National College of Ireland

Project Submission Sheet

Student Name:	Michae Ojo		
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Signature:	Michael Ojo
Date:	24/08/25

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AI Acknowledgement Supplement

[Dissertation]

The Impact of Wellbeing Initiatives on Performance Management in Sales and Professional Services

Your Name/Student Number	Course	Date
Michael Ojo/ x23174897	MBA part time	24/08/25

This section is a supplement to the main assignment, to be used if AI was used in any capacity in the creation of your assignment; if you have queries about how to do this, please contact your lecturer. For an example of how to fill these sections out, please click here.

AI Acknowledgment

This section acknowledges the AI tools that were utilized in the process of completing this assignment.

Tool Name	Brief Description	Link to tool
Grammarly	Grammar and punctuation construction	https://www.grammarly.com/
Copilot	Academic research on peer reviewed content	https://m365.cloud.microsoft/

Description of AI Usage

This section provides a more detailed description of how the AI tools were used in the assignment. It includes information about the prompts given to the AI tool, the responses received, and how these responses were utilized or modified in the assignment. **One table should be used for each tool used**.

[Insert Tool Name]	
Finding academic research	
Provide details of academic research and expert insights on the intersection of performance management and employee wellbeing	Key scholars cited include: • **Franco-Santos et al. (2021)**: Argue for frameworks that enable both performance and wellbeing rather than forcing a trade-off. • **Maslach and Leiter (2016)**: Warn that cultures rewarding long hours often penalise those who prioritise

	wellbeing.
	• **Peters et al. (2014)**: Highlight the human cost of profit-driven performance cultures

Evidence of AI Usage

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Additional Evidence:

[Place evidence here]

Additional Evidence:

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The Impact of Wellbeing Initiatives on Performance Management in Sales and Professional
Services
Michael Ojo
National College of Ireland MBA Dissertation

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who contributed to the development of this research. First and foremost, I extend my deepest appreciation to my supervisor, Maurice Fitzgerald, whose guidance, critical insights, and unwavering support have been instrumental throughout this academic journey. His expertise and encouragement have helped shape the direction and depth of this dissertation.

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Special thanks to my partner Damian Murray for his unwavering support, feedback, and encouragement. This journey was made possible because of his belief in me.

Finally, I acknowledge the support of my family and friends, whose patience and belief in my academic and professional aspirations have been a constant source of motivation.
This dissertation is dedicated to all those striving to create workplaces where performance and wellbeing are not competing priorities, but complementary pillars of sustainable success.

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Abstract

In professional services and sales organisations, where performance metrics and client demands are prioritised, the integration of employee wellbeing initiatives presents a strategic puzzle. While wellbeing is increasingly recognised as a key driver of employee retention and engagement, its alignment with high performance expectations remains vague in available studies and literature. This study investigates the impact of wellbeing initiatives on performance management practices in high pressure, target driven sales and professional services environments. It addresses the central tension between fostering employee wellbeing and sustaining results driven cultures, while exploring the effects of leadership adaptation and cultural change. Key findings indicate that well integrated wellbeing initiatives can enhance engagement and reduce turnover but may also trigger resistance, if perceived as tokenistic or misaligned with business goals. Leaders who adopt collaborative and adaptive approaches are better positioned to effectively integrate wellbeing within performance cultures. A convergent mixed-methods approach was employed, combining survey data from 52 managers across organisations in the UK, Ireland, and the Nordics, with qualitative case studies and secondary research. The Competing Values Framework and collaborative leadership theory were used to analyse and interpret findings. This research compliments organisational culture and leadership literature by framing wellbeing as a moderating influence within the Competing Values Framework. It offers sales and professional services managers a practical model for aligning wellbeing and high-performance objectives, showing that authentic integration supported by collaborative leadership can enhance both organisational results and workforce resilience. The findings provide actionable guidance for executives seeking to sustain competitive advantage, while addressing the evolving values and expectations of employees. This research introduces original insights into how wellbeing can be strategically and authentically embedded within performance driven professional services and sales environments, providing value for both academic inquiry and executive practice.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the research topic and provides a concise overview of its background. It sets out the research questions and objectives, outlines the rationale for the study, and explains its overall purpose. The Introduction chapter also contains the research structure, guiding the reader through the organisation of the work that follows.

1.1 Background and Sector Context

In the modern workplace, employee wellbeing has emerged as a central strategic priority, particularly in knowledge intensive and performance driven sectors such as professional services and sales. The global disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this shift, reshaping organisational expectations, employee values and leadership responsibilities. Remote work heightened awareness of mental health and shifting workforce demographics have contributed to an unprecedented demand for flexible, human-centred work environments (Kniffin et al., 2021).

