

# **The effect of positive leadership on employee wellbeing: The mediating role of organizational culture**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this research was to investigate the interactions between positive leadership, organizational culture, and employee wellbeing among Thai workers. The research's conceptual framework proposes that organizational culture will mediate the relationship between positive leadership and employee wellbeing. The research was conducted as a survey of employees in a large Thai organization. Statistical analysis included confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling. The analysis confirmed that positive leadership significantly influenced organizational culture and employee wellbeing, that organizational culture significantly influenced employee wellbeing, and that organizational culture partially mediated the effect of positive leadership on employee wellbeing. This finding implies that positive leadership alone is insufficient to foster employee wellbeing; a supportive organizational culture is also essential.

**Keywords:** Employee wellbeing, organizational culture, positive leadership, positive psychology

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## Introduction

Wellbeing is a positive indicator of happiness and contributor to positive outcomes in the workplace (Johar et al., 2023). It is also critical at the national level, as indicated by the United Nations' ranking of health and wellbeing as the third goal out of 17 sustainable development goals (United Nations, 2015). Therefore, it is unsurprising that wellbeing is increasingly considered in public economic and social development policymaking (Kamp et al., 2023). In Thailand, The 13<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development Plan (2023-2027) calls for universal access to basic necessities, a healthy environment, opportunities to improve livelihoods as supports for wellbeing (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2023). There is also evidence of a growing academic interest in employee wellbeing, with exponential growth in research and practice publications in the last decade (Rahman & Tahseen, 2023). Organizational psychologists are increasingly interested in wellbeing in the workplace (Diener et al., 2017). Furthermore, many organizations have set up wellbeing initiatives, with a recent survey showing that 77% of companies surveyed offer health and wellness programs, while 64% offer mental health support (Rahman & Tahseen, 2023). In short, awareness of and interest in employee wellbeing is growing across policy, academic, and corporate sectors.

Employee wellbeing is one component of employee wellbeing. Employee wellbeing can be defined briefly as a subjective sense of engagement with and happiness with work and the organization in general (Zheng et al., 2015). Employee wellbeing includes life wellbeing (a general sense of satisfaction with one's life), psychological wellbeing (satisfaction with one's mental health and stability), and employee wellbeing (satisfaction with one's working conditions and experiences) (Zheng et al., 2015). It is well known that employee wellbeing is influenced by organizational policies and practices, for example human resource practices, which influence everything from job resources to incentives and compensation for work (Li et al., 2024). There has also been increasing attention paid to emerging issues like virtual and remote work (Hill et al., 2024). However, there are still gaps in understanding of employee wellbeing. This research focuses on employee wellbeing as the aspect most directly influenced by the organization and workplace culture and practices (Zheng et al., 2015).

This research focuses on the role of leadership – specifically positive leadership – on employee wellbeing and how this interacts with organizational culture. Positive leadership can be defined as leadership which is oriented toward optimism, altruism, and virtuousness, and which seeks to motivate others toward these same principles (Malinga et al., 2019). Theoretically, positive leadership, like other forms of leadership, would shape organizational culture, or the set of cultural assumptions, norms, and practices that emerge within the

organization (Hofstede et al., 2010; Schein, 1984). Positive leadership is known to play a role in aspects of organizational culture such as organizational thriving (Vera et al., 2021), employee flourishing (Singh et al., 2022), and ethical leadership (Monzani & Van Dick, 2020). Positive leadership is also intended to promote employee wellbeing as well as employee performance (Cameron, 2008, 2021), but the empirical evidence for this effect is weak. Other leadership approaches, such as transformational leadership, authentic leadership, and ethical leadership, do support the effect of leadership on employee wellbeing (Arnold, 2017; Azila-Gbette et al., 2024), and there are a few studies which have found the same effect for positive leadership (Adams et al., 2020; Samad et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2022).

The interrelationships between positive leadership, organizational culture, and employee wellbeing have not been investigated fully, according to the literature review. There is evidence that positive leadership has an impact on organizational culture, contributing to the organization's resilience and development of a virtuous organizational culture which promotes employee flourishing (Monzani & Van Dick, 2020; Singh et al., 2022; Vera et al., 2021). However, there is less evidence for a direct influence of positive leadership and employee wellbeing. Contributing to employee thriving is a motivating goal of positive leadership (Cameron, 2008, 2021), and there is some empirical evidence that it does have a positive impact on employees (Adams et al., 2020; Samad et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2023; Yan et al., 2023). However, these studies have very different conceptualizations of positive leadership and employee wellbeing, leading to a lack of clarity in the research. There is also a strong theoretical claim made for a link between organizational culture and employee wellbeing (Paz et al., 2020). However, there were only a few studies identified that investigated this relationship (Ficarra et al., 2020; Hosseini et al., 2020; Paz et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2022). Once again, these studies had inconsistent theoretical foundations and used different models, leading to a research gap. There is also the possibility that organizational culture could intervene in the relationship between positive leadership and employee wellbeing, as has been found in other leadership-employee relationships (Hosseini et al., 2020; Paz et al., 2020; Sun et al., 2023; Yan et al., 2023). As in other questions, these researchers used different theoretical frameworks and measured different variables, leading to fragmented and uncertain evidence. Thus, although there are theoretical links between positive leadership, organizational culture, and employee wellbeing, these theoretical links have not been investigated adequately in the empirical literature. This leaves a significant gap in understanding how positive leadership can influence the individual employee and how the organization's culture affects this relationship. The aim of this research is to investigate the interaction between positive leadership, organizational culture, and employee wellbeing. Objectives

included (1) establishing a theoretical framework of positive leadership, organizational culture, and employee wellbeing, and (2) testing this framework within a Thai organization. These objectives were accomplished through an organizational survey in a large Thai firm, supported by the literature review.

