, and it is frustrating when a long conversation still does not address the key points*'. CH 1 Manager expressed frustration as: '*I have been wanting to ask for a pay raise for a while, expecting he would understand without me asking, but despite hinting several times, he kept diverted the conversation…*'.

Similarly, in CH 2, participants struggled with openly sharing their thoughts. CH 2 Receptionist said: '*It is stressful to express real thoughts… you need to praise something before addressing any concerns…speak directly is seen as impolite and disrespectful, and it can ruin the relationships*'. CH 2 DR 1 described communication at work as tiring. He said: '*we don't know what leaders think, and we do not dare to ask, this leads to stress and reduces work efficiency*'. CH 2 DR 2 expressed her dissatisfaction with the indoor temperatures at work to the researcher, considering the temperature suited most colleagues and leaders, she remained silent and endured personal discomfort to avoid a negative impact on work relationships. She believed this silence negatively affected her hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. This partly supports the existing literature, which emphasises that in China, hedonic wellbeing is often linked to considerations

for others and the importance of maintaining harmonious relationships (Zhang and Veenhoven, 2008; Joshanloo, 2014). Participants in both Chinese cases shared that they expected their leaders to sense their unhappiness and make relevant adjustments, thus relieving them from concerns about potential damage to work relationships.

In the two UK cases, participants perceived communication as direct and detailed, with a greater focus on individual experiences than on group harmony and work relationships. Most participants associated this communication style positively with their wellbeing. For example, UK1 Customer Service Administrator acknowledged that even though her work was stressful, communication with leaders and colleagues was '*direct*' and '*easy*'. She said: '*when they are not happy with my work, they point out what went wrong and how to improve, it is straightforward and efficient*'. UK 1 DR shared a similar view, he previously worked in TCM clinics in China, he compared the two experiences:

> '*In China, you can't speak your mind directly, and it makes me feel exhausted to always try to figure out what others really mean. Here, communication is straightforward and to the point, which can be a bit shocking and even hurtful at first. It took me a while to get used to it…but I prefer it as it makes me feel more relaxed*'.

UK 1 HR Assistant said he often communicated with leaders due to his job duties, and he described the communication as efficient. When he identified issues, he raised them to his leaders, and they would work together to find solutions. This efficiency in communication helped him work productively and reduced his workload and stress. However, participants noted that direct communication was not always associated positively with wellbeing, leaders' actions also played a critical role. For example, both UK 1 Receptionist and UK 1 DR complained about inadequate lighting at work and blamed this issues on their leaders. They felt frustrated with the outcome of their conversation with leaders, as their leaders refused to address their concerns, which they perceived negatively impacted their wellbeing.

In UK 2, participants described communication as easy and positive. They appreciated their leader's prompt responses. For example, UK 2 Therapist 2 noted that she was impressed when she received a swift reply from her leader after texting to ask for a pay rise. She said: '*It reassured me that I can talk to him without worrying too much, which is really important for*

me as I tend to be stressed and worry a lot'. Both Chinese participants in UK 2 valued the way they communicated with their leader and colleagues. UK 2 DR 1 said: *'compared to China, where you can't say everything or only partially express yourself and expect others to understand, I like the straightforward and direct communication here'*. UK 2 DR 2 also said:

> *'In China, maintaining harmonious relationships is valued more than expressing individual opinions and experiences…Open disagreements, especially at work, is often avoided to maintain relationships… I used to feel a lot of stress from constantly trying to avoid arguing with others…. but here, I can even disagree with my boss and share my true thoughts, which is relaxing and motivating…'*.

Participants at UK 2 also expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of natural lights in their work environment. They raised this concern with their leader, who responded by taking actions to improve the lighting conditions. For example, the leader installed adjustable lighting in areas with limited natural light. Participants were satisfied with the outcome and showed understanding that some limitations were due to the building's structure. They felt their leader's action helped reduce their frustration with the lighting situation, highlighting the importance of leadership and leader action in impacting employee wellbeing.

5.4 Trompenaars's cultural theory and employee wellbeing

There is overlap between dimensions in Trompenaars' cultural theory and Hofstede's cultural theory, such as collectivism and individualism. Considering the space of this thesis and the relevance of the research focus, the following section will discuss the cultural dimension that impact on employee wellbeing in the context of this research.

Universalism and particularism (rules and relationships)

Universalism emphasises formal rules that apply equally to everyone, such as the UK. In contrast, particularism allows rules to be influenced and modified by influential people, with China as an example (Trompenaars, 1993). This difference is reflected in this research. Both the Chinese and the UK cases had established rules and regulations in place. However, participants

in the Chinese cases expressed negative perceptions toward the rules at work, as they believed rules were relationship based and often ambiguous. For example, CH 1 Manager stated: *'there are many unwritten rules and regulations, and their application depends on interpersonal relationships'*.

Participants in CH 1 expressed a tendency to comply with rules and regulations at work, especially in the presence of their leaders. They held negative perceptions of explicitly stated rules, as these rules were often applied inconsistently or ignored in practice. They also perceived negatively towards unwritten rules due to their emphasis on interpersonal relationships, which often favoured senior employees or individuals maintained good relationships with leaders. Participants needed to observe and learn these unwritten rules, which led to their feeling of exhaustion. For example, CH 1 Receptionist believed that working hours *'should apply equally to all employees'*. She expressed her frustration: *'my manager is always late or goes out during work hours, especially when leaders are not around, and she asks me to call her if anything comes up….'*. Despite her dissatisfaction, CH 1 Receptionist felt compelled to tolerate her manager's rule-breaking behaviour. She said: *'it is frustrating because they supposed to set an example for us…they should regulate themselves before managing others, but they know we are unlikely to report them…as an unwritten rule, we are expected to be tolerant and remain silent'*.

CH 1 DR 2 also complained working hours. He noticed that the rules regarding work hours were not applied consistently to all doctors. He said: *'some doctors only come for their appointments and leave early…leaders know about this but allow it to happen without addressing it…I pretend I have no problems with it, but to be honest, it is upsetting'*. CH 1 DR 2 associated this disappointment with a decrease in motivation and increased stress at work, which led him to reduce the number of days he worked at CH 1. He felt that being treated differently from other doctors made him feel undervalued by leaders, thus caused him to lose his mianzi in front of his colleagues. Most participants at CH 1 expressed their dissatisfaction with the unequal application of rules among different employees. The researcher discussed rules and regulations with CH 1 Leader. He acknowledged *'rules are designed to apply to most situations…it is important to follow the rules, but we also need to be flexible based on varying conditions and circumstances'*. He further stated that *'applying rules differently to different situations or people are necessary'*.

Participants in CH 2 also perceived the rules as ambiguous and sometimes ignored. They expressed frustrations that rules often did not apply to leaders and senior employees. For example, CH 2 Receptionist said: '*leaders do not adhere to the rules they established…although she sets the working hours, she rarely arrives or finishes on time…if employees arrive late or even on time, they get blamed*'. CH 2 Receptionist further explained: '*She never follows the work hours, she expects us to come early and stay late…she won't explicitly tell us to stay late, she assigns more work before we finish, so we can't finish on time*'. CH 2 DR 1 also complained: '*I feel pressured to finish work on time, particularly if my colleagues are still working…I can only finish on time when leaders are not in the clinic*'. CH 2 DR 2 was also unhappy as she believed the rules are relationship-based in CH 2, she noted: '*I have noticed that some colleagues can leave early if they want to….it depends on their relationships with the leader*'.

In comparison to the Chinese cases, participants in the UK cases found workplace rules clear. For example, UK 1 HR Assistant stated that clear workplace rules and procedures '*reduce misunderstandings, as well-defined rules help communicate clearly*'. UK 1 DR said: '*I find clear rules motivating as rule-based means I can focus on my work without constantly worry about maintaining work relationships*'. In UK 2, participants held a positive perception of the rules in the workplace. UK 2 Leader believed that '*rules contribute to operational efficiency and help employees understand their responsibilities*'. UK 2 DR 2 also found that clear workplace rules enhanced his work efficiency and contributed to his job satisfaction, which positively related to his wellbeing. UK 2 DR 1 described the rules as '*simple and clear', he noted: 'what surprise me is that employees also expect leaders to follow the rules… this is motivating….*'. Most studies have primarily focused on identifying the reasons employees comply with workplace rules. This research explores employees' and leaders' perceptions of workplace rules and their impact on employee wellbeing.

5.5 Ways of solving employees' problems in relation to employee wellbeing

The research shows that the way leaders choose to address and resolve employee issues have different impacts on employee wellbeing. In CH 1, participants noted that their leaders often delayed in solving problems. For example, CH 1 DR 1 expressed feeling stressed while waiting

for responses from his leader. He said: *'The things I reported to her are urgent and important…she often keeps me waiting, so I have to endure the pressure to ask her again'.* When the researcher asked CH 1 DR 1 to further explain the pressure he experienced when needing to remind his leader, he explained: '*I feel pressure to remind her, as she may perceive it as questioning her authority*'. CH 1 DR 1 recounted an incident where he provided his leader with an order list for acupuncture needles and certain herbal medicines that were running low in stock. However, because his leader's delayed in placing the order, the clinic ran out of these supplies. This shortage negatively affected patients treatments and the overall performance of the clinic. As a result, CH 1 DR 1 was blame by his leader for not reminding her to place the order. When the researcher asked him how this affected his wellbeing, he explained that it heightened his anxiety every time they needed to order supplies, as he feared another delay.

CH 1 Manager expressed similar concerns about the delay in responses from the leader. She noted that she experienced pressure from both her colleagues and her leaders, as her colleagues continually asked her for answers while she waited for responses from her leader. Participants at both managerial and non-managerial levels expressed dissatisfaction with the delayed response from their leaders. The researcher addresses this issue with CH 1 Leader during the interview. CH 1 Leader explained that he '*only addressed issues that were important and required urgent solutions*'. He also noted that he often encountered situations where issues had already been resolved or were not actually problematic by the time he was about to address them.

Participants in CH 2 noted that their leaders tended to respond quickly to certain issues while delaying actions on others. For example, CH 2 DR 1 had been expecting a pay rise but felt that his leader seemed to have forgotten about it. He expressed frustration and believed that his leader intentionally used delaying tactics, particularly for issues she disliked or disagreed with. He also noted that although his leader claimed to have a deteriorating memory, she appeared to remember even the smallest details when it came to her own business. CH 2 DR 1 felt disappointed by his leader's neglect of his pay rise, believing it reflected a lack of value for his work and possibly a lack of value for him as well. When the researcher asked CH 2 Leader how she addressed employees' concerns, she explained that managing the clinic required a significant amount her time and effort. She prioritised certain issues, and for those she did not consider important, she would postpone addressing them until she had the time.

In comparison, participants in UK 1 mentioned that their problems were responded to and resolved more quickly, particularly when they performed well at work. For example, UK 1 Manager stated that he tended to assess recent sales performance before raising issues with his leaders, especially with difficult issues. In UK 2, participants perceived their leader promptly addressed their concerns and responded quickly to their messages. For example, UK 2 Receptionist mentioned receiving swift responses from her leader, which helped her work more efficiently with less stress, and encouraged her to raise questions or potential issues. UK 2 DR 1 also appreciated his leader's prompt responses to his issues at work. He found that it made him feel his leader was approachable and not put on the air. He further commented that in China, it was common for leaders to appear too busy to deal with employee issues, which could upset employees even if the problems eventually got resolved.

5.6 Summary

This chapter explores the impact of culture on employee wellbeing by applying extensively researched cultural theories of Hofstede, Hall, and Trompenaars. The research shows culture impact on employee wellbeing varies from context to context. Certain cultural dimensions of Hofstede's cultural theory appear more important for employees than others, thus have a different degree of influence on employee wellbeing in China and the UK. For example, the power distance dimension, including aspects such as work relationships, decision-making, and ways of communication, exerts a greater influence on employee wellbeing in China than in the UK. The collectivism appears more influential on employee wellbeing in China and the individualism impacts more in the UK. By applied Hall's cultural theory, the research shows high-context communication appears more important and impacts more on employee wellbeing in China, while low-context communication exerts more impact on employee wellbeing in the UK. There is limited discussion of Trompenaars' cultural theory in this research due to the overlaps with the relevance of certain dimensions of Hofstede's cultural theory, such as the dimension of collectivism and individualism. The research shows universalism appears more important in the UK while particularism have more importance on employee wellbeing in China. The research outcomes suggest that culture plays a significant role in employee perceptions of their experience and feelings at work, in other words, their wellbeing at work. Culture includes

shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices that influence how employees perceive and experiences the work environment. Furthermore, the study provides more detail about different perceptions and experience of Chinese employees working in SME health services in China and the UK and indicates that culture impact on leadership and leader actions, with their impact on employee wellbeing. The research also suggests the need for leaders to be aware of their influential role in impacting employee wellbeing.