Historically, professional services and sales organisations have been defined by their high-performance cultures, rigid key performance indicators (KPIs), and performance management systems. These sectors rely heavily on human capital, client relationships, and time sensitive service delivery, making them particularly susceptible to the challenges posed by employee wellbeing transformations. Organisations in these sectors are now under pressure to retain top talent while maintaining operational excellence, creating a paradox for leaders attempting to align performance management with employee wellbeing.

Many organisations have responded to the shift in the modern workplace, using wellbeing frameworks that range from flexible working arrangements and mental health programmes to burnout prevention strategies, these initiatives are often implemented without a full understanding of their implications for organisational culture, leadership dynamics, and performance systems. The result is a growing tension between the desire to foster a culture of care and the imperative to drive results, particularly in sales and professional services environments where high performance is not optional and considered fundamental to commercial success.

These human capital transformations should lead to an appraisal of leadership styles, cultural continuity, and employee engagement strategies as work life balance and mental health wellbeing become priorities for employees and prospective talent pools. Consequently, professional services and sales organisations must prioritise the implementation of wellbeing frameworks that can be aligned to the demands of their business.

This research proposal explores the impact that wellbeing initiatives have on performance management, identifying appropriate frameworks to sustain high performance teams, and evaluating the challenges that wellbeing culture poses to managers of sales and professional services teams. Key focus areas include trade-offs associated with professional services and sales organisations that prioritise wellbeing in the modern workplace; exploring whether challenges to performance management can occur from the implementation of wellbeing initiatives; requirements for leadership adaptation, and employee sentiment to cultural changes caused by wellbeing initiatives. Expected outcomes include the identification of guidelines for effective wellbeing frameworks in professional services and sales organisations, and practical recommendations for maintaining a cohesive performance related culture amidst evolving work practices.

1.2 Problem Statement and Practical Stakes

The central problem this research addresses is the tension between embedding employee wellbeing into organisational practice and preserving a strong, results driven performance culture. If not effectively aligned, the integration of wellbeing frameworks can lead to several adverse outcomes which include but are not limited to, blurred accountability, weakened leadership authority, inconsistent performance expectations and cultural misalignment.

Senior and middle management are on the forefront of this tension. They are expected to champion wellbeing, uphold productivity, and sustain team morale, while delivering client outcomes and meeting KPIs. If performance management systems are not effectively aligned to wellbeing strategies, the risk of disengagement, burnout or underperformance increases. Likewise, employees may experience confusion or frustration when wellbeing initiatives appear disconnected from actual performance demands or are applied inconsistently.

At an organisational level, the implications are high risk and far reaching. Sales and professional services organisations that fail to align wellbeing and performance management systems risk talent attrition, reduced client satisfaction, reputational damage and declining competitiveness. These risks are especially pronounced in sectors where human capital and cultural cohesion are critical to service delivery. There is a pressing need for evidence based strategies that allow organisations to support employee wellbeing without compromising performance or cultural integrity.

1.3 Academic Gap and Research Motivation

Although the literature on employee wellbeing has expanded significantly over the past decade, most research focuses on general workplace environments or explores wellbeing as

a standalone HR initiative. Studies often highlight the benefits of wellbeing programmes such as increased engagement, reduced absenteeism, and improved job satisfaction (Robertson & Cooper, 2011) but pay limited attention to the organisational systems and leadership practices required to make these benefits sustainable in high performance environments.

Notably, few studies address the operational and cultural implications of wellbeing in sectors where output, client relationships, and short-term deliverables are key success factors. The performance versus wellbeing link remains underexplored, particularly in sales and professional services settings. In addition, there is little research into how leaders interpret and apply wellbeing principles in practice, or how organisational culture evolves in response to these changes. These verticals, historically reliant on performance related client engagement and team based collaboration, now face cultural, strategic, and structural upheavals as employees demand greater flexibility. Sales and professional services organisations are trying to balance cultural cohesion, productivity and employee satisfaction with performance management. Wellbeing frameworks promise adaptability and enhanced responsiveness, but their influence on organisational performance culture, particularly in high performance environments, can be detrimental to sustaining a cohesive performance based organisational culture.

This research is motivated by this academic and practical gap. It seeks to contribute timely and sector specific insight into the complex trade-offs that organisations must navigate. As the demand for employee centric cultures grows, understanding how wellbeing frameworks affect leadership, culture and performance systems becomes critical to sustaining business effectiveness and employee engagement. The research will explore the multifaceted implications of wellbeing models. It will examine how leadership interacts with wellbeing initiatives, organisational performance culture, the effectiveness of frameworks in maintaining cultural integrity, and employee responses to cultural change. The study aims to contribute both to academic literature and to practical strategy by providing direction on how sales and professional services organisations can sustain organisational performance culture and integrate effective wellbeing strategies that align with the objectives of the organisation.