## **Framework and Literature Review**

### **Positive leadership**

Positive leadership has its theoretical roots in positive psychology, a field which emphasizes outcomes such as happiness, optimal performance, and flourishing (Seligman, 2011; Vera et al., 2021). Positive leadership can be viewed as a style of leadership which draws on the insights of positive psychology, especially focus on positive behaviours and outcomes and the use of positive reinforcement, rather than punishment, to achieve goals (Cameron, 2008, 2021; Monzani & Van Dick, 2020). Positive leadership makes use of positive psychology in goal setting, motivation, and orientation, as well as the support of authentic virtue and ethics within the organization as a whole (Monzani & Van Dick, 2020).

One definition of positive leadership distinguishes it from other conceptualizations of leadership through (1) development of extraordinarily positive performance (2) a focus on strengths and capabilities and on affirming human potential and (3) facilitating the best of the human condition, or on fostering virtuousness (Cameron, 2008). On a personal level, positive leaders are characterized by personality traits such as optimism, altruism, ethical orientation, virtuousness, and the ability to motivate others towards positive outcomes (Malinga et al., 2019; Monzani & Van Dick, 2020; Redín et al., 2023). Positive leaders also encourage others toward positivity on a personal, team, and organizational level through motivation and role modelling of behaviours (Monzani & Van Dick, 2020). These characteristics of positive leadership contribute to its purported ability to facilitate growth and energize followers toward exceptional performance (Cameron, 2021). Furthermore, positive leadership focuses on what goes right in organizations and leadership contexts; while it does not ignore problems, the focus on creating an environment for positive outcomes, not just mitigating negative outcomes, is central to the philosophy of positive leadership (Cameron, 2021).

Although the evidence on positive leadership and its effect on employee outcomes like employee wellbeing is limited, it can be equated to similar theoretical models of leadership such as authentic leadership, servant leadership, and transformational leadership (Ramdas & Patrick, 2019). Each of these leadership styles has its own theoretical structure, but many acknowledge the importance of positive leadership and focus on virtuousness and employee thriving. Furthermore, as Ramdas and Patrick (2019) point out, each of these similar leadership

models is supported with evidence for their impact on employee wellbeing. There is also evidence that positive leadership plays a role in short-term employee emotional response and wellbeing at work (Wijewardena et al., 2014). Thus, there is some evidence that similar constructs to positive leadership are beneficial in the organization, but it is unclear exactly how this effect occurs. This research turns to organizational culture as the contextual factor that could influence the relationship of positive leadership and employee wellbeing.

### **Organizational culture**

Organizational culture refers to the assumptions, beliefs, practices, and artifacts that characterize the organization and people within it (Schein, 1984). These assumptions, beliefs, norms, and social practices play a significant role in shaping the organization's policy, strategies, and the beliefs of people within it (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016). Organizational cultures are derived from multiple sources, including the overarching culture, organizational leaders, and the organization's history and strategies (Hofstede et al., 2010). Organizational culture can be viewed in a multi-dimensional model, with assumptions, beliefs and practices surrounding areas such as individualism versus collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and traditionally masculine versus feminine values and practices (Hofstede et al., 2010). These cultural dimensions vary at the individual, organizational, and broader cultural levels, creating differences in viewpoints and opinions between individuals (Yoo et al., 2011). Organizational culture can also be viewed through the lens of organizational priorities and orientations, for example innovation cultures team cultures, and detail cultures (Chong et al., 2018). While there are multiple models for organizational culture, this research adopts the Hofstede et al. (2010) dimensional model of organizational culture in order to determine whether some aspects of culture are more relevant.

### **Employee wellbeing**

Wellbeing is a broad term for an individual's general quality of life, happiness, and contentment with their situation, which is applied differently in different ways (Cooke et al., 2016). Within the organization, wellbeing may be characterized as employee wellbeing or employee wellbeing, which is a form of subjective wellbeing related to the individual's engagement with their work and organization (Zheng et al., 2015). As Zheng et al. (2015) explained, wellbeing comprises several different dimensions, including employee wellbeing (representing the individual's subjective perception of contentment with their work) and psychological wellbeing. Employee wellbeing can be affected by several different aspects of organizational life, ranging from organizational and human resources, policies, and leadership practices to relationships with leaders and colleagues, to the meaningfulness and satisfaction the employee derives from their work (Pagán-Castaño et al., 2020). Psychological factors such as

the employee's trust in organizational leadership and employee voice may also play a role in employee wellbeing (Prince et al., 2022). However, the research on wellbeing in general, and especially employee wellbeing, is underdeveloped and fragmented (Cooke et al., 2016; Pagán-Castaño et al., 2020). Therefore, more exploratory research is needed to investigate how employee wellbeing is influenced by organizational forces and other issues.