Chapter 6 Leadership and Employee Wellbeing

6.1 Introduction

Leadership exerts a notable influence on employee wellbeing (Inceoglu et al., 2018), influencing aspects such as employee performance, motivation, and personal growth (Breevaart and Zacher, 2019; Pham-Thai et al., 2018). Given the significance of leadership on employee wellbeing, this research aims to explore the leadership impact on employee wellbeing in the context of SME health services in China and the UK. Transformational, transactional, and ethical leadership styles have been applied to explore leadership impact on employee wellbeing. By exploring these leadership styles in both Chinese and British contexts, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the similarities and differences in the way leadership influences employee wellbeing in different cultural contexts.

6.2 Transformational leadership and employee wellbeing

The concept of transformational leadership and its impact on employee wellbeing have been discussed in section 2.5.3. Previous studies have considered that transformational leadership has a positive relationship with employee wellbeing (Munir et al., 2012; Arnold, 2017), such as elevating employees' desire for greater achievement at work, motivating employees to exceed their initial expectations, and facilitating their adaptability in the workplace (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Voon et al., 2011). However, the contexts of those studies different from the context of this research. It is noted that Bass (1990) and Avolio (1999) identify four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. The following sub-sections will explore how these four transformational dimensions were seen in each of the four cases.

6.2.1 Idealised influence

Leaders demonstrate idealised influence when they act as role models, inspiring and motivating employees to exceed their initial expectations (Bass et al., 2003). By setting a positive example, leaders elevate their employees and encourage them to pursue greater achievements.

In CH 1, participants' perceptions of their leaders' idealised influence were relatively limited. Many expressed feeling that opportunities for interaction and communication with their leaders were limited due to the hierarchy of the clinic. Participants considered it led to feelings of disconnection and underappreciation at work, resulting in decreased job satisfaction and reduced work motivation. For example, CH 1 Receptionist felt *'a lack of direction and support from leaders'*, which led to her feelings of uncertainty and stress. CH 1 DR 2 perceived a sense of disconnection, as he felt: *'frustrated by the lack of clarity regarding the goals and priorities of the clinic...the ambiguity made me feel a bit lost and decreased my motivation at work'*. Similarly, CH 1 DR assistant expressed frustration about feeling: *'disconnected from higher-level leadership and lack of support from leaders'*, noted that *'it was primarily the managerial level employees who had regular contact with the leaders'*. This situation resulted in other employees having a less favourable impression of their leaders' influence, ultimately leading to a negative impact on their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing, such as reduced engagement, productivity and overall job satisfaction in the workplace.

In CH 2, participants perceived their leaders as encouraging and motivating, often encouraging them to achieve higher levels of performance at work. They observed their leaders' hard work and dedication, which they considered as a source of inspiration and encouragement. For instance, CH 2 Therapist believed that her leader's hardworking *'motivates me a lot…I enjoy working with her, even though it can be tiring... I have the opportunity to improve myself by learning new things from her'*. CH 2 Receptionist also expressed how witnessing her leader's dedication motivated her to work harder. Despite the challenges and tiredness, she enjoyed working with her leader because it provided her with *'an opportunity for personal growth and development'*. Moreover, participants felt encouraged and motivated by their leaders' strong sense of responsibility. For example, CH 2 DR 2 shared that she joined CH 2 because of CH 2 Leader's responsible reputation. She said:

'CH 2 Leader is responsible. I saw many salespeople who wanted to sell products or medical devices to her. She always makes cautious decisions and doesn't sacrifice her reputation for money… this is crucial for me'.

The researcher asked CH 2 DR 2 to elaborate on the term 'crucial'. She shared a past work experience at a different clinic involving the sale of a controversial product. Despite her repeated expressions of concern to her former leader, her warnings were consistently ignored. Eventually, the controversial product caused significant problems that tarnished the clinic's reputation. CH 2 DR 2 described this experience as a *'nightmare because I was questioned by my friends and family, and it made me feel devastated'*. The accumulated stress became overwhelming and resulted in her resigning from her job. She was unable to work for nearly a year, and when she began looking a new job, her priority was *'to work under a leader who demonstrated responsibility and integrity'*. After discovering that CH 2 Leader had a reputation for responsibility, she decided to join CH 2.

Compared to the Chinese cases, the majority of participants in the clinic of UK 1 expressed both positive and negative perceptions of their leaders and the impact leaders had on them. Some participants were motivated by their leaders' abilities as the business had been established and sustained for more than thirty years in the UK. Leaders provided them the access to resources that they can develop themselves and opportunities to achieve higher sense of achievement. However, recognising their leaders as motivating can also have negative effects on their wellbeing, as the pressure to meet expectations or maintain high performance could cause stress. For example, UK 1 Receptionist described her leader as *'demanding'*. When the researcher asked her about the impact this had on her wellbeing. She said*: 'It stresses me out because a single day's underperformance leads to added pressure from them'*. UK 1 DR believed that the leader *'solely prioritised money, and the amount of money an employee generates determines how that employee is treated at work'*.

Similarly, UK 1 Manager expressed his stress and concerns, stating that he found the sales target set by the leaders to be unattainable. He worried that consistently failing to meet these targets would result in reassignment to different branches, which would be inconvenience for him. He said: *'They can move you to any branch…. regardless of where you live. That's how the company operates. If you don't meet their expectations, they won't make things easy for you'*. UK 1

Manager also expressed disappointment and noted that his extensive tenure of over seven years at UK 1 appeared to hold little value. He felt that familiarity with the leaders did not hold much weight, as work performance took precedence over other factors, as 'the number talk.' The emphasis was placed on meeting targets rather than considering an employee's length of service or seniority. This shows the differences compared to the outcomes from the Chinese cases and indicates the role of cultural factors in influencing employee wellbeing.

Participants in UK 2 expressed their satisfaction with their leaders and described them as positive and encouraging. For example, UK 2 DR 2 said he enjoyed working with his leader because he perceived his leader as '*a really positive person…. even when I wasn't busy, he would encourage me by saying that customers would come rather than blaming me for not bringing in customers'*. Similarly*,* UK 2 Receptionist noted that: '*I have seen several times when therapists made mistakes with their hours, but the leader always ensure they were paid correctly. This shows integrity and motivates me to work harder, he's just a fantastic leader*'.

The researcher asked her how the leader's integrity serves as a source of motivation. She explained that she believed a leader with strong moral values can achieve success, which benefits both the leader and employees by motivating them to contribute their efforts at work. UK 2 Therapist 2 shared her experience of learning punctuality while working with her leader. She said: '*he always arrived on time, and sometimes even earlier, he was a great role model for us'*. She also mentioned that her leader's adherence to the clinic's rules had an important impact on her. She explained '*I used to think rules were just for employees but seeing him set a positive example by following them motivated me to do the same. Since I started being on time, it has improved efficiency'*.

To summarise, the idealised influence of transformational leadership impact employee wellbeing differently in the four TCM Cases, participants who experienced a positive impact from their leaders found it to motivating and beneficial to their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. On the other hand, participants who perceived a negative influence from their leaders resulted in increased stress and concerns. Moreover, the influence of leaders on employees is heavily influenced by the values of leaders hold, as these values instructed their leadership style and guided their actions that impacting employee wellbeing.

6.2.2 Inspirational motivation

Inspirational motivation refers to the ability of leaders to motivate employees by presenting an inspiring vision and encouraging them to strive for higher goals and realise their full potential by exceeding expectations (Biron et al., 2014). The fieldwork shows in the two cases in China, participants recognised training at work as a way for personal growth and achieving higher goals. This reflects the eudemonic aspect of wellbeing, as it related to personal growth and the fulfilment of one's potential (Zheng et al., 2015).

In the clinic of CH 1, most participants perceived limited inspiration from their leaders, as they have limited interactions with their leaders, especially limited direct interactions with their leaders. In terms of inspiring employees, CH 1 Leader said:

> '*We provide training for employees to support their development at work...I delegated this duty to managers, as my primary responsibility was to liaise with investors to ensure the clinic's long-term development*'.

CH 1 Manager highlighted that CH 1 provided on-the-job training to encourage employees to reach higher levels of achievement. For example, junior employees were assigned to learn from senior employees. However, both CH 1 receptionist and CH 1 DR Assistant expressed a lack of support from their leaders. They complained that they were not given many chances to choose the senior employees they could learn from and that they were unable to request changes if needed. Both participants said some senior employees were willing to teach, while others were reluctant. When assigned to senior employees who provided limited guidance, they felt disappointed, which resulted in reduced motivation at work. For example, CH 1 Receptionist expressed her frustrations: '*It is frustrating because they did not teach me much, and I learned the most from my mistakes. I wish they could tell me so I can avoid making more mistakes*'. When the researcher asked about the impact of this on her, she said she felt frustrated when she made mistakes due to a lack of knowledge what she was supposed to learn from the seniors, especially when her seniors blamed her for making those mistakes.

CH 1 DR Assistant also expressed her frustrations about the lack of the support at work. She said: '*I found a lack of support at work, and it stresses me when I think about my future. I don't*

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see a clear view of my career development'. Lack of support was frequently mentioned in interviews by participants in CH 1, they associated it negatively with their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. However, participants expressed reluctance to raise these concerns with their leaders when asked by the researcher, as they '*feared*' that raising these issues could cause conflicts and confrontations, potentially damaging their work relationships with leaders.

In CH 2, participants experienced both positive and stressful feelings about working with their leaders. While participants acknowledged having opportunities to learn and appreciated that their leaders provided training and encouraged skill development, they still perceived a negative impact on their wellbeing. For example, CH 2 Manager said: '*the leader has a great passion for learning and motivates us to learn, she provides training but has been pushing...she constantly monitors our progress and that was stressful'*. CH 2 Receptionist also said: '*She doesn't give you much choice to say no...she believes it benefits us and expects us to feel happy for these learning opportunities, but we have our lives, and it's not all about work...'*.

CH 2 Therapist expressed her appreciation for the opportunities to learn and improve her skills at work, as she '*started with limited knowledge and experience but developed my skills at CH 2 and gained the confidence to become a professional massage therapist'*. She valued the support and inspiration provided by her leader but also expressed experiencing exhaustion and stress. CH 2 DR 2 said: '*I have become more open to learning new things since working with the leader... She always finds new things for us to learn...I learned new techniques and developed my skills'*. However, she pointed out that '*the learning takes up a lot of time outside working hours',* which she found '*particularly tiring after long workdays'*.

Participants in CH 2 were supported by their leader to develop themselves at work, but they also experienced negative effects. Most participants appreciated opportunities for learning during regular working hours, however, when these opportunities extended beyond working hours or required extra time, they perceived a negative impact on their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. For example, CH 2 DR 1 expressed unhappiness with being asked to stay late for practice sessions. He said:

> '*I stayed extra hours at least for two weeks... the learning sessions started within the working hours, but when it was time to go home, the leader ignored the time. Initially, I*

found it difficult to say something, but it really bothered me, and my family complained as well… I don't mind learning or practising, but it shouldn't take up my own time…'.

Other participants also complained that CH 2 Leader often seemed to ignore the time when training sessions extended beyond regular working hours. This led them feelings stressed and frustration, especially when these sessions took place during their personal time, and they were not paid for the extra hours. As a result, participants expressed more complaints than appreciation for these learning opportunities during the interviews. This suggests that even though employee learning and development are supposed to improve wellbeing, especially eudemonic wellbeing, they can have negative impacts if they happen outside working hours.