1.4 Research Aim, Objectives and Questions

Aim:

Examine how wellbeing initiatives impact performance management, leadership, and organisational culture in professional services and sales environments.

Objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To analyse how wellbeing frameworks influence performance expectations and organisational culture.

2. To assess how leaders navigate the trade-offs between employee wellbeing and performance accountability.

3. To explore employee and managerial responses to cultural shifts driven by wellbeing implementation.

Research Questions of the following study are:

- How do wellbeing initiatives impact performance management practices in professional services and sales organisations?

- What are the organisational trade-offs of promoting employee wellbeing culture versus performance culture in sales and professional services environments?

- How do employees and managers respond to cultural changes introduced by wellbeing initiatives?

1.5 Theoretical Framing

This study draws on two primary theoretical frameworks: the Competing Values Framework (CVF) (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983) and Collaborative Leadership Theory (Denis et al., 2001), complemented by concepts from organisational culture (Schein, 2010) and change management (Kotter, 2012).

The CVF provides a model for understanding the inherent tensions within organisations, particularly between flexibility and control, and internal cohesion versus external focus. In the context of this research, the CVF is used to map how wellbeing values (e.g., flexibility, support, and development) intersect or conflict with traditional performance driven values (e.g., performance, productivity, efficiency, and competition). This framework is central to addressing Q1 and Q2. See figure 1.
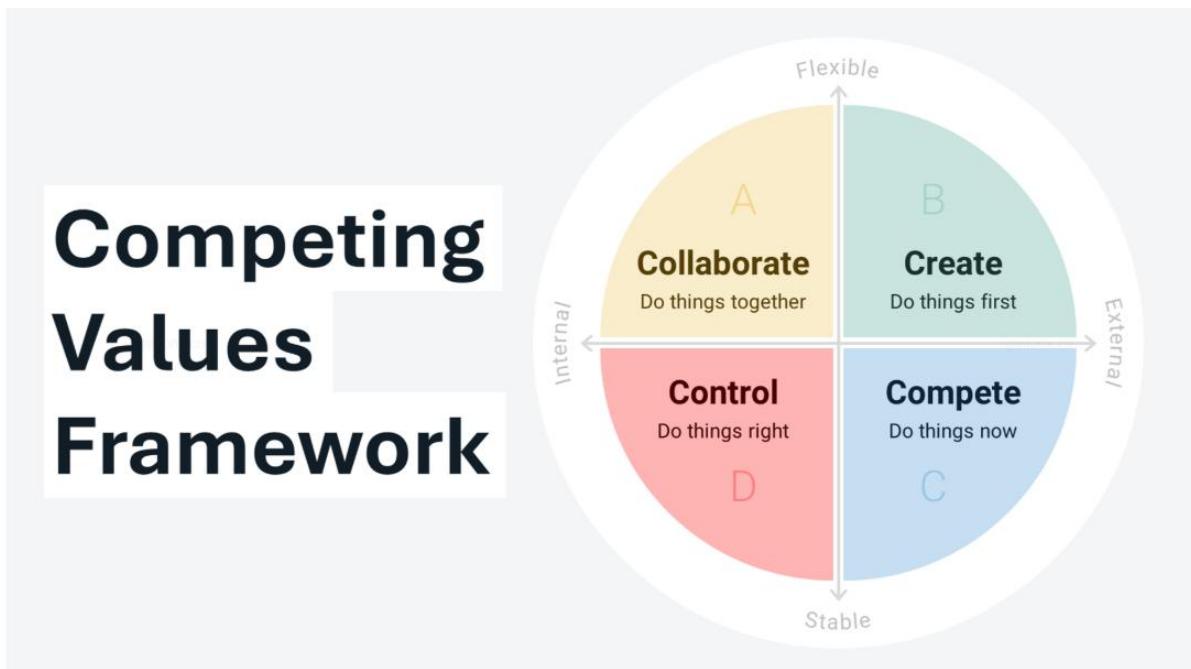
Figure 1 Competing Value Framework

(Kyne, 2024)

Collaborative Leadership Theory highlights the need for shared authority, adaptability, and relational trust in complex organisational environments. As wellbeing initiatives often require cultural and behavioural change, this theory is used to assess how sales and professional services leaders adapt to changing expectations and reframe their roles in relation to team wellbeing and performance output (addressing research question 2 and 3).