### **Positive leadership, Organizational culture, and Employee wellbeing**

The first relationship investigated is the relationship between positive leadership and organizational culture. This relationship is proposed in organizational culture theory, which argues that leadership practices are one of the main influences which shape organizational culture through the ethics, norms, and values of leaders (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016; Hofstede et al., 2010; Schein, 1984). Positive leadership is viewed as one of the factors that creates a positive organizational culture in which exceptional outcomes and flourishing are encouraged, and virtuousness is promoted (Cameron, 2008, 2021; Redín et al., 2023). Thus, it stands to reason that positive leadership could be observed to have a positive influence on organizational culture perceptions. Empirical evidence supports the role of positive leadership in organizational culture. Studies have shown that leadership and organizational culture are tightly integrated, with leadership styles strongly influencing organizational culture (Chong et al., 2018; Kargas & Varoutas, 2015). Positive leadership has been shown to have a direct effect on the organization's resilience and thriving under difficult conditions, in part because positive leadership creates a positive organizational culture (Vera et al., 2021). Positive leadership is also associated with the development of virtuous organizational cultures, in which ethical norms and practices are prioritized over transactional and short-term organizational issues or organizational toxicity (Monzani & Van Dick, 2020). Empowering leadership (which is conceptually very similar to positive leadership) has been shown to influence the formation of organizational culture which promotes employee flourishing as well (Singh et al., 2022). Taken together, these studies support a positive effect of positive leadership on organizational culture. Therefore, the research investigates the following relationship:

Hypothesis 1: Positive leadership positively influences organizational culture.

The second relationship investigated is between positive leadership and work wellbeing. This relationship is also supported by the theory surrounding positive leadership. One of the core purposes of positive leadership is to promote employee thriving and performance (Cameron, 2008, 2021), which is central to the concept of employee wellbeing (Zheng et al., 2015). There is also some empirical support for this relationship, although it is complicated by the fragmentation of the literature on both positive leadership and employee wellbeing. According to one literature review, many prior studies have investigated the relationship of leadership and



employee wellbeing, showing that leadership does influence wellbeing at work, although there are some limitations to this research, especially methodological limitations (Inceoglu et al., 2018). Another recent review indicated that different leadership styles, including authentic leadership, transformational leadership, ethical leadership, and servant leadership, have been shown to influence employee wellbeing in different ways (Azila-Gbettor et al., 2024). Transformational leadership has also been linked to employee wellbeing, although there are many mediating variables in this complex relationship (Arnold, 2017). Direct evidence comes from several studies which have shown that positive leadership styles can influence employee wellbeing (Adams et al., 2020; Samad et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2022; Wijewardena et al., 2014) as well as related outcomes like quality of work life (Sun et al., 2023) and employee engagement (Yan et al., 2023). These studies are limited in comparative value due to differences in conceptualization of leadership styles and employee wellbeing (Vincent-Höper et al., 2017), which is common in the literature (Arnold, 2017; Azila-Gbettor et al., 2024; Inceoglu et al., 2018). Furthermore, many studies on positive leadership are more focused on employee performance than on employee wellbeing or other subjective measures of happiness at work (Ramdas & Patrick, 2019). Thus, there is a significant empirical research gap on the relationship between positive leadership and employee wellbeing. To address this gap, the research investigates a second relationship:

Hypothesis 2: Positive leadership positively influences employee wellbeing.

The third relationship investigated is between organizational culture and employee wellbeing. The theoretical relationship between these two constructs is clear, considering that organizational culture is one of the factors that contributes to the employee experience at work – toxic organizational cultures create negative work experiences, while good organizational cultures create positive work experiences (Hofstede et al., 2010). Furthermore, different types of organizational culture create different work experiences and values, e.g., clan cultures are likely to create strong interpersonal relationships, but may weaken incentives for professional growth (Paz et al., 2020). It is therefore considered that organizational culture is also likely to have a direct role in employee wellbeing. However, the empirical situation is less certain, due again in part to a fragmented body of literature. While direct evidence is limited, there is evidence that organizational culture influences other employee outcomes which are related to employee wellbeing. For example, it has been shown that positive organizational culture is one of the determinants of employee flourishing in India (Singh et al., 2022). Another study found that organizational culture was associated with organizational learning, which can be a factor in employee outcomes (Hosseini et al., 2020). A study in faith-based higher education institutions

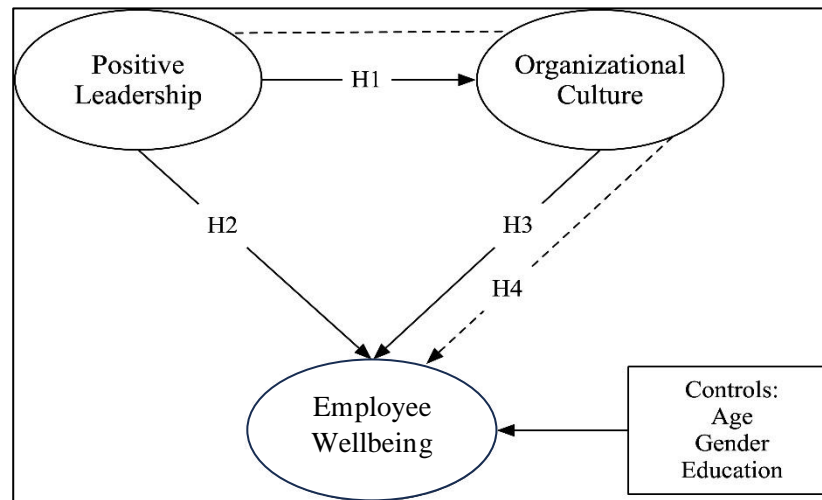
found that organizational culture was associated with employee happiness (Ficarra et al., 2020). Paz et al. (2020) found that there was a direct influence of all organizational cultures except bureaucratic culture on perceived employee wellbeing. These empirical studies are limited in number, but they do support the idea that there is an influence of organizational culture on employee wellbeing. Therefore, the third hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 3: Organizational culture positively influences employee wellbeing.