In the Chinese cases, participants raised concerns about learning and training for different reasons, but both related these experiences negatively to their wellbeing. In CH 1, participants complained due to a lack of training and support from leaders, which aligns with the literature that lack of training at work can negatively impact on employee wellbeing. However, in CH 2, participants complained that their leaders expectations for learning extended into their personal time. Therefore, despite opportunities for personal growth and inspiration from leaders, participants perceived these opportunities as negative impacting their wellbeing.

In UK 1, participants shared negative perceptions of their leaders' way of inspiration. They felt that their leaders' motivation was mainly aimed to encourage them to work harder to generate more revenue for the clinic. For example, UK 1 Receptionist said: *'leaders inspire us for their own benefits…pushing us to earn more for the company instead of caring about us'.* Besides, some participants complained about some training sessions held outside of regular working hours, which they perceived as a 'punishment' rather than 'inspiration'. Adding to their stress, these training sessions were sometimes conducted outside their workplace, requiring employees to pay for their own transportation costs. UK 1 Receptionist said: *'after a stressful workday, I just want to go home and relax…not pay to go listen to them tell us what we already know'.* UK 1 Manager also said asking employees to attend training outside of work hours and pay for their own transportation showed a lack of consideration from leaders. He said: *'they did not care about us obviously… they just want us to work harder to make more money for them'.* Even UK 1 HR Assistant responsible for organising the training admitted to feeling the pressure, he said: *'I know they don't like to attend training, neither do I, I just doing my job'.*

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In contrast to the complaints raised by employees, UK 1 Leader believed the training sessions benefited employees' wellbeing by helping them develop their skills and improve work performance. She said: *'The training is to help them identify their problems at work and allow them to achieve better results….'.* When asked by the researcher why some training sessions were scheduled after regular working hours, UK 1 Leader explained that these training were designed for employees who had not met their sales targets, and due to those employees may work different days at different branches, it was difficult to conduct training during working hours. She emphasised that most training sessions were conducted at the workplace and within working hours. Addressing concerns about transportation cost, UK 1 Leader explained that those training sessions were arranged to provide employees opportunities to improve their skills and work performance. She said: '*they may cover some transportation cost, but we provide sandwiches and drinks as most of them come straight after work, this shows we care about our employees…*'.

In UK 2, participants described positively about the influence of their leader, despite the limited training and learning sessions available for employee development. When the researcher asked about employee development opportunities at work, UK 2 Leader explained that due to his limited knowledge of Traditional Chinese Medicine, he chose to offer higher salaries to recruit experienced employees. Employees would be introduced to the clinic and informed about relevant regulations when they join. Employees were encouraged to learn, and for any questions or confusions at work, they could ask colleagues or leader.

When the researcher asked participants about the influence of limited learning opportunities on their personal development and wellbeing. Most expressed satisfaction with their leader' support. Although with limited training sessions provided at work, they felt they had learned new knowledge and develop skills from their leader and their colleagues from daily work. They highlighted that their leader encouraged them to take the initiative to improve their performance at work. This outcome raised the researcher's interest, as UK 2 provided limited training but received few complaints and high levels of appreciation from employees about leader. This outcome contrasts with the existing literature, which suggests that limited training and learning opportunities were negatively impact employee wellbeing. Therefore, the researcher asked them probing questions to explore the reasons behind the positive impact on employee wellbeing.

Participants perceived leader support as a crucial factor impacting their wellbeing, highlighting that leader support was not limited to training, for example, they considered prompt responses to their requests as a form of support from their leader.

In summary, while the existing literature suggests that training and personal growth positively affect employee wellbeing, the outcomes from the fieldwork show that the impact of training for personal growth can also have negative effects on employee wellbeing. The role of leader is crucial in influencing employees' perceptions and experiences on their wellbeing. The research shows that in the context of SME health services, limited training opportunities at work do not necessarily lead to a negative impact on employee wellbeing. As can be seen from the clinic of CH 2, while leader provided training sessions, there were often perceived as 'pushing' employees to learn and develop, leading to a negative impact on their wellbeing. In contrast, in the clinic of UK 2, despite the limited training sessions, employees perceived a positive impact on their wellbeing, largely due to their positive perceptions of their leader and the support they received from their leader in other ways. Therefore, leaders' perceptions and actions are crucial in influencing how employees perceive their wellbeing. Employees can experience a positive influence on their wellbeing, such as increased motivation, if they perceive their leaders positively. This highlights the significant impact of leadership on employee wellbeing.

6.2.3 Intellectual stimulation

Intellectual stimulation emphasises leaders encourage employees to have new ways of thinking to explore better answers to their questions (Biron et al., 2014). The following section will discuss the intellectual stimulation aspect and its impact on employee wellbeing in the context of this research.

In CH 1, participants at the managerial level were more likely to meet regularly with their leaders. CH 1 Leader described his role as '*guiding the clinic in the right direction*' and '*managers were responsible for filling in details and implementing plans*'. For example, CH 1 Manager explained that she found her work challenging but enjoyable. She shared an example to explain how she developed her work ability. She said: '*since our leaders decided to promote our clinic on social media, I created a few promotion plans… after they approved it, we implemented them….it was very exciting, and I learned a lot from the experience*'. CH 1

Manager highlighted that her work was challenging because she needed to continuously learn new knowledge to achieve the goals set by her leaders, such as achieving targeted numbers of views on social media promotions. Despite the challenges, she found her work enjoyable because the support provided by her leaders, such as introducing her to digital marketing specialists, which enabled her to apply the new knowledge effectively. She said: '*I enjoyed the learning experience and being empowered by my leaders to make decisions and implement plans'*. When asked about the impact on her wellbeing, CH 1 Manager noted that it positively contributed to her hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing as '*it makes me happy and gives me a strong sense of achievement'*.

Participants from CH 2 also perceived encouragements from their leaders to think innovatively and find better solutions to their challenges. However, this encouragement was often experienced as pressure, as they felt 'pushed' to meet high expectations. For example, CH 2 DR 2 said: '*It is stressful when leaders always ask for ideas and expect to hear something new… if you do not have anything new, you are judged as not making enough efforts*'. CH 2 Receptionist also shared her experience of stress from the leaders' approach, she said:

> '*They have a passion for learning, but it can create pressure for others…my leader shares too many learning materials for us to learn, and she criticises you if you say you not finishing them…it just too much….'*.

The researcher asked CH 2 Receptionist to elaborate on the pressures she described, particularly what she meant by '*too much'*. She explained that if she was busy with work and unable to read the learning materials shared by leaders in their WeChat group, her leader would then expect her to complete the readings after work. However, she became increasingly reluctant to read these materials during her personal time. She also noted that many of her colleagues were also frustrated with their leaders' expectations, as they felt it interfered with their own time for studying. As a result, while participants valued their leaders' encouragement and sharing of learning materials, including prepaid courses, they preferred to learn at their own pace and not feel pressure to do so, especially outside of work hours. However, from CH 2 Leader's perspective, she expected employees to appreciate the learning and development opportunities to '*learn fast and apply the knowledge at work'*. CH 2 Leader expressed her confusion about why employees perceived learning as a source of pressure. She said:

'I don't understand what they are thinking. I gave them so many opportunities to improve themselves, but they still complain. I wish I could have had these supports and materials when I was learning'.

From the perspective of CH 2 Leader, her own experiences influenced her action to employee development. Having received limited training and support when she was learning, she overcame numerous challenges through self-study and learned from her mistakes. She described working during the day and studying until late to improve herself. This background motivated her to provided various trainings and learning opportunities to her employees when she started her own practice. However, when she realised that her staff were not always happy about learning opportunities, she felt '*confused and disappointed'*. In her opinion, employees should value every chance to learn and develop at work.

In the clinic of UK 1, most participants acknowledged receiving encouragement from their leaders but associated it with increased stress. They perceived these encouragements as a way for leaders to motivate them to work harder to generate more profits for the company. For example, UK 1 Receptionist expressed: '*I feel nervous when I answer phone calls from my leader, especially on days when we do not perform well…even though the leader encourages us, you can feel the pressure behind it'*. UK 1 DR also said leaders often called the clinic to ask about performance and income, even though daily records were sent to leaders at the end of each workday. He added that if performance was not good when leaders called, leaders would encourage them to work harder and achieve better.

UK 1 Customer Service Administrator highlighted that she experienced a lot of pressure at work, not only because she dealt with customer complaints and refunds, but also because her leader became more demanding when money was involved. She explained that her leader often asked her to find additional solutions. She said:

'My leader is rarely satisfied with my initial solutions for refund requests…I am the only one to deal with customer complaints and refunds, which is a substantial workload…she added to my workload'.

When the researcher asked UK 1 Customer Service Administrator about the impact on her wellbeing, she said: *considering the amount of work I have, the leader seems not to pay much attention to my wellbeing*'. When the researcher asked whether she had asked support from her leader with her workload, she said that her leaders were aware of her heavy workload but chose to ignore it, which made her feel even more upset.

Participants in the clinic of UK 2 perceived their leader's encouragement positively. They felt supported because their leader was open to listening to their ideas, considering their suggestions and providing them flexibility at work. For example, UK 2 DR 1 shared that he recommended his leader to buy a device for electric acupuncture, and his leader bought it without hesitation. He said: *'he even asked me which brand I recommended for the device and ordered it straight away…that was really encouraging as I know he supports us…'.*

UK 2 Therapist 1 also expressed her appreciation for the leader's openness to new ideas and consideration of employees' suggestions. She said: *'We are not under pressure from leaders. We are encouraged to share our ideas at work. There is also no pressure when we need to tell the leader if there is an issue'.* She explained that knowing leaders would consider employees' suggestions increased her commitment to work and contributed to the clinic performance. For example, after recommending her leader to use the online booking platform Treatwell to promote the clinic, after her leader conducted research and quickly set up a business account. This attracted many new customers to visit the clinic, and significantly increased the clinic's sales. Participants in UK 2 appreciated that their suggestions were often considered and accepted. When the researcher asked why this made them happy, they said it was because they felt respected and valued by their leaders. The willingness from leader to listen to employees' suggestions motivated and encouraged employees to contribute more actively and enhancing their wellbeing.

6.2.4 Individual consideration

Individual consideration is defined as leaders treating employees as individuals and providing meaningful and appropriate support that responds to an individual's abilities and needs (Biron et al., 2014). The research shows that leaders in the two Chinese cases supported employees as individuals both at work and outside of work. In comparison, participants in the two UK cases

perceived leader support mainly at work. For example, CH 1 Manager said: *'leaders know what we are good at, so they support us in different ways... they knew I am strict and responsible… so they put new staff to work with me for training'.* CH 1 Manager expressed that she enjoyed employees being assigned different tasks based on their specialities. By training new employees, she was able to develop her teaching and training skills. Similarly, CH 1 DR 1 said he developed his public speaking skills at work with the support of his leader. He enjoyed educating people to raise their awareness of the disease to help prevent it, though he rarely had the opportunity to do so. When the leader told him that the clinic would organise community activities and invited him to deliver a speech, he was very excited. He said:

> *'I couldn't believe it when he asked me…I told him that was what I had always dreamed of doing…he said he knew, as I told him when I first came...I am so lucky to have a boss like him...'.*

CH 1 DR 1 said the activity went well, attracting new customers and boosting his confidence. Leaders were also pleased with the feedback and results of the activity. Therefore, when they began promoting the clinic on social media, they invited CH 1 DR 1 to shoot a series of videos for the clinic's social media. Knowing that his work was meaningful, CH 1 DR 1 perceived his job fulfilling and experienced a sense of achievement. Besides, he appreciated that his leader recognised his abilities and provided him with opportunities to apply and improve his skills. CH 1 DR 1 found this work both encouraging and motivating, which contributed to his hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing.

Participants in CH 2 also received support from their leaders both at work and outside of work, which contributed to their wellbeing. For example, CH 2 Therapist believed her leader:

> *'…helped me a lot at work as well as in life…. I was so anxious when looking for a school for my daughter….I was busy at work but also needed to look after her…my leader knew my situation and helped me find a good school…I feel so grateful…'.*

CH 2 Therapist also mentioned that her leader allowed her to leave early if she did not have any bookings, as she needed to look after her daughter. She appreciated her leader's support both at work and in her personal life, which contributed to her hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. CH2

Receptionist also shared with the researcher that she received help and support from her leaders, which enhanced her hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. She said: *'unlike the doctors and therapist, I don't have a TCM background…. When I first started working here, my leader helped me a lot by lending me relevant books and learning materials'*. CH 2 Receptionist added that this helped her to catch up with her colleagues and eased her work stress, which positively affected her hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing.