Figure 2: Conceptual Collaborative leadership theory

(Shreya, 2024)

These frameworks provide a comprehensive lens through which to examine the organisational, cultural and leadership dynamics at play when wellbeing strategies are introduced in sales and professional services high performance environments.

1.6 Contribution and Significance

This dissertation aims to contribute theoretically, methodologically, and in terms of policy relevance to the understanding of workplace wellbeing and performance in professional services and sales organisations. Theoretically, it extends the application of the Competing Values Framework to the wellbeing performance tension in contexts where these dynamics are particularly pronounced and contributes to leadership studies by examining how collaborative leadership practices support or hinder the integration of wellbeing in performance focused cultures. Methodologically, it employs a convergent mixed-methods design, combining quantitative survey data from fifty-two managers across three multinational professional services and sales firms in the UK, Ireland and the Nordics with qualitative case study analysis, thereby enhancing both the depth and breadth of the findings through methodological triangulation.

Practically, it offers evidence-based guidance for leaders on designing, implementing, and evaluating wellbeing strategies aligned with performance goals, identifying leadership behaviours, cultural conditions, and management practices that foster sustainable wellbeing integration.

The research is restricted in scope to mid-to-large professional services and business to business sales organisations operating in developed markets; while the findings may have broader applicability, they are most pertinent to firms where client interaction, output metrics, and cultural consistency are central to strategic success.

1.7 Structure of study

The first chapter of the study serves as an introduction, outlining the background to the research, the objectives and questions, and the rationale and purpose of the study. The second chapter presents a comprehensive literature review, drawing on relevant and credible sources aligned with the study's objectives, and develops a hypothesis informed by existing literature. The third chapter details the research methodology, including the design and approaches used to gather data from various sources. It also addresses ethical considerations and outlines the search strategy employed to collect information. The fourth chapter presents the findings, offering an analysis based on the research objectives and the chosen methodology. The fifth chapter provides the discussion and interprets the findings,

considering the theoretical frameworks and research questions. Finally, the sixth chapter of study summarises the research contributions, outlines strategic recommendations and proposes areas for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review examines recent developments in workplace wellbeing and performance management, particularly in high-performance professional services and sales organisations. It analyses both the theory and evidence behind wellbeing strategies and the potential impact wellbeing has on organisational performance, outlines cause-effect links, summarises current knowledge and debates, notes research gaps, and proposes new questions with supporting sources and quotes.

2.2 Scope and Search Strategy

There has been an accelerated shift in how organisations address their responsibilities to incorporate wellbeing as part of their organisational strategy (Robertson & Cooper, 2013). Available research suggests that benefits of wellbeing strategies in the modern workplace include enhanced employee motivation, productivity and commitment to the organisation. Numerous studies have established a positive correlation between wellbeing and organisational outcomes (Knight et al., 2019).

CIPD (2022) reports that a key driver to organisational success and employee engagement has been associated with employee wellbeing strategies.

Professional services and sales organisations operate in high pressure environments where performance metrics are usually linked to financial outcomes, client satisfaction and competitive advantage. These sectors often rely on rigid performance management systems to drive productivity, yet such systems can inadvertently undermine employee wellbeing if they are not carefully designed and implemented. The human cost is often neglected in the quest for organisations to sustain high performance and continuously increase profit margins (Peters et al., 2014).

Workplace wellbeing encompasses physical, psychological, and social dimensions of the employee experience. Robertson and Cooper (2013) define it as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." This holistic view challenges traditional performance focussed concepts, especially in sectors where output is tightly measured. CIPD (2022) asserts that "wellbeing is no longer a 'nice to have', it is a strategic imperative." However, the causal mechanisms remain underexplored. Is wellbeing a driver of performance, or merely a correlate? Franco-Santos et al. (2021) argue that "performance management systems can simultaneously enhance and undermine wellbeing," highlighting the paradoxical nature of these systems.

In sectors such as professional services and sales, wellbeing initiatives have been integrated into their business strategy to combat high burnout rates and absenteeism (Bakker et al., 2020). However, the cultures in these industries often reward long hours (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). This is visible in sales environments, where performance is often directly associated to financial incentives and public rankings (Peccei & Van der Voorde, 2019).

These systems drive short term results, but they can undermine long term employee mental health and organisational sustainability, if they are not balanced with wellbeing considerations. Competitiveness and performance-based outcomes have been highlighted as creating potential misalignment with wellbeing objectives (Peters et al., 2014).