Finally, the potential mediation effect of organizational culture on the positive leadership-employee wellbeing relationship is investigated. This relationship is based on the theoretical view of mediation and prior findings. Mediation may be observed when an intervening variable has significant causal relationships with both an independent and dependent variable (Hayes, 2018). Previous parts of the literature review have established that positive leadership influences both organizational culture and employee wellbeing in other contexts, and that organizational culture influences employee wellbeing, establishing theoretical conditions for mediation. There has also been some prior research which has investigated organizational culture as a mediator between leadership styles or other organizational factors and employee outcomes, including employee wellbeing and others. One of these studies found that most organizational cultures (except for bureaucratic cultures) mediated the effect of quality of work life on employee wellbeing (Paz et al., 2020). Another study found that organizational culture mediated the influence of leadership styles on organizational learning outcomes (Hosseini et al., 2020). While Singh et al. (2022) did not investigate a mediating effect, their model of joint effects of empowering leadership and organizational culture on wellbeing suggests that there could be a relationship. A study on positive leadership in the medical field found that organizational culture moderated the relationship between positive leadership and quality of work life outcomes among doctors (Sun et al., 2023). Finally, a study on positive leadership and employee engagement showed that individualism-collectivism (one dimension of organizational culture) influenced the relationship between positive leadership and organizational engagement for employees (Yan et al., 2023). Taken together, these studies show that there is a known mediating effect of organizational culture between leadership styles and employee outcomes, including employee wellbeing and others. However, there is a limited amount of research in this area, and some conflicting findings, which justifies additional research. Thus, the final hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 4: The influence of positive leadership on employee wellbeing is mediated by organizational culture.



**Figure 1** Conceptual framework of the study

## Research Methodology

### Methodology and research design

The research employed a quantitative methodology, which was selected due to the ability to test hypotheses and generalize findings to broader populations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A survey research design enabled the researcher to collect evidence on pre-existing attitudes and beliefs as well as the real-world experience in the organization (Ruel et al., 2015).

### Research instrument

The research instrument (Table 1) was developed based on prior instruments where possible. The scales included positive leadership (10 items), the organizational culture measures, and employee wellbeing (6 items). These items were measured using a five-point Likert scale.

The positive leadership scale did not have a reference scale available as there have not been any instruments published for this construct. Instead, the researcher developed the scale from the literature on positive leadership and characteristics of positive leaders.

The cultural dimensions perspective on organizational culture, as implemented in the CVSCALE instrument (Hofstede et al., 2010; Yoo et al., 2011), was used to evaluate organizational culture. This choice was made because of its broad acceptance in organizational literature (Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024). While some of the aspects of this organizational culture model do not support positive organizational culture, the scoring mechanism accounts for this (Yoo et al., 2011). Organizational culture measures were comprised of five dimensions: power distance (5 items), uncertainty avoidance (5 items), collectivism (6 items), long-term orientation (6 items), masculinity (4 items), and employee wellbeing (6 items).

The employee wellbeing measure was adapted from Zheng et al.'s (2015) compound measure of overall employee wellbeing. This measure includes three separate dimensions of life wellbeing (related to overall life satisfaction), workplace wellbeing (related to employee experience of the workplace), and psychological wellbeing (related to mental stability and health) (Zheng et al., 2015). As the focus of the study was on workplace wellbeing, only the employee wellbeing scale was used.

Because there is evidence that gender (Díaz et al., 2022; Sirgy, 2021) and age (Sirgy, 2021) affect general wellbeing, these were also included as control variables, using categorical variables. The third control variable of leader tenure was added due to the role of leader-member exchange in employee perceptions of leadership and other outcomes (Decuyper et al., 2022).

### **Sampling and data collection**

The research was conducted among employees of a large Thai organization. The organization, which is a utility company, has approximately 5,000 employees across a variety of technical, administrative, and operational fields. The company was chosen for the research because the organization's leaders are currently considering implementing more formal employee wellbeing programs and preferred to be aware of the current situation. Organizational culture was one of the factors considered in a broader study. Only non-managerial employees were included in the sample because the company has different support programs for managers and non-managers, and because managers may have significantly different expectations and experiences of leadership. Of the approximately 5,000 employees in the company, it was estimated that about 4,200 employees held non-managerial roles, while there were around 800 employees at levels from team leaders to top management.

Data was collected anonymously using an offsite survey platform in order to protect participant identity. A random sample of non-managerial employees from all organization levels was selected from the employee base, and employees were recruited using the employee mail system. A sample size of 200 members was targeted, in order to ensure that the sample would be an adequate size for the structural model using a standard rule of thumb for sample size (Kline, 2023). The final sample included 208 members.

### **Data analysis**

The data analysis technique selected was structural equation modelling (SEM), an approach which associates observed variables with latent variables and evaluates relationships on a model level (Byrne, 2016; Kline, 2023). SEM was conducted in SPSS AMOS, a standard tool for model-based analysis (Byrne, 2016). The analysis began with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), which was used to investigate factor structures and reduce the model to improve

model fit (Brown, 2015). SEM was then used to investigate the relationships between the identified factors and test the hypotheses proposed in the literature review.