Participants in the clinic of UK 1 perceived that they were considered individually based on their work performance. Whether leaders respond to individual abilities and needs depends on how much employees contribute to the clinic. Employees who contribute the most receive the most consideration and support from leaders. For example, UK 1 HR Assistant said: *'here, work performance decides how you are treated… if you are good at what you do, then leaders will reward your contributions...'*. UK 1 Manager expressed a similar view, telling the researcher that at UK 1, work performance and individual contributions were valued most by leaders. He said:

> *'They care about the results and the amount of money you make for them…. even if you are a new employee, if you make more than a senior employee, you will get more attention and better reward from leaders'.*

The researcher asked him how it impacted his wellbeing. He explained that it contributed to his eudemonic wellbeing by motivating him to achieve higher sales targets, but negatively affected his hedonic wellbeing due to increased stress.

Participants from UK 2 perceived that their leader considered their abilities and needs at work. For example, they noted that leader would promote their specialities in the clinic to motivate them and encourage them to develop their expertise. UK 2 DR 1 said: *'They advertise my specialities, so patients come to see me because of my expertise. It shows they have confidence in me and recognise my expertise. This motivates me to improve….'*. UK 2 Therapist 2 said many of her customers booked her for 90 minutes treatments, so she needed to have breaks between each session to rest. Her leaders set up a timetable in the online booking system to allow her time to have breaks between customers. When asked by the researcher, she expressed appreciation for her leaders' consideration and believed it enhanced her hedonic and eudemonic

wellbeing. When interviewed UK 2 Leader, he said that understanding employees' strengths and needs and then providing them with opportunities to use their strengths and meet their requirements could motivate employees and contribute to a positive experience.

The research also shows that employees' ability to manage their spare time at work impacted their wellbeing. In the Chinese context, participant expressed being allowed to manage spare time at work differed from feeling comfortable doing so. For example, participants from the clinic of CH 1 were allowed to manage their spare time at work, but this often only applied to senior employees. CH 1 DR assistant said: *'I don't have my own time at work, even I am on break, I could be asked to work… sometimes, even when I am not busy, I still need to find work to do…to leave a good impression to my leaders…'.*

In the UK context, participants in UK 1 said according to the clinic's rules, they were not allowed to do things that unrelated to work during working hours. Whether employees felt comfortable managing their spare time at work depended largely on their leaders. Participants in UK 2 expressed satisfaction with the flexibility they were given to manage their spare time at work. For instance, UK 2 Therapist 2 said: *'I like the free time I have at work… leaders give us a lot of flexibility….'.*

In summary, employees felt positive at work when they were inspired and motivated by their leaders, perceived their work as meaningful, felt respected and valued, and experienced self-development and opportunities to apply their strengths. However, motivating employees to achieve higher performance could sometimes have negative impacts, particularly if it took on their personal time or if employees perceived the motivation as only for the company's benefit. The research also shows that employees tended to perceive leaders' behaviours and actions more positively when they were satisfied with leaders. For example, although employees at the UK 2 mentioned their wages were not competitive compared to other workplaces, they were willing to stay because of their leader.

6.3 Transactional leadership and employee wellbeing

Unlike transformational leadership, transactional leaders mainly motivate employees through contingent rewards (Bass and Bass, 2008). Transactional leadership consists of two main components: contingent reward and management-by-exception (*ibid*). Contingent reward provides rewards for effort and recognises good performance, while management-by-exception maintains the status quo and correct actions to improve performance (*ibid*). The following section will discuss the impact of transactional leadership on employee wellbeing in the context of this research.

CH 1 Leader explained the reward and punishment system implemented at CH 1. Employees receive a basic salary and earn different commissions depending on the treatment services and products they sell. Services not covered by medical insurance offer higher commissions. Employees who generate more profit also have additional bonuses. CH 1 Leader highlighted that the reward system was changed after he took over the clinic. He described how the clinic previously lacked a profit motive, resulting in inefficiencies and misalignment between products and services with market demand. To improve profitability, he introduced the new bonus and commission plan. Initially, the plan received a rare response, but after he spoke individually with key employees, the plan began to take effect and showed significant profit improvements. He said:

> '*I know there are complaints because they felt the workplace has become more competitive and has gone through many changes…. but this is the way to progress. If you contribute more, you receive better pay*'.

Participants reacted differently to the commission plan and the changes in the clinic. Some participants considered it as an opportunity for higher pay, while others felt it increased competition. For instance, CH 1 DR 2 believed the bonus plan led to a negative workplace atmosphere and caused a loss of mianzi in front of others, which resulted in competitive work relationships that negatively impacted his wellbeing. He said:

> '*Some people just think about how to increase sales to get more commissions….they talked about it constantly at work. It was annoying and caused a lot of stress, and it all started when they introduced the bonus plan….*'.

The researcher asked CH 1 DR 2 to elaborate on why he found the situation '*stressful and annoyed*'. He explained that he believed leaders should not prioritise sales figures in a health clinic, as it could lead to higher and sometimes unnecessary cost for patients. He noted that he constantly felt the pressure of meeting sales target but believed that a good doctor should prioritise patient needs, so he only prescribed what was necessary. When the researcher asked if he had discussed his thoughts with his leader, he said he had not because he felt that the leader would not take his opinions seriously or make changes. He expressed uncertainty about how long he could bear the sales pressure. Failing to meet sales target also meant he lost mianzi in front of his leaders and colleagues, which he felt added to his work stress and negatively affected his hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. However, some participants were optimistic about the bonus plan, such as CH 1 DR 1. He noted that his leader had increased his bonus twice within five months, which motivated him to achieve higher performance and positively impacted his hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing.

In comparison to the bonus plan, participants in CH 1 expressed more complaints about the punishment plan. The most frequently mentioned issue was the daily ranking updates shared in the WeChat work group, where the manager ranks daily income from highest to lowest. Everyone in the clinic can see these rankings, and leaders often praise the top-performing employees in the group. Participants in CH 1 described this practice as embarrassing and stressful. For example, CH 1 Manager said: '*I know it could be tough, especially for those ranked low, but it encourages employees to work harder to make more profits….*'. When the researcher asked her to elaborate on what she meant by 'tough', she explained that a few employees had told her in private that the rankings created tense relationships at work, especially those who ranked low often felt negative and affected the morale of other colleagues. She conveyed these complaints to the leader, but the leader believed that the ranking updates motivated employees and led to increased profits, thus weighing out the negative impact on employee wellbeing.

CH 2 Leader stated that she did not set uniform rules for bonuses and punishments because she preferred to discuss wages and bonuses with employees on an individual basis. She explained: '*They have different qualifications, experience, and potential. I pay more for certain employees to keep them happy, otherwise, they may leave…. we need their reputation to promote the business*'. However, some participants expressed concerns about differences in the earning and

leaders treated employees differently. The most frequently voiced complaint was that those who received higher wages also enjoyed additional priorities. For example, CH 2 Therapist mentioned that she had been working with her leader for more than ten years. While she acknowledged that she enjoyed certain advantages, she believed she had earned them. She said: *'I knew some people talk behind my back, but I have been here for over ten years, and I have contributed a lot to the clinic…. besides, I am not the only one who enjoys these priorities….'.*

The researcher asked CH 2 Therapist to elaborate on what she meant by '*I knew some people talk behind my back*'. She explained that some colleagues thought she as a snitch, which 'hurt' her feelings. She recounted instances when she noticed that the receptionist refused to take bookings for customers who arrived late for their appointments. Believing this was because the receptionist wanted to avoid finishing late, she reported the situation to her leader, who then spoke with the receptionist. Then the receptionist labelled her as '*selfish and greedy*' to other colleagues. CH 2 Therapist said this upset her, as some of her colleagues started to distance her, so she asked her leader to change her workdays to avoid certain colleagues.

CH 2 Receptionist also expressed her concerns about the escalating problems at work because of the bonus plan. She said: *'The bonus varies too much...some of them work fewer hours but earn much more than me…it has created fierce competition…'.* She perceived the bonus plan as negative on her wellbeing. While it did contribute to her earnings, it also tensed relationships and caused a lot of problems and pressures at work, making her to become more irritable. Moreover, she noted that her leader would moan and train employees who failed to receive bonuses. As discussed earlier, this training often resulted in employees working extra hours, which motivated them to pursue the bonuses a way to compensate for work extra time.

UK 1 has branches located in different areas of London. UK 1 Leader explained that she sets different sales targets for each branch based on its location and operating costs. These sales targets were assessed on a monthly basis. If a clinic meets its sales target, employees receive a bonus. Otherwise, they only earn a basic salary and may even face punishments. The main way off punishment in UK 1 involves the relocation of employees between branches. Employees often have the opportunity to request their preferred branch, particularly if they hold a strong position, such as being experienced or with a strong background. However, being relocated to a different branch is perceived as a punishment because most employees prefer to work in one

clinic to save on commuting time and transportation costs. For example, UK 1 DR said he lives less than ten minutes away from his current clinic, but if he fails to meet his sales target, he could be moved to another branch and resulted in increased time and cost for him. He expressed that this caused him stress and increased competition among colleagues, as '*many of my colleagues also want to work here because they live close….*'.

Participants in UK 1 expressed stress related to the sales target and the threat of relocation. They felt that the sales targets were not easy to achieve, led to their stress and anxiety. For example, UK 1 Manager regarded as a star employee and having work in the same clinic for over three years, which considered long at UK 1. He said he was under '*tremendous stress*' because the pressure of not wanting to be relocated. He noted that the sales target had been increased several times and making them '*increasingly unmanageable*'. Moreover, he felt that his leader '*still adding my stress by setting me as an example in the clinic…. it made me more anxious, especially on less busy days*'. UK 1 Manager found difficult to discuss his stress with colleagues, given the expectations place on him. As a result of this pressure, he began smoking and he admitted that his '*mood changes with the work performance*'.

Some participants in UK 1 chose to work in different clinics to reduce their stress. For example, UK 1 Receptionist said she used to work in one clinic but started overeating to cope her stress. She gained 10 kg in three months and struggled to control her eating habits because that provided temporary relief from her anxiety. Eventually, she decided to change her work environment due to the negative impact on her health. She told her leader that she wanted to work in different clinics rather than staying in one. UK 1 Receptionist explained although the commute took longer, it reduced her sales pressure and stress that was better for her health. UK 1 DR also faced pressure from the sales targets and the possibility of relocation. He expressed reluctance to sell courses of treatment to customers to meet sales targets, he described as: '*I don't want to, but I have to…*'. UK1 DR expressed disappointment in himself, wishing he could '*focus on my doctor duties to treat patients*', but he recognised that it could negatively affect his income and increase the risk of being relocated.

Most participants complained concerns about the pressure associated with relocation, as many had experienced it. They believed the sales targets and the possibility of relocation caused their

stress and '*pushed*' them to meet the leaders' expectations. When the researcher interviewed UK 1 Leader, she explained the relocation as follows:

> '*If you are doing well, you stay. If you do not, you go…I know it is not easy to change locations, I don't want to move them…if you are performing well, the target is achievable…we have managers who have worked in one clinic for many years*'.

UK 1 Leader believed that the sales targets were achievable, and that bonus were designed to reward employees for their higher performance at work. In her view, relocation worked more as a warning, as employees who failed to reach the sales targets were defined by her as '*lazy at work*'.

UK 2 Leader said he had established clear reward rules for receptionists, doctors, and massage therapists, which were posted in the staff room for transparency. Employees had different sales targets, who reached their targets were eligible for bonuses. He highlighted that bonuses were calculated on a daily basis as it reduced the stress employees may feel about '*if they do well today but not tomorrow…they would lose the bonus*'. Also, he emphasised that maintaining employees happiness was key to better performance. Therefore, he had not increased the sales targets for three years and increased wages for employees who constantly performed well. He said: '*I am happy about my staff, they know what they are doing, and they do it well….it is good to reward them from time to time as it motivates them*'.