Wellbeing initiatives such as flexible working, mental health support and workload management are designed to enhance employee satisfaction, resilience and retention. However, these initiatives can be perceived as a secondary concern or in some cases, contradictory to performance targets if they are not embedded within the broader performance culture (Tweedie et al., 2019).

This tension is particularly pronounced in professional services, where billable hours and client satisfaction are often prioritised over internal wellbeing metrics. The integration of performance management systems with employee wellbeing initiatives presents a complex challenge in high performance business models like professional services and sales organisations.

These sectors have historically been associated with aggressive targets, client driven deadlines and a culture of high achievement. This business approach can create a conflict with the principles of employee wellbeing. Research suggests that the misalignment lies in the dual role of Performance management systems; while they can provide clarity and motivation, they can also become sources of anxiety and pressure. The challenge that professional services and sales organisations face is to avoid opting for either performance or wellbeing, but to design frameworks that enable both (Franco-Santos et al., 2021).

Sales and professional services organisations operate under unique pressures. Maslach and Leiter (2016) note that "cultures that reward long hours and visibility often penalise those who prioritise wellbeing." In sales environments, performance is often linked to financial incentives and public rankings, creating a tension between short term results and long term sustainability.

Organisational culture and leadership play a vital role in aligning these two domains. Professional services and sales leaders are exploring how to integrate and model behaviours that value wellbeing as an integral part of their performance goals. In sales organisations, this might involve redefining key performance metrics to include team collaboration,

customer satisfaction, and ethical selling practices alongside revenue targets (Salas-Vallina et al., 2020).

Despite growing interest by organisations, many still struggle to operationalise the synergy between performance management and employee wellbeing. Operational barriers such as ineffective Human resource strategies, poor enablement for sales leaders, lack of data analytics integration and short-term financial pressures, often influence the disregard for the development of holistic strategies. Additionally, literature suggests that wellbeing is still underrepresented in performance environments, particularly in target driven environments like sales and professional services.

Tweedie et al. (2019) observe that "wellbeing initiatives are often perceived as contradictory to performance targets." This misalignment is particularly pronounced in male dominated, target driven environments. Boxall and Macky (2014) advocate for "high-involvement work practices" that align wellbeing with strategic goals, but empirical evidence of this in practice remains sparse.

A systematic literature search was conducted to identify empirical and theoretical studies relevant to the interplay between employee wellbeing, performance management, leadership and organisational culture in the context of sales and professional services organisations.

2.2 Definitions and Conceptual Boundaries

For the purposes of this study, wellbeing is conceptualised holistically, encompassing affective states such as job satisfaction and positive affect, psychological functioning including engagement, purpose, psychological safety and social wellbeing, in terms of belonging and inclusion. This aligns with multidimensional definitions in recent occupational health literature (Sonnentag, 2023), with a recent meta review confirming that increases in job resources such as autonomy, clarity, and social support are associated with higher wellbeing and lower strain (Shiri, 2023). In sales and professional services contexts, performance is a multifaceted construct, incorporating financial metrics (e.g. revenue growth, margin, utilisation rates), client facing measures (e.g. satisfaction, retention, net promoter scores), quality indicators (e.g. error rates, rework, compliance breaches), and human capital outcomes (e.g. retention, skills development, leadership capacity) (De Neve et al., 2024). Organisational culture, defined as the shared values, norms and underlying assumptions that shape employee behaviour, plays a critical role in balancing these domains with the psychosocial safety climate, policies and practices that promote 'the vibe' of the organisation (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Ideally, organisational culture would act as a lever

for prioritising psychological health and be a strong predictor of both wellbeing and performance outcomes in high performance environments (Dong et al., 2024). Leadership is equally significant, with styles such as paradoxical leadership (Zhang et al., 2022), transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006), and responsible leadership (Haque et al., 2021) offering potential pathways to reconcile the demands of performance with the need to support employee wellbeing. Specifically, paradoxical leadership reflects the ability to hold competing tensions, such as maintaining high standards while enabling recovery time. This would be relevant to high performing sales and professional services, as part of a solution to align employee performance management with wellbeing initiatives.

2.3 Contrasting perspectives and ongoing debates around wellbeing and performance alignment

The review of existing research reveals four central debates that shape scholarly discourse on wellbeing, performance, and organisational practice. Primarily, there is disagreement over whether wellbeing programmes enhance performance by increasing job resources and motivation (De Neve et al., 2024) or dilute performance by diverting attention and resources from core business priorities, particularly when poorly designed or implemented in a tokenistic manner (Shiri, 2023).