**Table 1** Scale construction, items and sources

Scale	Definition	Measurement	Source
<b>Predictor Variables</b>			
Positive Leadership	Leadership which facilitates positive performance, affirms human potential and strengths, and promotes virtuousness (Cameron, 2008, 2021)	My leader... PEL1. Helps other people flourish without expecting payback. PEL2. Expresses gratitude and humility. PEL3. Instils confidence and self-efficacy in others. PEL4. Forgives weaknesses in others. PEL5. Invests in developing personal relationships. PEL6. Shares plum assignments and recognizes others' involvement. PEL7. Listens actively and empathetically. PEL8. Solves problems. PEL9. Mostly sees opportunities. PEL10. Clarifies meaningfulness and inspires others.	Author Based on Cameron (2021)
Power Distance	The extent to which people agree that there should be hierarchies and separation of higher and lower positions (Hofstede et al., 2010)	PD1. People in higher positions should make most decisions without consulting people in lower positions. PD2. People in higher positions should not ask the opinions of people in lower positions too frequently. PD3. People in higher positions should avoid social interaction with people in lower positions. PD4. People in lower positions should not disagree with decisions by people in higher positions. PD5. People in higher positions should not delegate important tasks to people in lower positions.	Yoo et al. (2011) Based on Hofstede et al. (2010)

**Table 2** (Continuous)

Scale	Definition	Measurement	Source
Uncertainty Avoidance	The extent to which people try to limit or avoid uncertainty and risk (Hofstede et al., 2010)	UA1. It is important to have instructions spelled out in detail, so I always know what I'm expected to do. UA2. It's important to closely follow rules and procedures. UA3. Rules and regulations are important because they inform me what is expected of me. UA4. Standardized work procedures are helpful. UA5. Instructions for operations are important.	Yoo et al. (2011) Based on Hofstede et al. (2010)
Collectivism	The extent to which people prioritize the interests of the group over individual interests (Hofstede et al., 2010)	CO1. Individuals should sacrifice self-interest for the group. CO2. Individuals should stick with the group even through difficulties. CO3. Group welfare is more important than individual rewards. CO4. Group success is more important than individual success. CO5. Individuals should only pursue their goals after considering the welfare of the group. CO6. Group loyalty should be encouraged even if individual goals suffer.	
Long-Term Orientation	The extent to which people prioritize the future over the present (Hofstede et al., 2010)	LTO1. Careful management of money (thrift) is important. LTO2. Going on resolutely in spite of opposition (persistence) is important. LTO3. Personal steadiness and stability are important. LTO4. Long-term planning is important. LTO5. Giving up today's fun for future success is important. LTO6. Working hard for success in the future is important.	
Masculinity	The extent to which people privilege traditional Western masculine ideals (Hofstede et al., 2010)	MAS1. It is more important for men to have a professional career than it is for women. MAS2. Men usually solve problems with logical analysis; women usually solve problems with intuition. MAS3. Solving problems usually requires an active, forcible approach, which is typical of men. MAS4. There are some jobs that men can always do better than women.	



**Table 3** (Continuous)

Scale	Definition	Measurement	Source
<b>Outcome Variable</b>			
Employee Wellbeing	Subjective wellbeing related to the individual's engagement with work and organization, including satisfaction and enjoyment (Zheng et al., 2015).	WWB1. I am satisfied with my work responsibilities. WWB2. In general, I feel fairly satisfied with my current job. WWB3. I find real enjoyment in my work. WWB4. I can always find ways to enrich my work. WWB5. Work is a meaningful experience for me. WWB6. I feel basically satisfied with my work achievement in my current job.	Zheng et al. (2015)
<b>Control Variables</b>			
Gender		I am... Male Female Other/Prefer not to say	
Age		I am... [fill in] years old	
Tenure		I have worked with my current leader for ... [fill in] years	

## Findings and Results

### Respondent information

*Gender.* The largest group of participants was female (47.6%), followed by male participants (43.3%). A small group of participants chose other/prefer not to say (9.1%). This is consistent with the distribution of gender within the organization according to the most recent demographic survey.

*Age.* The largest group of participants was aged 30 to 39 years (38.5%), followed by 20 to 29 years (33.2%), 40 to 49 years (14.9%), under 20 years (10.6%) and 50 years and older (2.9%). This is broadly consistent with the organization's demographics, although it slightly underrepresents older employees, who comprise about 5% of the organization. This may be due to the typically higher managerial position of older employees within the organization; since the survey excluded managerial employees, only senior technical employees would have been sampled from the oldest age group.

*Leader tenure.* Most participants did not have a very long relationship with their supervisors. It was most common that participants had worked with their current leader for one to three years (46.2%), followed by four to six years (28.4%), less than one year (16.3%), or more than six years (9.1%). This indicates that about 60.5% of the sample had worked with their current leader for three years or less.

### Confirmatory factor analysis

The next step in the analysis was the CFA process. CFA is used to confirm the factor structure of variables prior to analysis in order to reduce the model and improve the model fit for SEM (Brown, 2015). The initial model included individual measures for the organizational culture dimensions, while in the final model the individual measures were combined into a single measure. The final modification of the model is shown in Figure 2.

Table 2 summarizes the model fit for the original and refitted models. The relative chi-square (CMIN/DF) was the first measure used, with a cut-off of  $<3$  being considered a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999) and a value of  $<5$  being acceptable (Marsh et al., 2004). The second measure used was the root mean square residual (SRMR), with a cut-off for acceptable fit of  $<.08$  (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Finally, the comparative fit index (CFI) was used, with a cut off of  $\geq .95$  to indicate a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The original model did not reach an adequate level of fit according to two measures (CMIN/DF = 5.443; CFI = 0.90), although according to the third it was well fitted (SRMR = 0.045). As is common with CFA and other path analysis practices, the model was refitted in order to improve the goodness of fit for the original model (Schumacker & Lomax, 2010). This resulted in one measure being acceptable (CMIN/DF = 3.866) and improvements in the other two measures (CFI = 0.936; SRMR = 0.035). Additional

attempts to refine the measurement model did not improve the fit significantly, but did lose some potentially relevant information. Therefore, these measures were retained.