Participants in UK 2 expressed satisfaction with the rewards plan, they found it clear and motivating. They appreciated that while they frequently received bonuses, their leader still did not increase targets to put pressure on them. For example, UK 2 DR 1 told the researcher that a former colleague had recommended him to join UK 2, and he had been with the clinic for over two years. He described his work experience as less stress and motivating. He said: '*I have worked in the UK for more than 20 years, and I feel the happiest working here… the leader is very good and does not push employees….*'. He contrasted this with previous workplaces in the UK, where leaders often used bonuses to put pressure on employees. In UK 2, however, bonuses were viewed as rewards, which he greatly appreciated. When asked about the punishments, UK 2 Leader said '*the bottom line is breakeven*', he acknowledged that some days may better than

others, but he could not accept ongoing losses. If an employee consistently failed to earn their wages, he would have to let them go. He said:

> *'It rarely happens, but we had a doctor who worked here for two months and struggled to het bookings or gain returning customers…eventually, I asked her to leave as she could not even earn her wages'.*

UK 2 Therapist 2 shared her positive experience, noting that she had been working in the clinic for one year. She earned both salary and bonus when she sold massage packages. She expressed satisfaction with her work environment, her leader, and the pay. She said: *'if you are good at your job, you get returning customers, and that keeps you busy…. the pay is good, I don't get pressure for not selling packages'.*

In summary, under transactional leadership, employees are motivated to achieve objectives through rewards and punishments set by their leader. The researcher found that transactional leadership impacted employee wellbeing differently in the four cases. While all four cases have sales targets and bonus plans, employees experienced less stress when bonuses were viewed as a way of encouragement. In contrast, when bonuses were perceived as a way to put pressure, employees perceived increased stresses.

6.4 Ethical leadership and employee wellbeing

In section 2.5.5, it is noted that ethical leaders set an ethical example for employees by conveying moral principles and desires, providing moral direction, and considering employees responsible for their actions (Ahmed et al., 2020; Brown and Trevion, 2006). Previous studies have indicated that ethical leadership positively impacts employee wellbeing (Sarwar et al., 2020). However, the research conducted by Sarwar et al. (2020) was focused on undergraduate students in Pakistan, and there is limited research on the impact of ethical leadership on employee wellbeing in the context of this research. This research shows that employees perceive ethical leadership behaviours contribute to their wellbeing by positively influencing job attitudes and job satisfaction. Unethical leader behaviours have a negative impact on employee

wellbeing, often leading to increased work stress. The following section will explain how ethical leadership impacts employee wellbeing in the context of this research.

6.4.1 Credibility

The research shows credibility is considered important to improve employees' job security, reduce work stress and contribute to job satisfaction. As stated in section 2.3.3, job security acts as one of the factors associated with work-related stress that influences employee wellbeing (Johnson et al., 2005; Robertson et al., 2015; CIPD, 2020). Credibility has been related to employee wellbeing in both China and the UK. In the two Chinese cases, participants valued their leaders' credibility, as it was linked to their sense of job security. For example, CH 1 Receptionist believed leaders of CH 1 '*have the ability to lead CH 1 to a promising future*', which assured her job stability and contributed to her job satisfaction. CH 1 Manager considered leaders at CH 1 as credible, saying this credibility improved employee wellbeing by enhancing job satisfaction. In CH 2, CH 2 DR 2 chose to work there because of the leader's reputation for responsibility, which helped reduce her stress.

In the clinic of UK 1, participants perceived that their leaders pay them on time demonstrated credibility, contributing to their job security and job satisfaction. For example, UK 1 DR expressed appreciation for their leaders pay them on time. He said:

> '*It sounds strange, but I have encountered many leaders who do not pay on time. They always have different excuses…I hate to chase them for the payment. It was stressful and embarrassing…I work hard and deserve to get paid on time. I may complain about working here sometimes, but I respect them for always paying me on time*'.

UK 1 HR Assistant also satisfied with the timely payment of employees, because it '*make my work easier and also reduces my stress at work*'. Participants at UK 2 praised their leaders as credible, with many described their leader as trustworthy. This perception not only improved their job satisfaction but also helped foster a positive work environment. These ethical behaviours showed by leaders contribute to employee job security, job satisfaction, and reduced work-related stress.

6.4.2 Integrity

The research shows employees perceive leaders who demonstrate integrity in their practices associated with higher levels of job satisfaction and wellbeing. In the two Chinese cases, participants valued their leaders' integrity, linking it to their job security, job satisfaction and work stress. In CH 1, some participants complained about being treated differently by their leaders based on their backgrounds or positions, which negatively affected their wellbeing. For example, CH 1 DR 2 noted the promotions and opportunities available to him were fewer than other doctors, resulting in reduced job security and increased work stress. In contrast, CH 1 DR1 felt respected and valued by his leader, and it contributed positively to his job satisfaction and motivation, relating to his hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. Participants in CH 2 described their leaders as accountable, thus they felt a sense of security at work. For example, CH 2 DR2 perceived her leader as responsible that promoted her job security and satisfaction, thereby enhanced her wellbeing.

In the two UK cases, participants expressed positive perceptions about being paid on time, which contributed to not only their job security but also to their job satisfaction, both factors related to their wellbeing. For example, UK 1 Customer Service Administrator believed '*getting paid on time paid rewards my hard work and relieves my stress… it motivates me at work*'. Participants in the clinic of UK 2 believed their leaders' integrity was a motivating factor that enhanced their job security and helped reduce stress. For example, UK 2 Therapist 2 appreciated her leader's integrity, which she found motivating. She said: '*He is a good person…I believe a healthy environment creates positive energy, and an integrity leader has a positive impact on the business…I am lucky to work here and happy to work for him*'. UK 2 Receptionist also perceived her leader have moral qualities and it contributed to a healthy workplace that positively impacted her wellbeing. Her appreciation for UK 2 suggests that ethical leadership behaviours foster positive job attitudes and contribute to employee happiness at work.

6.4.3 Blaming subordinates

It has been noted that unethical behaviours, such as blaming employees for leaders' own shortcomings and taking credit of other's work, are prominent among leaders of organisations

(Sarwar et al., 2020). This research shows that such unethical behaviours negatively impact employee wellbeing. The negative effects of these unethical behaviours on employee wellbeing appeared more in the two Chinese cases, due to the high power distance. For example, participants in CH 1 complained about being blamed by their leaders and senior employees, and they often felt obliged to take the blame for their leaders' mistakes, which negatively affected their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. CH 1 DR assistant described her experience: '*they blame me for their faults...I have to take the blame and face the consequences for them*'. CH 1 Manager also expressed frustration at having to take the blame for her leader's actions.

In CH 2, participants also experienced excessive blame from their leaders, which caused their stress and anxiety. For example, CH 2 DR 2 Receptionist shared how her leader constant blames caused her to doubt herself. She said: '*my leader is always picking on me. It made me doubt my abilities, feel anxious and become very stressed*'. CH 2 DR 1 also expressed his unhappiness regarding his leader' blaming. He recounted an incident that he considered one of his worst experiences, when his leader blamed him in front of his patients. He explained: '*most of the time I keep my unhappiness to myself because she is the leader, but that time I confronted her as she blamed me in front of my patients! She showed no consideration for my mianzi*'. CH 2 DR 1 still upset as he described the confrontation, emphasising that being a leader does not grant the right to blame employees without limits. He felt that his leader's action showed a lack of respect for his mianzi, given that the blame occurred in front of his patients.

In the two UK cases, however, participants did not accept unfair blame and chose to speak to their leaders if they were wrongly criticised. For example, UK 1 Customer Service Administrator said: '*I will defend myself when wrongly blamed for things I didn't do*'. She added that defending herself against unjust blame positively impacted her mental health, as she believed '*it's important because it helps reduce stress and form a healthy work environment*'. Similarly, UK 2 Therapist 2 said when she was wrongly blamed, she called her leader immediately to clarify the situation. She said: '*direct communication helped resolve the issue and ensured a fair workplace environment*'.

6.4.4 Taking credit for other's work

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Employees perceive taking credit for other's work as an unethical behaviour (Sarwar et al., 2020). This research shows that instances of leaders taking credit for employees' work appeared more in China than in the UK, and such unethical behaviours negatively related to employee wellbeing. In the two Chinese cases, participants expressed dissatisfaction with leaders or senior colleagues who took credit for work they had done. For example, CH 1 DR Assistant described doing additional work for her leader, only to see the leader took full credit. She said: *'It's frustrating…I did the work, but they took all the credit…it seems my time is not time…but what can I do because they are leaders…I can't question them'.* Similarly, CH 2 Receptionist shared her frustrations about doing extra work for her leader without receiving recognition. She had hoped for: '*a promotion or bonus for the extra work I did for them'*, but felt stressed and demotivated when her leader did not acknowledge her contributions, perceived it as a lack of recognition for her efforts.

In the two UK cases, participants mentioned instances where colleagues tried to take credit for their work. However, they were able to clarify these situations directly with their leaders, without worry about potential damage to work relationships. For example, UK 1 Manager said he designed a promotion plan that a colleague later claimed credit for. The promotion plan contributed to an increase in the sales income, and the leader praised the idea without acknowledging him. He confronted his colleague and clarified the situation with the leader. He expressed satisfaction with the outcome, saying: '*I was happy that the credit was rightfully restored to me, and I got my rewards…otherwise it would have been demotivating and disappointing'.* Similarly, UK 2 Therapist 2 mentioned an occasion where she cleaned the staff room, but a colleague tried to take credit. She immediately texted her leader to clarity: '*I cleaned it, and I am not letting others take credit for my work*'.

6.4.5 Moral decisions

Leaders' ethical behaviours have been shown to increase job satisfaction, which is an important indicator of employee wellbeing (Yang, 2014). This research shows when leaders make moral decisions, it positively impacts employee wellbeing. Participants feel more motivated and happier at work if they perceive their leaders act ethically. This reflects in both China and the UK cases. In the two Chinese cases, participants felt that their leaders' moral decisions contribute to increased job satisfaction and motivation, thus enhancing their wellbeing.

Participants in the clinic of CH 1 recognised that their leaders frequently organised social activities that involved collaborating with the local community to offer free consultations. This not only helped promote the clinic's reputation through community support but also motivated employees. Participants at CH 2 perceived their leader's investment in employee development provided them with professional growth opportunities. For example, CH 2 Therapist appreciated these learning opportunities as '*supports from leaders*'. CH 2 DR 2 perceived the leader's moral decisions to not selling untrust yet profitable products '*reduced my work stress and make me happy*'.

In the two UK cases, participants perceived their leaders' moral decisions mainly through the attitudes and support leaders showed towards employees. There were instances where employees felt unsupported. For example, UK 1 Customer Service Administrator expressed dissatisfaction due to a lack of support from her leaders. She explained:

> '*I deal with customer complaints and refunds, which is stressful, but my leaders made it worse by delaying the approval process for my proposed refund plans, increasing customer wait times…it added to my workload and stress because a case that should take 10 minutes to resolve can ends up taking several days….*'.

UK 1 Receptionist also highlighted the stress she experienced due to challenges with the refund process. She explained the clinic's refund policy, which requires customers to complete a refund request form that the clinic then faxes to the head office. Although the policy indicates a 14 working days processing period, the long wait often results in customers giving up their refund requests. She speculated this delay was leaders' purpose to make customers lose patience and give up the refund. However, UK 1 Receptionist did not perceive this as an ethical behaviour, as it negatively affected the clinic's reputation and consumed employees' time and added to their stress.

Participants in UK 2 expressed satisfaction with their leaders' moral decisions, which motivated them and increased their job satisfaction. For example, UK 2 Receptionist shared an experience dealing with a refund. She said:

'Once, a patient booked an acupuncture but became anxious before the treatment began. He requested a refund…even though the doctor had already opened the needles, which then needed to be disposed of. I wasn't sure if a refund was allowed in this situation, so I texted the leader…he responded quickly and told me to refund the patient. I really appreciated that, and it was motivating'.