Additionally, scholars debate whether leadership is the primary driver of organisational culture through the signalling of priorities and the shaping of norms (Haque et al., 2021). Critically, considerations arise that culture itself constrains leadership effectiveness, with entrenched policies and norms that limit even leaders that have the best intentions (Dong et al., 2024). Furthermore, the shift to remote or hybrid work is contested, with experimental evidence showing neutral to positive effects on performance (Bloom et al., 2024), while qualitative studies highlight risks to cohesion, belonging, and team coordination (Urrila, 2025).

Finally, there is disagreement over the role of targets and rankings; while carefully designed systems can drive accountability and improve attainment without increasing turnover, poorly structured targets may foster short-termism, burnout and the manipulation of behaviours to meet performance expectations (Ahearne et al., 2024).

2.4 Models and Cause–Effect

A critical contribution of this review lies in moving beyond identifying correlations, to articulating the causal mechanisms that explain how wellbeing and performance management interact in professional services and sales contexts. Ahearne et al. (2024)

propose that while anonymous sales rankings can raise attainment levels, they also lead to higher employee turnover, indicating that the design of performance visibility directly moderates the effects of social comparison. This finding demonstrates how a performance management tool intended to boost motivation can simultaneously undermine workforce stability. Critically, an organisations wellbeing intention can have a negative impact on performance culture, an issue central to research question one which explores how wellbeing initiatives influence performance management practices.

Dong et al. (2024), in a meta synthesis of 990 studies, found that supportive organisational climates foster open communication and behavioural integration, which in turn drive innovation and reduce error rates. This provides insight into research question two, highlighting how cultural conditions may shape the trade-offs managers perceive between sustaining performance management systems, while promoting employee wellbeing initiatives.

Przybyłek (2025) adds further nuance by examining agile working cadences. While these iterative structures improve organisational responsiveness and problem resolution speed, the study finds that without skilled coaching, the transparency inherent in agile practices can be perceived by employees as surveillance. This demonstrates how initiatives aimed at improving performance can trigger unintended cultural resistance, linking directly to research question three, which considers how employees and managers respond to cultural changes introduced by wellbeing initiatives. Finally, Bloom et al. (2024) show that hybrid work scheduling can improve retention without harming output, but only when supported by strong team interdependence and effective collaboration tools. This conditional benefit reinforces all three research questions by illustrating that the success of wellbeing related practices depends on their integration with existing performance systems, the cultural context in which they operate and the responses of both leaders and employees. Collectively, these studies underline that the effects of wellbeing and performance initiatives are shaped not only by their presence, but by how they are designed, implemented, and experienced within high performance environments.

2.5 Synthesis of Empirical Evidence

2.5.1 Quantitative Evidence

Among the available evidence, one of the most robust studies is the randomised controlled trial by Bloom et al. (2024), which assigned 1,612 employees either to work from home two days per week or to remain office-based full time. After six months, quit rates in the hybrid group were one-third lower, with no measurable differences in performance or promotion

rates over a two year period. These findings directly challenge some managerial assumptions that hybrid work undermines output, offering insights relevant to research question one on how wellbeing related practices can influence performance management outcomes. Critically, the study did not include participants from sales or professional services sectors, limiting its direct applicability to the present research context. Although, De Neve et al. (2024) conducted an observational analysis of 1,782 listed companies, finding a positive association between employee reported wellbeing and superior financial performance. While this evidence is correlational rather than causal, the large-scale dataset adds weight to the business case for wellbeing investment, again informing research question one.

Shiri (2023) further demonstrates that workplace wellbeing interventions can enhance both work ability and performance, but the effectiveness varies significantly depending on programme design and the extent to which they are integrated into organisational systems. This is a topic that is linked to research question two, which explores the perceived trade-offs and practical challenges of embedding wellbeing within performance cultures.

In the specific context of sales, Ahearne et al. (2024) show that the design of performance rankings is critical; identifiable rankings can boost attainment and reduce turnover, whereas anonymous rankings may increase attainment but also elevate attrition rates. This highlights the cultural and behavioural responses to performance system design, making it directly relevant to research questions three, which examines how employees and managers react to cultural and operational changes introduced by wellbeing initiatives in the modern workplace.

2.5.2 Qualitative Evidence

Urrila (2025) qualitative study of hybrid teams highlights that when work from office days lack structure and schedules, employees experience reduced feelings of belonging and cohesion. In the professional services context, interviews with employees reveal that while recovery time is recognised as valuable, it is seldom utilised unless accompanied by explicit changes to workload norms, underscoring the influence of cultural expectations on the uptake of wellbeing practices.

2.5.3 Mixed-Methods Evidence

Przybylek (2025) uses action research to demonstrate that scrum-like cadences sustained performance post-COVID in a knowledge work setting. The key mechanism was faster identification and removal of impediments.