Table 3 summarizes the validity and reliability measures derived from this model. Factor loadings for all items were a minimum of 0.832, which is well above the threshold of 0.60 which indicates that a factor is relevant to a latent variable (Brown, 2015). Cronbach's alpha was used to investigate internal consistency of the scales, with a minimum measure of 0.70 (Iacobucci & Duhachek, 2003). As Table 3 shows, all of the scales reached this level (Positive leadership:  $\alpha = 0.987$ ; Organizational culture:  $\alpha = 0.973$ ; Employee wellbeing:  $\alpha = 0.964$ ). Therefore, the measures showed appropriate levels of internal consistency. Composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were also used to investigate the validity of the instruments, with  $CR \geq .70$  used to indicate internal consistency and  $AVE \geq .50$  used to indicate discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2019). As Table 3 shows, all measures exceeded this criterion. Therefore, the overall reliability and validity of the CFA model was supported. The analysis then moved on to the SEM process.

**Table 4** CFA model fit (original and modified)

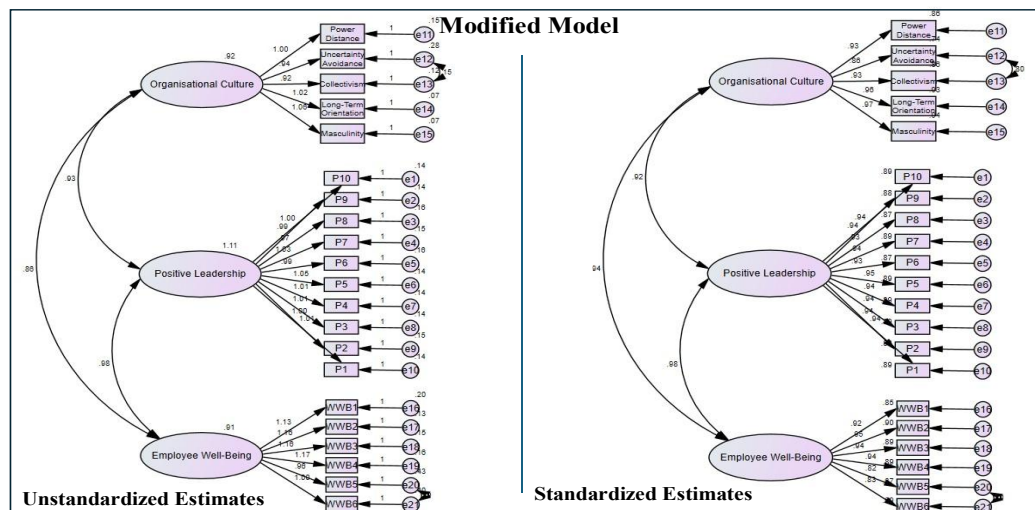
Model Fit	Original Model	Modified Model
CMIN/DF	5.443	3.866
RMR	0.045	0.035
GFI	0.673	0.774
AGFI	0.593	0.717
CFI	0.900	0.936

**Table 5** Summary of factor loadings and reliability and validity for the measurement model

Positive Leadership	Factor Loading	CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
P1	.943	0.987	0.884	0.987
P2	.939			
P3	.942			
P4	.943			
P5	.946			
P6	.933			
P7	.941			
P8	.932			
P9	.940			
P10	.941			

**Table 6** (Continuous)

Organizational Culture	Factor Loading	CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
Power Distance	.926	0.970	0.866	0.973
Uncertainty Avoidance	.862			
Collectivism	.929			
Long-Term Orientation	.964			
Masculinity	.968			
Employee wellbeing	Factor Loading	CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
WWB1	.924	0.964	0.816	0.964
WWB2	.951			
WWB3	.944			
WWB4	.942			
WWB5	.816			
WWB6	.832			

**Figure 2** Confirmatory factor analysis (final modification)

### Structural equation modeling

The final analysis procedure was the SEM process, which was used to investigate relationships between the latent variables. The initial model began with the model derived from the CFA process, and it was then further modified in order to improve fit. The final modification of the SEM model is shown in Figure 3.

The goodness of fit measures is summarized in Table 4. In addition to the goodness of fit measures used for the CFA process, an additional measure was added. The Tucker-Lewis Index

(TLI), otherwise known as the non-normed fit index (NNFI), uses a cut-off of  $\geq .90$  to indicate good fit (Byrne, 2016). In the initial model, only one of the fit measures indicated acceptable fit (RMR = 0.045), with others being above the thresholds for good or acceptable fit (CMIN/DF = 5.443; CFI = 0.900; TLI = 0.887). Following the refitting process, the fit on most measures was acceptable or good (CMIN/DF = 3.866; RMR = 0.035; TLI = 0.927), with the exception of CFI which was once again slightly below what would be considered good fit (CFI = 0.936). Given that additional fitting attempts did not result in an improvement in this measure, and in some cases worsened others, this fit was considered as the best fit that could be obtained.