UK 2 DR 1 also valued the leader's decision, he believed it '*shows the leader cares about the wellbeing of both customers and employees*', and he felt this decision prevented potential conflicts.

6.5 Summary

This chapter discussed the impact of transformational, transactional and ethical leadership on employee wellbeing. The research shows the similarities and differences with the existing literature regarding the impact of these leadership styles on employee wellbeing. For example, while providing learning and development opportunities is generally beneficial, it can negatively affect employee wellbeing if it results in longer working hours. Although transformational leadership is generally associated with positive outcomes for employee wellbeing, some instances showed employees experienced negative experiences. This highlights the importance of considering contextual factors and cultural differences when exploring leadership impacts on employee wellbeing.

The literature suggests that transactional leadership, with its focus on contingent rewards and punishments, has a limited impact on employee wellbeing. However, the fieldwork reveals that transactional leadership impact employee wellbeing in both positive and negative ways, depending on leaders' actions. While previous studies primarily focused on the impact of transformational and transactional leadership on employee wellbeing, this research also explored ethical leadership's influence on employee wellbeing. For example, employees who perceived their leaders as ethical expressed higher levels of job satisfaction and wellbeing. The differences between the fieldwork and the existing literature highlight the importance of developing an understanding of leadership and its impact on employee wellbeing and suggests

the importance of considering contextual and cultural factors when exploring leadership' impact on employee wellbeing.

The research also demonstrates the different degrees of leadership effect on employee wellbeing in China and the UK. Transformational leadership appeared to have more impact on employee wellbeing in China than in the UK. Greater influence of transactional leadership on employee wellbeing in the UK is seen as more than in China. Ethical leadership had a relatively limited impact on employee wellbeing in both China and the UK, especially when compared to the influence of transformational and transactional leadership. Through the analysis of the fieldwork outcomes and the existing literature, it suggests that leadership has both positive and negative impact on employee wellbeing. These outcomes underline the importance of developing leadership practices that prioritise employee wellbeing.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

This chapter concludes the outcomes of the research, including the understanding of employee wellbeing, the impact of culture and leadership on employee wellbeing, the impact of culture on leadership, and an exploration of leader actions that contribute to employee wellbeing. It will then present outcomes of a comparative analysis between the research outcomes and the existing literature, and draw conclusions of the research contributions. The chapter will also indicate the limitations of this research and propose possible future research in the field of employee wellbeing.

7.1 Understanding of employee wellbeing

Recognising the importance of employee wellbeing, this study aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goal No.3, emphasising the promotion of good health and wellbeing, with implications for healthcare organisations and their CSR development (George et al., 2016).

The research extends the understanding of employee wellbeing to SME health services in cross-cultural contexts from both leaders' and employees' perspectives. The research studies employee wellbeing in the context of SME health services, deriving its value from the substantial presence of SMEs in both China and the UK. Despite extensive research on SMEs in business and management, there is limited study on employee wellbeing in health services, especially in the cross-cultural context (Ganster and Rosen, 2013), which remains a gap in the literature. This research aims to fill the gap by making contributions to the existing literature. Also, it aims to provide insights that can help SME health services leaders in enhancing employee wellbeing.

The research enhances the understanding of employee wellbeing and its variation in different cultural contexts from perspective of employees and leaders and demonstrates the significance of hedonic and eudemonic benefits to employee wellbeing in SME health services. As discussed in Chapter 2, previous studies suggest the understanding of wellbeing includes hedonic wellbeing and eudemonic wellbeing (Zheng et al., 2015; Xu et al., 2021). However, this research offers different focuses, such as in different contexts and using different

research methods. The researcher provides elements belonging to hedonic and eudemonic aspects from leaders' and employees' perspectives in China and the UK.

As discussed in Chapter 4, employees in the Chinese context saw employee wellbeing as employee benefits, work environment and workload. Employee benefits include financial aspects and leaders' care, include employee development and social activities. Financial aspects reflect hedonic wellbeing, while leaders' care, especially employee development reflects eudemonic wellbeing. Work environment in China include both physical work environment and work relationships, with both aspects reflect hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. Leaders in the two Chinese cases viewed employee wellbeing as employee benefits and employee development, which shows hedonic and eudemonic aspects respectively.

In the UK context, the understanding of employee wellbeing also highlights hedonic and eudemonic aspects from perspective of employees and leaders. However, with a different understanding from the Chinese context, in the two UK cases, employees viewed employee wellbeing as employee benefits, work environment, perceived stress levels at work, and personal development. Employees perceived work environment as physical work environment and considered leaders responsible for providing a good physical work environment due to the health and safety regulations. Employees felt a comfortable work environment helped to improve their mood and reduce work-related stress, which contributed to their hedonic wellbeing. This shows a culture difference from the Chinese context, where employees viewed work environment including work relationships and leaders' care for employees considered crucial to employee wellbeing. Leaders in the two UK cases perceived employee wellbeing as employee benefits, employee development, happiness, and work environment. These reflect both hedonic and eudemonic aspects of wellbeing.

The research highlights the significance of employee benefits in the perception of employee hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing in China and the UK. The research suggests that in both China and the UK, employees and leaders considered employee benefits as important in the perception of employee wellbeing. As explained in Chapter 4, the understanding of employee benefits varies in China and the UK, reflecting cultural differences, but in both contexts reflect hedonic and eudemonic aspects of wellbeing. The existing literature lacks research that provides detailed elements of hedonic and eudemonic benefits in understanding employee wellbeing,

especially in the context of SME health services in China and the UK. Therefore, the recognition of employee benefits as a crucial element in perceiving employee wellbeing in the SME health service sector is a contribution of this research.

Moreover, the research introduces a view of employee wellbeing in the context of SME health services, which is: employee wellbeing consists of hedonic and eudemonic benefits. This definition was studied in a different context from previous definitions of employee wellbeing that were focused on physical, psychological, and social aspects (Guest, 2017). To meet the objectives of this research, the researcher initially defined employee wellbeing as the quality of employees' experience from physical, psychological, and social aspects at work. This definition was derived from the one presented in previous research that appeared in the literature on employee wellbeing. However, the outcome of the research shows employee wellbeing is seen as hedonic and eudemonic by participants from the perspectives of employees and leaders, with an emphasis on the concept of employee benefits in both contexts. This outcome has not been found in the literature in the context of SME health services in China and the UK.

The research indicates that the physical, psychological, and social perspectives of employee wellbeing have different impacts on employees' hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing and provide more detail to understand how those aspects affect hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing in SME health service sector in cross-cultural contexts. Many research studies employee wellbeing from physical, psychological and social aspects (Guest, 2017). As discussed in Chapter 4, the physical aspects have more impact on employee hedonic wellbeing in both China and the UK. Participants in both contexts highly valued their physical work environment and believed a pleasant work environment reduced work stress and contributed to their hedonic wellbeing. The physical aspect of employee wellbeing was perceived as important but has not been found explored extensively in the cross-culture contexts of SME health services prior to this research. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature by addressing this gap.

The research demonstrates that the psychological aspect of wellbeing influenced on hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing in China and the UK. Workload as one factor that identified employees' experience and stress at work (Robertson and Cooper, 2011) shows both positive and negative on employee hedonic wellbeing in this research. The negative impact of workload on employee hedonic wellbeing shows in both Chinese and the UK context, such as tiredness and increased

stress. The positive effect of workload on employee hedonic wellbeing shows in the Chinese context, as employees felt stressed and anxious with less workload due to the consideration of their mianzi, one of the important characteristics of Chinese culture. This has not been explored in the previous research and suggests the impact of culture on employee wellbeing. A more detailed discussion of the psychological aspect and its impact on employees' hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing have been presented in Chapter 4.

The research indicates that the degree of social aspect influence on employee hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing varies in China and the UK. The social aspect of wellbeing includes interpersonal relationships at work, including relationships among employees and between employees and leaders (Grant et al., 2007; Guest, 2017). The research highlights that work relationships have more impact on employee wellbeing in China than in the UK context. As explained in Chapter 4, in the two UK cases, participants did not consider work relationships as an important factor that impacted on their wellbeing. In comparison, participants of both leaders and employees in the two Chinese cases were highly valued interpersonal relationships and their impact on their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. These outcomes not only support the literature that China highlighted harmonious relationships from the aspect of hedonic wellbeing (Zhang and Veenhoven, 2008; Joshanloo, 2014), but further show the influence of work relationships on both hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing of employees in this research context.

As explained in Chapter 4, the research also highlights critical factors that influence employee wellbeing in the context of SME health services in China and the UK and adds more detail on how these critical factors impacted employee hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing in the cross-cultural contexts. Moreover, the research shows leaders' understanding of employee wellbeing is closely related to their actions that impact on employee wellbeing. In other words, leaders took different actions to enhance employee wellbeing based on their understanding of employee wellbeing. For example, in the Chinese context, leaders saw employee wellbeing as employee benefits and employee development. As a result, they offered competitive salaries and provided training sessions for employees' personal development. In the UK context, work environment is seen as an important factor in employee wellbeing. Therefore, both leaders highlighted that they provided a pleasant work environment for their employees. These outcomes contribute to the literature of critical factors' influence on employee wellbeing in SME health services and provide insights into actions that leaders can take to improve employee wellbeing.

7.2 Culture and employee wellbeing

The research shows the degree of cultural impact on employee wellbeing differs in different cultural contexts in SME health services. As explained in Chapter 2, the definition of culture in this research is the shared values, understandings, and behavioural patterns of groups of people. To better understand the culture impact on employee wellbeing, extensively researched cultural theories of Hofstede, Hall and Trompenaars were applied in this research.

Hofstede's cultural theory has been applied in the research and shows varies degrees of its impact on employee wellbeing in China compared to the UK. **The power distance dimension exerts a greater influence on employee wellbeing in China than in the UK, through the analysis of work relations, decision-making and communication channels.** As discussed in Chapter 5, in the two Chinese cases, participants needed to respect hierarchical order and follow instructions from both their leaders and seniors, which they perceived resulted in their increased work stress and negatively impacted on their wellbeing. Besides, as discussed in Chapter 5, participants in the Chinese context found it stressful to communicate with their leaders due to the high hierarchy. Also, they were unlikely to express their dissatisfaction to their leaders as it is considered as a lack of respect or challenging the authorities. As a result, the power distance dimension has been largely negatively related to employees' wellbeing.

In comparison, the power distance dimension showed limited impact on employee wellbeing in the two UK cases. Participants in the two UK cases, including the Chinese participants perceived less negative impact of power distance on their wellbeing. As explained in Chapter 5, participants were allowed to express their disagreements or dissatisfactions with their leaders in the two UK cases. Also, participants enjoyed more control over their work, rather than following instructions from their leaders like the participants experienced in the Chinese cases, which enhanced their job satisfaction and work engagement that contributed to their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. Moreover, participants in the two UK cases found less negative impact on their wellbeing from work relations and communication with their leaders. This outcome aligns with the literature that Chinese culture with high power distance, so people are more likely to accept a hierarchical order, and employees are expected to be told what to do compared

to the UK (Hofstede, 2005; 2011). **The collectivism appears more influential on employee wellbeing in China and the individualism impacted more in the UK.** As discussed in Chapter 5, in the two Chinese cases, participants highlighted the concept of Mianzi, which indicated in Chapter 2, is a strong collectivist concern that related to good work relationships emphasised in the Chinese culture (Ambler et al., 2009). The emphasis on collectivism resulted in participants feeling compelled to comply with others at work, such as choosing to tolerate others in order to reduce potential conflicts and maintain group harmony. However, participants in the Chinese context perceived this resulted in their increased work stress that negatively influenced their wellbeing. In comparison, as discussed in Chapter 5, participants in the two UK cases embraced an individualist culture that encouraged individual responsibility. Work relations also appeared to have less negative impact on their wellbeing compared to China.

By applied Hall's cultural theory, the research shows that high context culture and low context culture have different impacts on employee hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing in different cultural contexts through the ways of communication. As discussed in Chapter 5, Chinese culture is considered high context, which means that Chinese people rely heavily on indirect messages and non-verbal communication, such as unwritten rules and regulations in the workplace showed in this research. Participants in the two Chinese cases perceived the indirect ways of communication and the unequal application of unwritten rules between senior and junior employees as largely associated negatively with their wellbeing because it added to their feeling of exhaustion and resulted in their increased dissatisfaction at work.