2.6 Nuances in Sales and Professional Services

Sales and professional services operate in high pressure environments, client facing conditions with intense performance metrics. These sectors differ from manufacturing or healthcare in that performance outcomes are often directly visible to clients and linked to revenue streams, creating unique tensions between wellbeing and performance.

In consulting firms, billable hours and utilisation targets remain primary performance metrics. Research shows that workload norms rather than resource availability, are the main barrier to the uptake of wellbeing initiatives. Introducing initiatives like billable hour credits for recovery has been shown in pilot studies to reduce attrition and error rates without financial losses (Burris et al., 2024).

Sales environments frequently use public rankings, quota attainment charts and pipeline visibility. Evidence shows that the way rankings are designed, directly influences both performance and retention (Ahearne et al., 2024). Identifiable rankings can increase quota attainment while reducing turnover, whereas anonymous leaderboards can unintentionally raise attrition.

Professional services often involve high stake client deliverables, making missed deadlines unacceptable. This creates cultural reinforcement of long hours and constant availability, which can undermine wellbeing interventions (Urrila, 2025). In sectors where the client relationship is a competitive advantage, there is a risk that employees will avoid using wellbeing resources for fear of perceived reduced commitment.

2.7 Leadership and Culture

Leadership can be a primary driver of cultural change, particularly when leaders model behaviours that balance performance with wellbeing (Haque et al., 2021). Transformational leadership, for example, promotes trust and psychological safety, enabling voice behaviours and innovation (Bass and Riggio, 2006).

However, the psychosocial safety climate literature shows that entrenched norms, metrics, and workload expectations can limit a leader's ability to effect change (Dong et al., 2024). Leaders in billable or quota driven environments may support wellbeing rhetorically but be constrained by performance systems that penalise time away from client work.

Middle managers function as both enablers and bottlenecks for cultural change. Recent studies highlight that they lack competence in coaching, conflict resolution and agile facilitation to translate organisational wellbeing priorities into daily team practices (Collings et al., 2022).

Synthesis Leadership and culture are best viewed as co-evolving; leader behaviours can shift norms, but only when performance systems are redesigned to avoid punishing wellbeing supportive actions.

2.8 Wellbeing and Outcomes

Best practice involves using multidimensional validated scales for job satisfaction, purpose, affect and stress (Sonnentag, 2023). At the organisational level, aggregated employee ratings can predict financial outcomes (De Neve et al., 2024) but should be complemented by internal pulse surveys to capture context specific nuances.

In sales and professional services, leading indicators (e.g. deal cycle, bottleneck removal time and coaching hours) should be tracked alongside lagging metrics (e.g., revenue, profit and client retention). Over reliance on single metrics like utilisation can lead to measurement shortsightedness, where short term efficiency is prioritised over long term capability (Shiri, 2023).

2.9 Gaps and Research Limitations

Existing research is focused on the benefits of wellbeing programmes, with relatively few studies exploring unintended cause and effects. Studies that do highlight risks tend to be anecdotal or theoretical, lacking robust qualitative insight into how these risks manifest in real-world organisational settings like high performance teams (Kniffin et al., 2021). The debate pertaining to how wellbeing impacts performance management supports the need for nuanced, context specific approaches to the implementation and application of wellbeing initiatives in sales and professional services organisations.

The current academic literature poses several limitations to the depth required to analyse how wellbeing initiatives impact professional services and sales organisations, from a performance management perspective. The current research fails to differentiate the impact of wellbeing initiatives across sectors, providing limited analysis of high-performance sales and professional services environments. Available studies generalise findings from broader corporate environments without acknowledging the unique pressures found in sales and professional services (Gifford et al., 2020). Historically, these sectors have been driven by KPIs, deal cycles, and performance management systems that are not comparable to other sectors such as healthcare or education (Bevan et al., 2018).

Critically, there is insufficient research that details how performance management systems and wellbeing can be operationally integrated in professional services and sales organisations. While there is agreement that wellbeing matters (CIPD, 2022), the

mechanisms through which organisations manage performance while supporting employee wellbeing strategies are vague and are not sector specific (Boxall & Macky, 2014). In high performance organisations, performance is often prioritised over wellbeing initiatives (Jex & Britt, 2014).

Additionally, there is limited empirical evidence from the managerial perspectives within these sectors. Sales and professional services managers face the pressure of client deliverables, revenue generation, and team performance management (Thompson & Prottas, 2006), but limited guidance has been documented on how they balance those responsibilities with the need to support mental health, flexibility, or other wellbeing initiatives (Kinnie et al., 2005).