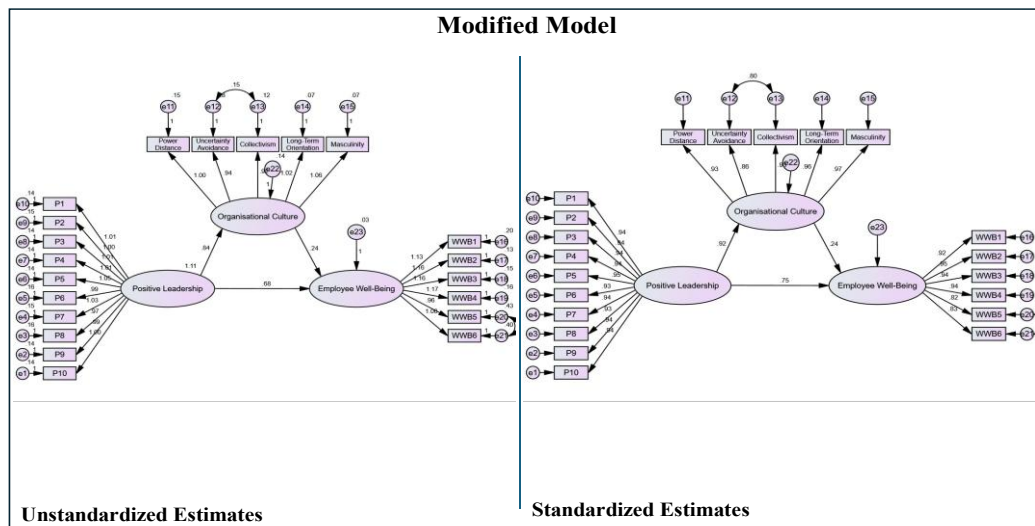
Estimates and standardized regression weights for the variables is summarized in Table 4. These regression weights are used to assess the hypothesis tests in the following section.

**Table 7** SEM model fit (original and modified)

	Unstandardized Estimate (B)	S.E.	Standardized Estimate ( $\beta$ )	C.R.
Positive Leadership $\rightarrow$ Organizational Culture	.840	.041	.919	20.496***
Organizational Culture $\rightarrow$ Employee wellbeing	.243	.053	.245	4.600***
Positive Leadership $\rightarrow$ Employee wellbeing	.684	.058	.755	11.738***

Note: \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Figure 3** Structural equation model (final modification)



### Hypothesis outcomes

Hypothesis outcomes are summarized in Table 7. With respect to Hypothesis 1, the Positive leadership  $\rightarrow$  Organizational culture relationship was positive and significant ( $\beta = .919$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, H1 was supported. The Positive leadership  $\rightarrow$  Employee wellbeing relationship was also positive and significant ( $\beta = .245$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was

also supported. The Organizational culture → Employee wellbeing relationship was also positive and significant ( $\beta = .755$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Because Hypothesis 4 was a mediation hypothesis, there are several considerations to determine whether it is supported. The four steps approach to mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986) is used to evaluate whether organizational culture mediated the relationship between positive leadership and employee wellbeing. In order to demonstrate a mediation effect, the four steps require that (1) the independent variable predicts the dependent variable; (2) the independent variable predicts the mediator; (3) the mediator predicts the independent variable; and (4) for full mediation, the independent variable no longer predicts the independent variable when the effect of the mediator is considered (Baron & Kenny, 1986). With respect to (1), it was demonstrated that positive leadership influenced employee wellbeing ( $\beta = .245$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In (2), it was also demonstrated that positive leadership influenced organizational culture ( $\beta = .919$ ,  $p < .001$ ). With regard to (3) organizational culture did have an influence on employee wellbeing ( $\beta = .755$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, the first three steps of mediation were supported. The final step (4) can be investigated by comparing the magnitude of effects of Positive leadership → Organizational culture and Organizational culture → Employee wellbeing respectively. This comparison shows that the effect of organizational culture on employee wellbeing was weaker than the effect of positive culture on employee wellbeing. Therefore, the effect of positive leadership on employee wellbeing was partially mediated by organizational culture.

**Table 8** Summary of hypothesis outcomes

	Statement	Outcome
H1	Positive leadership → Organizational culture	Supported
H2	Positive leadership → Employee wellbeing	Supported
H3	Organizational culture → Employee wellbeing	Supported
H4	Positive leadership → Organizational culture → Employee wellbeing	Supported

## Discussion and Recommendations

The findings from this research confirmed that there was a significant influence of positive leadership on organizational culture. This finding is consistent with the theoretical positioning of positive leadership as a tool for influencing the organization's culture as well as individual followers (Malinga et al., 2019; Monzani & Van Dick, 2020; Redín et al., 2023). It is



also consistent with the theory of organizational culture, which posits that the organization's culture is heavily influenced by the ethics, norms and values of its leaders (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016; Hofstede et al., 2010; Schein, 1984). Given that both of these theoretical bases argue for the role of leadership values and norms in organizational culture, it was not surprising that positive leadership, which focuses on the potential and ability of the organization and its members to thrive (Cameron, 2008, 2021), was found to have a positive effect. The finding is also consistent with prior empirical studies, which have shown a strong connection between leadership styles and organizational culture (Chong et al., 2018; Kargas & Varoutas, 2015; Monzani & Van Dick, 2020; Singh et al., 2022; Vera et al., 2021). The implication of this finding is that positive leadership can contribute to the development of a positive organizational culture, which supports and encourages excellence in its teams and members. Therefore, positive leadership can have an overall positive effect on the organization through its culture, which affects many dimensions of organizational life (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016).

Findings also confirmed the significance of the relationship of positive leadership and employee wellbeing. This relationship was suggested by the theory of positive leadership, in which improvement of employee wellbeing and performance is identified as both a goal and a significant benefit (Cameron, 2008, 2021). Furthermore, since employee wellbeing results from engagement with the individual's work and environment (Zheng et al., 2015), it is consistent that leadership approaches that promote a positive engagement with work would influence the employee's wellbeing. The previous research on the role of leadership in employee wellbeing has been investigated in many studies, but these studies are characterized by fragmented theoretical models and differences in conceptualization of the variables (Arnold, 2017; Azila-Gbettor et al., 2024; Inceoglu et al., 2018; Vincent-Höper et al., 2017). As a result, there was limited empirical evidence that directly reflected the role of positive leadership in employee wellbeing, with only a few studies reflecting this exact leadership position (Adams et al., 2020; Samad et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2022). Therefore, this research has contributed to the literature by showing that positive leadership has a specific role in employee wellbeing. The implication of this finding is that organizations that promote the use of positive leadership are likely to benefit from improved employee wellbeing, which is in turn associated with improved employee performance and outcomes (Vincent-Höper et al., 2017). This should be considered when designing workplace programs to improve performance.