In contrast, British culture is classified as low context, where information is exchanged explicitly in communication (George et al., 2016). As discussed in Chapter 5, in the two UK cases, direct communication and clear information exchanged in the workplace reduced participants' work stress, which contributed to employee wellbeing. With more detail explained in Chapter 5, this research shows that high context culture impacted more on employee wellbeing in China compared to the UK. The research also shows that Trompenaars's dimensions, such as individualism and collectivism, influenced employee wellbeing differently in different cultural contexts. As discussed in Chapter 5, Trompenaars' dimensions of achievement and ascription explore whether individuals are valued based on their achievements on their social status and background, which is indirectly related to Hofstede's dimensions, such as individualism and collectivism, and power distance. Therefore, the researcher discussed those

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overlapped Trompenaars' dimensions impact on employee wellbeing in Hofstede's cultural dimension without repetition.

The research reveals practical implications of the degree of cultural impact on employee wellbeing differs in different cultural contexts. As explained in Chapter 5, in the Chinese context, due to the high power distance culture and high context culture, participants expressed that they felt obliged to comply with their leaders, preferred indirect communication with their leaders, and have to make efforts to maintain a good relationship with their leaders. Participants related those were negative to their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing because they found it added to their stress while reducing their work engagement and the desire for personal development. Therefore, in the Chinese context, in order to improve employee hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing, leaders need to take measures to reduce the negative impact of power distance on employee wellbeing in work relations, decision-making and communication channels, such as making efforts to identify employees' concerns that employees felt hesitate to say because of worrying about damage work relations, allow employees to make decisions, provide more opportunities for employees to communicate their leaders, and encourage open communication.

Moreover, as collectivism and indirect ways of communication appear more influential on employee wellbeing in China, also participant highlighted mianzi and its impact on their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing, such as losing mianzi resulted in increased stress and tensions in work relations. Therefore, to improve employee hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing, leaders need to consider employees' mianzi, especially preserve employees' mianzi in front of others. Also, leaders need to apply unwritten rules and regulations more equally to employees to improve employee wellbeing. In comparison, in the UK context, because of low power distance culture and low context culture, participants value privacy and autonomy, such as make decisions at work, and preferred direct communication. Therefore, leaders need to pay attention to those aspects to improve employee wellbeing. In addition, in Chapter 5, leaders address and resolve employees' problems at work quicker than delay, which can contribute to employee wellbeing in both Chinese and UK contexts.

7.3 Culture, leadership and employee wellbeing

The research shows the cultural impact on leadership by applying three extensively researched cultural theories of Hofstede, Hall and Trompenaars, and evaluates their impact on employee wellbeing. In the literature, there are a number of research highlighting cultural influence on leadership (Chen and Partington, 2004). This research supports the view from the perspective of employee wellbeing in the context of SME health services in China and the UK and shows the degree of cultural impact on leadership varies from context to context. The research also filled the research gap in the literature that there is limited research on the cultural impact on leadership, especially in-depth exploration was needed (Muhonen et al., 2013).

The dimensions of power distance and collectivism of Hofstede's culture theory have more influence on leadership styles and leader actions in China while the dimension of individualism influenced more on leadership styles and leader actions in the UK. As discussed in Chapter 5, in China, with a high power distance culture, leadership tends to be more hierarchical. Leaders are considered as authorities and employees are expected to follow leaders' instructions without questioning. The collectivism culture highlights work relationships, which are personal and emotional (Tayeb, 1994). The research outcomes support the view from the perspective of employee wellbeing. In the Chinese context, leaders emphasised workplace relationships and they pay attention to look after, inspire and motivate their employees both at work and outside the work. Employees also expected their leaders to look after them and help them with their personal difficulties, which contributed to their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. While in the UK context, with a low power distance culture that indicates leaders were perceived as approachable. Decision-making is encouraged by leaders. Besides, individualism culture led to leadership styles that value employees' autonomy. Employees did not expect their leaders to deal with their personal difficulties, as it would be an invasion of their privacy (Tayeb, 1994). This is reflected in this research as leaders in two UK cases mainly interacted with their employees at work or towards work-related issues, which are positively linked with employees' hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing.

The influence of culture on leadership is also reflected by apply Hall's cultural theory. For example, high context communication appears to be more influential on leadership styles and leader actions in China than in the UK, while low context communication has more

impact in the UK on leadership styles and leader actions than in China. In the two Chinese cases, the emphasis on implicit, non-verbal cues, and shared cultural values and norms allow leaders to communicate indirectly as the need to consider work relationships and give mianzi to employees that contribute to employees' hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. For example, leaders give employees mianzi helps employees to reduce confrontations at work that helps employees to form harmonious relationships at work. In contrast, in the two UK cases, with low context communication, leaders tend to communicate more explicitly and directly with employees, which reduces misunderstandings. Participants found direct communication with leaders helped to reduce their work stress, improved their work efficiency and they are encouraged to express their opinions and ideas, which contributed to their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing.

Cultural impact on leadership in the context of SME health services in China and the UK is also indicated by work relationships between leaders and employees. As discussed in Chapter 2, work relationships (Guanxi in Chinese) reflected the cultural impact on leadership as it was the key influencing element among Chinese cultural characters to smooth relationships in the workplace (Cooke, 2009). As discussed in Chapter 5, the research shows in the two Chinese cases, Guanxi resulted in leaders rewarding employees not only for employees' work performance but also for employees' Guanxi with leaders. This impacted both positively and negatively on employees' hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. On the one hand, participants perceived Guanxi is positively impacted their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing as a good Guanxi with leaders allow them to enjoy better employee benefits such as increases in bonuses and easy access to limited resources at work. On the other hand, employees perceived Guanxi as negatively related to their wellbeing as it added frustrations and reduced their motivation at work, especially when leaders expressed the need to consider Guanxi to give priority to some employees over others. This aligns with the literature that Guanxi plays a critical role when leaders reward their employees in China (Zhou and Matrocchino, 2001). While in two UK cases, participants considered Guanxi between leaders and employees have limited impact on employee wellbeing compared to other factors such as work performance. By understanding the connections among culture, leadership and employee wellbeing, leaders can take relevant actions to improve employee wellbeing.

7.4 Leadership and employee wellbeing

In the literature, there is extensive research highlighting leadership plays a critical role in impacting employee wellbeing (Rudolph et al., 2020) through different leadership styles (Northouse, 2018). This research supports the view from employee wellbeing perspective in the context of SME health services in China and the UK.

The research demonstrates different degrees of leadership exert different effects on employee hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing in different cultural contexts, which is reflected by exploring the impact of transformational, transactional and ethical leadership styles on employee wellbeing. **Transformational leadership appears to have more impact on employee hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing in China than in the UK.** As detailed in Chapter 6, in the two Chinese cases, participants who perceived limited inspiration and motivation from their leaders reported lower hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing such as low job satisfaction and reduced motivation for self-development at work.

In contrast, participants who perceived their leaders as encouraging and motivating experienced higher levels of hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing, such as experienced positive emotions towards work and felt motivated to achieve higher at work. These outcomes align with the existing literature suggesting a positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee wellbeing (Munir et al., 2012) and extend the context to SME health services in China and the UK. **These suggest in the Chinese context, to improve employee wellbeing, leaders need to focus on both hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing, take actions to motivate employees to surpass their initial expectations, inspire employees for greater achievement at work, treat employees as individuals and provide appropriate supports to respond to individual employee's needs and abilities.**

Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 6, employees' perceptions of their leaders play a significant role in the impact of transformational leadership on their wellbeing. In the Chinese context, participants who perceived positive with their leaders experienced a positive impact from their leaders and beneficial to their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. Participants who perceived negatively from their leaders resulted in increased stress and negative effects on their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. In contrast, the impact of transformational leadership on employee

wellbeing was not seen as evident in the two UK cases. Considering the influence on employee wellbeing, participants in the UK context placed less importance on receiving inspiration and motivation from leaders, instead prioritising rewards and benefits.

Greater influence of transactional leadership on employee wellbeing in the UK as compared to China. As discussed in Chapter 6, the impact of transactional leadership on employee hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing was more evident in the UK context. In the two Chinese cases, participants viewed differently of the influence of reward and punishment rules at work on their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. Some viewed the rules as positively linked to their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing as the rules can contribute to their financial benefits and encourage them to achieve higher at work. While some participants viewed the rules as having a negative influence on their hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing because it caused them to lose mianzi and affected the work relationship at work that led to added work stress.

In the UK context, participants in the clinic of UK 1 complained that they were experiencing excessive stress at work from their leaders to reach high sales targets to receive bonuses and avoid punishments, while participants in the clinic of UK 2 did not complain of suffering stress at work from leaders for reaching their sales targets to receive a bonus. This shows transactional leadership's impact on employee wellbeing varies, potentially due to differences in leader actions. **These suggest when rewarding or punishing employees, in the Chinese context, leaders need to consider employees' mianzi and work relationship to improve employee hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing, while in the UK context, leaders need to take work stress into account to improve employee hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing.** More details have been explained in Chapter 6.

Ethical leadership shows a relatively limited impact on employee wellbeing in both China and the UK, especially when compared to the influence of transformational and transactional leadership. As discussed in Chapter 6, employees in both China and the UK perceived that ethical leadership behaviours contributed positively to their hedonic wellbeing and eudemonic wellbeing. Unethical leader behaviours were associated with negative effects on employees' hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing, such as increased work stress and lower motivation for self-development. These support the existing literature that ethical leadership

positively impacts employee wellbeing (Sarwar et al., 2020) and extend to the context of SME health services in the cross-cultural contexts.

The research indicates the importance of certain leader actions, such as leader support is positively impacting employee hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing in both China and the UK. As detailed in Chapter 4, participants in both China and UK cases expressed positive perceptions regarding the physical work environment provided by their leaders. These positive perceptions were associated with a higher level of employee wellbeing. Chapter 5 and 6 indicated specific leader actions in the two Chinese cases, particularly among senior employees, who attached great importance to the concept of mianzi and sought to avoid causing anyone to lose mianzi in front of others. This approach was seen as a means to foster happiness among employees.

In comparison, leaders in the two UK cases placed greater emphasis on the physical work environment. They also considered work stress and workload as factors that affect employee hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing, focusing less on other factors that appeared important in the Chinese context, such as work relations. Overall, the research shows various ways in which leader actions can impact employee wellbeing, with variations explored between the Chinese and UK contexts. These contribute to improving employee wellbeing, not only helping to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goal No.3 to promote wellbeing, but also contributing to healthcare organisations with their CSR development.

7.6 New model of employee wellbeing

This research explores the impact of culture and leadership on employee wellbeing in the context of SME health services in China and the UK. As shown in Chapter 2.7, the initial conceptual framework of this research helps the researcher to conduct the research.

Initial Conceptual Framework:
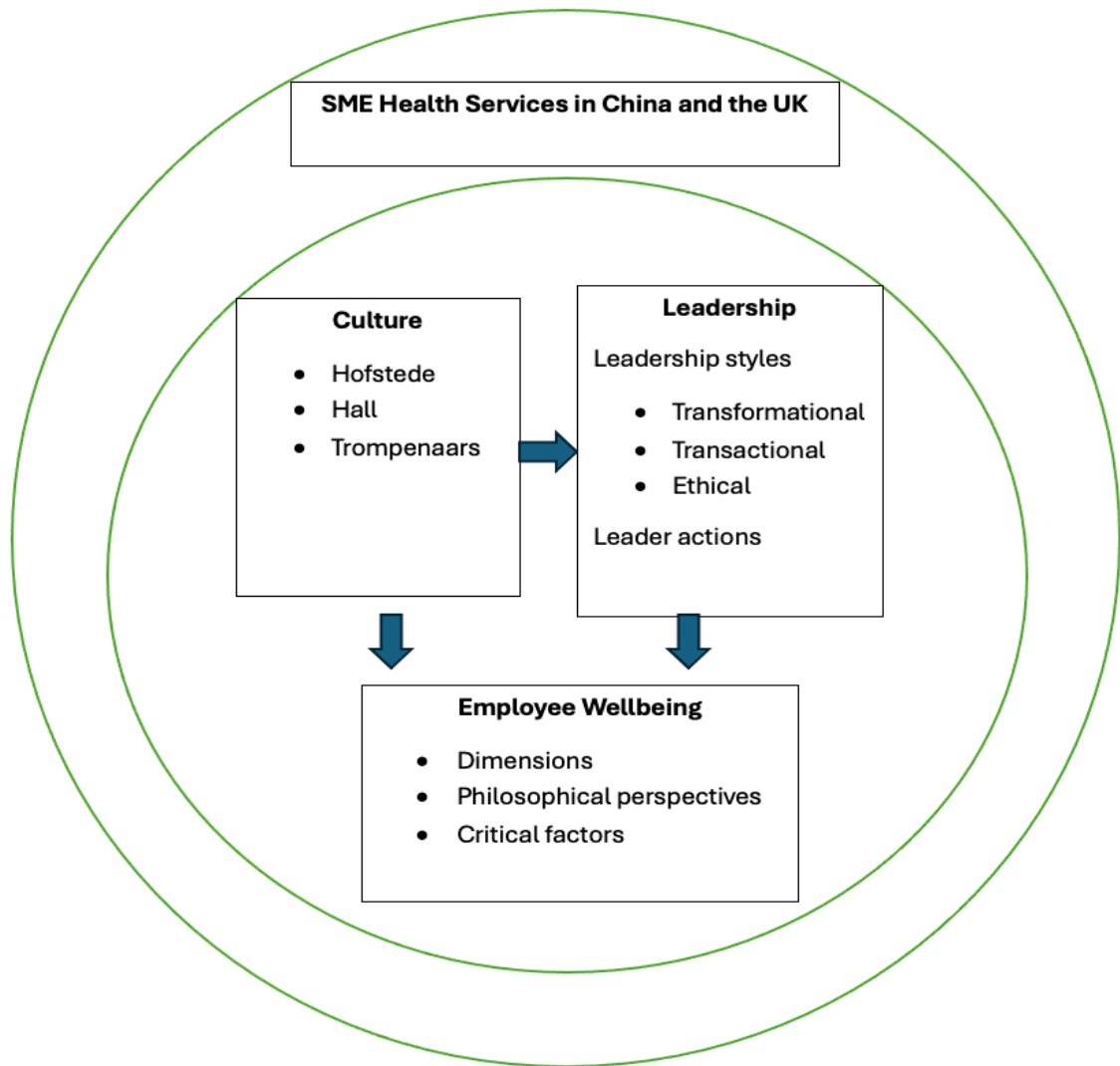
The research outcomes reveal that employee wellbeing consists of hedonic and eudemonic benefits. Culture impact on employee hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing directly and also through the influence on leadership via leadership styles and leader actions. Leadership impact on employee hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing through leadership styles and leader actions. Therefore, the researcher introduces a model to better understand the impact of culture and leadership on employee wellbeing in the SME health sector:
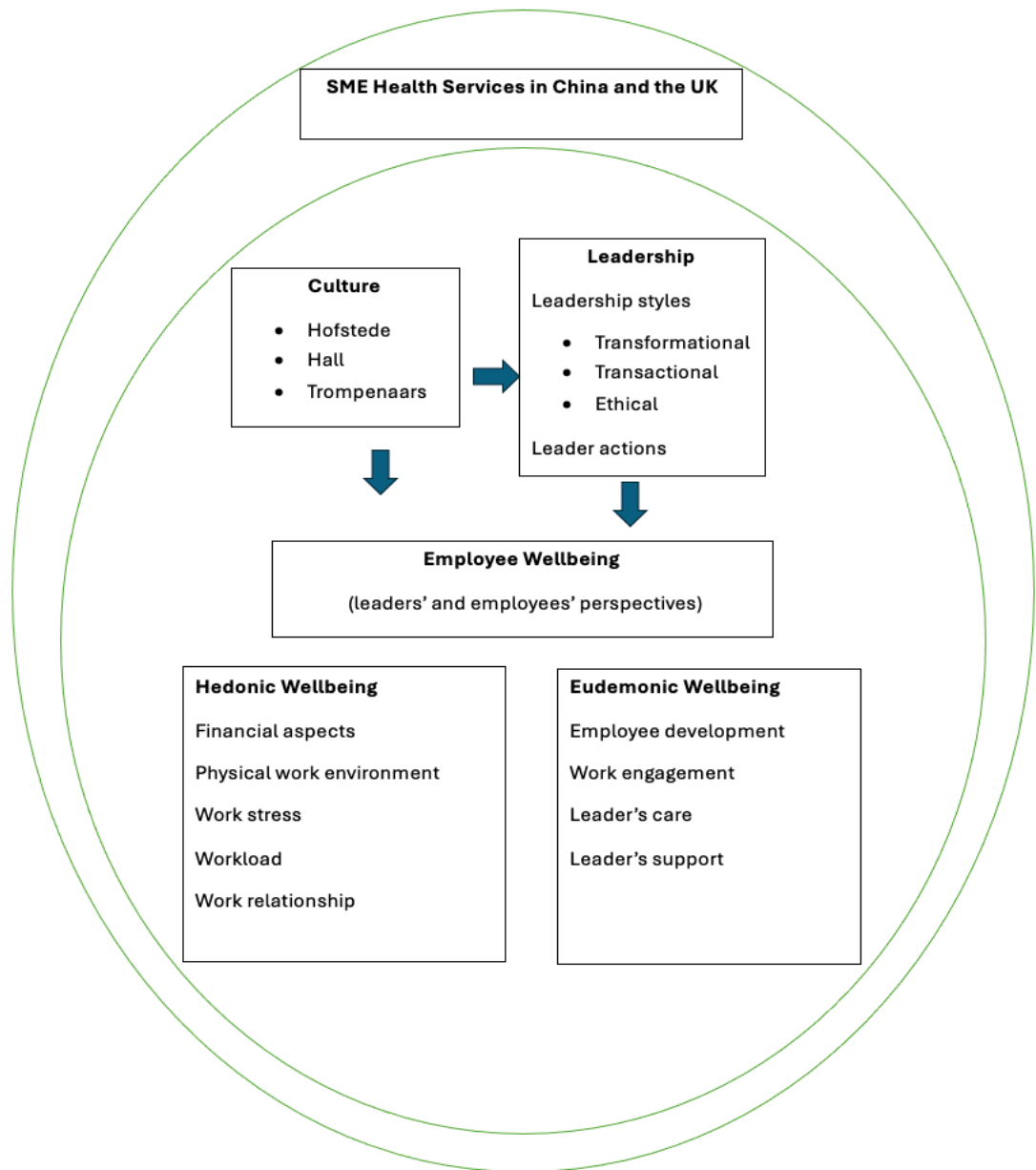
Figure 7-1 New model of employee wellbeing

7.7 Limitations of the research and future research

This research explores the understanding of employee wellbeing, and the impact of culture and leadership on employee wellbeing in SME health services in China and the UK. As any research, this research inevitably has some limitations, and these limitations provide valuable insights for future studies. First, key concepts of this research including employee wellbeing, culture, leadership are broad and include many aspects of each and relevant theories. So, the researcher

has narrowed it down and mainly focused on certain aspects and theories due to the constraints in time and thesis space. Future research can consider other dimensions of Hofstede's cultural theory, such as uncertainty avoidance, which may impact employee wellbeing. Similarly, future research can explore other leadership styles' influence employee wellbeing than transformational, transactional and ethical, such as laissez-faire. Therefore, future research on employee wellbeing, culture and leadership could consider exploring additional aspects and theories of these concepts.

Secondly, the researcher considered gender balance in participant selection but did not explore further how gender may influence employee wellbeing, which can be considered in future research. Thirdly, the fieldwork was conducted via online video interviews instead of other qualitative research methods such as face to face interviews or observation due to the social distance rules and travel restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. The research method limited the researcher's ability to collect richer materials by observing participants' body language and non-verbal cues. Therefore, face to face interviews or other research methods employed in future studies on employee wellbeing could enhance a deeper understanding of participants' experiences by allowing researchers to observe and interact more comprehensively in the fieldwork. Last, there is potential for improvements regarding the quality and representativeness of samples. For example, there are six participants selected in each of the four cases in this research. In future research, a greater number of participants in each case may provide a more comprehensive view of the study.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview questions

1. Could you describe what you do here at the clinic?

[workload including work overtime; job autonomy; relations with others; job demands and resources; job satisfaction; employee engagement]

2. How do you feel about working here at the clinic?

[employee's perception about work environment; the quality (e.g. cleanliness, workplace temperature, equipment) and safety of the physical environment; relations with others (e.g. relaxed and productive atmosphere); open communication (e.g. give feedback, interesting topics for conversation at work); leader support]

3. How much do you like your job?

[employee personal growth; employee feel meaningful and purpose at work; employee feel supported/motivated at work; employee feel respected and valued at work; harmony with others at work; style of communication at work]

4. Could you tell me about how your leader influences you?

[leaders share their thoughts and ideas with employees; employee's involvement in the decision-making process; the authority of leader; leader sets/shows a role model; leader motivates/supports employee; leader recognise employee as individuals]

5. What you like the most in your workplace?

6. Is there anything interesting to you at the clinic that you would like to share with me?

Appendix 2. Participant Information Sheet

Title of the Research '[*Impact of Culture and Leadership on Employee Wellbeing in SME health services: Cases of TCM in China and the UK*]'

The research is being conducted by Xuehan Du at Nottingham Trent University. The aim of the research is to better understand the influence of culture and leadership on employees' wellbeing in SME health services of TCM in China and the UK. The field work of the research is to get the primary data in order to answer the question, how do culture and leadership influence employee wellbeing in China and the UK with focus on in the context of traditional Chinese medicine practices. There are a number of interviews that I will conduct with leaders and employees at their clinics. You have been selected to take part in this study because you are working in SME health services in Beijing/ London. Your responses to my questions will help me to complete my research project.

Your participation in the interview is entirely voluntary, and you can opt out at any stage by telling me via email. If you are happy to take part, please sign the consent form enclosed. The interview will take approximately 1.5 hours and will be video recorded. Your responses in the interview will be treated confidentially and the information you provided will be kept anonymous in any research outputs/publications. The video of your interview will be transcribed. I will then analyse the information and feed it into my results. The transcripts will be fully anonymised before they are archived. Any information that identifies you and/or your organisation will be removed. The video and transcript will be handled only by me, in line with data protection principles and the approved research protocol. The video of the interview will be stored in a secure storage with password to access to files in my personal computer, and the relevant files will be stored for 5 years.

This project has received favourable ethical opinion from Nottingham Trent University's Schools of Business, Law and Social Sciences' Research Ethics Committee. If you have any questions about the project, you can email a request to me: xuehan.du2018@my.ntu.ac.uk.

Agreement to consent

I voluntarily consent to participate in this study. In completing this form I certify that I am 18 years of age or older. I shall be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Participant's name   date

I certify that I have presented the above information to the participant

Researcher's signature   Date

For further information, or if you have any queries, please contact the person below:

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Thank you very much indeed for taking the time to read this sheet, and for your interest in this research.

Appendix 3. Interview Consent Form

Title of the research: *Impact of Culture and Leadership on Employee Wellbeing in SME health services: Cases of TCM in China and the UK*

This is an informed consent form in respect of the above research. Please read and confirm your consent to being interviewed for this research by initialling the appropriate box(es) and signing and dating this form.

I, _____confirm that (please tick):

1	I confirm that the purpose of the research has been explained to me, that I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research	
2	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw my participation at any time without giving any reasons and I will not be penalised for withdrawing	
3	The procedures regarding confidentiality and anonymity have been explained to me (e.g. use of pseudonyms)	
4	The use if the data in research, publications, archiving and sharing has been explained to me	
5	I consent to the interview being conducted online due to the Covid-19 situation and the interview being video recorded on the understanding that the recording will be disposed of as per the terms in the information sheet	
6	I agree to take part in this research	

_____   _____   _____
Participants' name   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____
Participants' name   Signature   Date