Furthermore, the findings showed that there was a significant influence of organizational culture on employee wellbeing. Given that the experience of work within the organization is influenced by the organization's culture (Hofstede et al., 2010) and that these effects can

influence the workplace in different ways (Paz et al., 2020), it was reasonable to investigate the effect of organizational culture on employee wellbeing. However, there was limited prior research in this area, which like other areas is characterized by theoretical and methodological fragmentation. As a result, there was evidence that suggested such a relationship, such as a study which showed that positive organizational cultures influence employee wellbeing (Singh et al., 2022) and one which showed that organizational culture influenced happiness (Ficarra et al., 2020), but none that directly investigated the role of organizational culture in employee's employee wellbeing. Therefore, this study provides a novel contribution to the literature on employee wellbeing and employee wellbeing more generally, by showing that organizational culture does influence employee wellbeing. The implication of this finding is that in order to improve employee wellbeing, a positive organizational culture needs to be developed that supports the employee's work needs and creates satisfaction and contentment with the work itself.

Finally, the findings illustrated that organizational culture mediated the effect of positive leadership on employee wellbeing. This finding was suggested by previous research and theories which posit that both organizational culture and positive leadership influence employee wellbeing. A variety of studies had also found mediating effects of organizational culture on other workplace relationships, including leadership and workplace wellbeing (Hosseini et al., 2020; Paz et al., 2020; Sun et al., 2023; Yan et al., 2023). However, only Yan et al. (2023) had investigated positive leadership previously, and they investigated only one aspect of organizational culture, with a related but not identical outcome of employee engagement. Therefore, this study was potentially the first study to empirically investigate whether organizational culture mediated the positive leadership-employee wellbeing relationship. This presents further opportunities to investigate how organizational culture mediates positive leadership in general, especially given that the differentiation between organizational culture and leadership is not always clear (Chong et al., 2018). The practical implication of this finding is that implementation of positive leadership practices without a positive organizational culture will not result in desired improvements in employee wellbeing.

## **Conclusion and Implications**

The theoretical positions on organizational culture and employee wellbeing have suggested that the approach taken by leadership has an influence on both the formation of organizational culture and directly on employee wellbeing and other work outcomes. This theoretical relationship has been tested frequently in the context of other leadership styles, but

has only occasionally been investigated in the context of positive leadership. This gap in research on positive leadership raises the question of how the claims of positive leadership to influence organizational culture and individual employees can be understood, as well as how the interaction of leadership and culture can influence the subjective experience of the organization and work by employees.

This research's findings have shown that positive leadership does have a significant influence on organizational culture and employee wellbeing. The findings also showed that organizational culture also influences employee wellbeing, which partially mediates the direct effect of positive leadership on employee wellbeing. In other words, these findings support the theoretical notion that positive leadership can have a significant effect on both the direct experience of work (as reflected in its relationship to employee wellbeing), and on the organizational context, specifically organizational culture. Therefore, in conclusion it can be stated that this research has illustrated that positive leadership can have an effect on both organizational culture and the individual's employee wellbeing. However, the mediating effect of organizational culture means that positive leadership is not the only factor that influences employee wellbeing.

There are some theoretical implications stemming from this research. Specifically, the findings indicate that positive leadership is not enough on its own to create employee wellbeing. Instead, leadership is filtered through organisational culture to more broadly influence employee wellbeing. Therefore, while this research has contributed to knowledge of positive leadership, there is still some room for theoretical development which delves into this relationship.

There are also some practical implications stemming from this research, which could be used by HR professionals and leaders to influence the organization through changes in organizational culture, leadership, and other practices. Positive leadership can create a supportive organizational culture, which also contributes to employee wellbeing, but it is not guaranteed to do so. Therefore, in order to fully realize the benefits of positive leadership, leaders within the organization need to consider both their individual relationships with their followers and how they influence organizational culture. This indicates that positive leaders should take a two-pronged approach to influence both organizational culture and their individual followers. These practical implications should be followed up on in future studies, however, as the research did not include a case study of practical application.

## Limitations and Future Research

There were some contextual and methodological limitations to this study. The research took place in a single organization, meaning that there were both shared organizational culture assumptions and shared assumptions of a broader culture. Therefore, the perception of positive leadership could be different depending on cultural context. Because the findings relate to a single organization and its cultural context, they cannot be generalized. With little empirical research on positive leadership, it is challenging to state how much these differences could affect findings in other settings. The research also reflected employee perceptions, and not leadership intentions. Therefore, it is uncertain whether leadership *intended* to be positive would have a different effect than leadership that was *perceived* as positive. Furthermore, only a small number of potential influences on employee wellbeing were investigated. These limitations offer several opportunities for additional research. First, there is a need for more empirical research on positive leadership, as the theory is still under development and there is a need to clearly differentiate it from other forms of leadership. Additionally, investigating the interplay of leadership and organizational culture should be done more broadly, including different organizational and broader cultural contexts. It would also be interesting to investigate how positive leadership is perceived compared to how it is intended by the leaders that use it, in order to better understand intentionality.

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