Another limitation is the lack of primary data. Most studies provide a snapshot of wellbeing programmes and their impact, rather than tracking how these programmes develop or affect organisational performance (DeJoy et al., 2010). This hinders understanding of how professional services and sales organisations can sustain and adapt wellbeing as part of their business strategies (Grant & Wallace, 2011).

There is also a lack of research which stems from the opinions of frontline employees. Although leadership intentions are reviewed in available literature, there is limited research of how wellbeing and performance policies are experienced by employees who are exposed to the pressures of high output and personal resilience (Van De Voorde et al., 2012). In sales and professional services, frontline employees may experience wellbeing interventions as insufficient, superficial, or tokenistic (Spence Laschinger & Fida, 2014).

Available research relies on approaches and quantitative measures of performance and wellbeing which could be considered bias to the benefits of wellbeing in the modern workplace. Critically, such methods may not fully capture the nuanced, emotional, and social dimensions of wellbeing in high performance sales and professional services environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative studies that explore real use experiences, contradictions, and adaptive skills-based demands are limited (Tracy, 2020).

Transformational and collaborative leadership styles are required to effectively create environments that support mental health while upholding productivity goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In sales and professional services environments, where leaders manage targets and revenue expectations, the challenge is to balance wellbeing with performance accountability (Peccei & Van der Voorde, 2019). Research suggests that leaders who actively promote psychological safety, open communication, and flexible workload management can positively influence employee wellbeing while maintaining high standards (Edmondson &

Lei, 2014). They must also model behaviours that signal wellbeing is not an optional add-on but an essential factor in sustainable performance (CIPD, 2022).

Critically, available research does not address the nuances of sales and professional services organisations which have profit and revenue targets and are built on rigid performance management systems.

Cultural frameworks can provide some direction on how wellbeing strategies can be embedded into high performance environments. The Competing Values Framework (Cameron & Quinn, 2011) categorises cultures into Clan, Adhocracy, Market, and Hierarchy. High performance cultures typically lean toward market types, which focus on addressing competition and achievement. In contrast, Clan cultures support collaboration, mentorship, and psychological wellbeing. The challenge in sales and professional services is to create a hybrid culture that recognises the need for both competitive performance and supportive work environments (Hartnell et al., 2011). This could involve, but not limited to, adjusting performance systems to include wellbeing indicators such as stress management, peer support and psychological safety (Gifford et al., 2020).

The introduction of wellbeing programmes in high performance sectors can create trade-offs. Initiatives like mental health resources, flexible scheduling, or workload reviews may improve job satisfaction but also risk being underutilised if performance pressures persist unchecked (Whillans et al., 2024). In sales, for example, employees may hesitate to take advantage of wellbeing support for fear it could affect their visibility or bonus eligibility (Fleming, 2021). Critically, this type of research is heavily weighted to the benefits of wellbeing initiatives from an employee's perspective and does not consider the demands on sales and professional services organisations to drive performance, maximise profits and increase revenues.

Managers in sales and professional services organisations face challenges with aligning wellbeing with performance measurement. Historically, KPIs rewarded short term output leaving the long-term value of wellbeing to be overlooked by the need for financial return on investment (O'Boyle & Harter, 2022). To prevent this lack of alignment, organisations need to design balanced metrics that incorporate both business performance and wellbeing outcomes (Schneider et al., 2013). The dilemma for sales and professional services organisations comes in two parts.

Firstly, it is widely accepted that sales and professional services roles come with performance pressures that require resilience and mental capacity to cope with the constant demand for high achievement; an environment which could lead to trade-offs from the implementation of wellbeing initiatives (Whillans et al., 2024).

Secondly, if wellbeing programmes are implemented, employees might be reluctant to access these initiatives due to cultural peer group pressures or fear that reducing focus on their targets might affect their income (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005).

There is a need for qualitative research that captures the lived experiences of managers and employees within high performance focused cultures, especially in sales and professional services. This study will contribute to closing this gap by exploring how wellbeing initiatives influence employee performance culture, and the effectiveness of aligning performance management with employee wellbeing.

2.10 Summary

Over the past decade, the literature on employee wellbeing has expanded, but much of it remains centred on general workplace environments or treats wellbeing as a standalone Human resource initiative. Preceding studies frequently highlight positive associations for organisations implementing employee wellbeing strategies such as higher engagement, lower absenteeism, and improved job satisfaction (Robertson & Cooper, 2011). Critically, they give far less attention to the organisational systems, performance practices, and leadership approaches needed to embed the potential benefits sustainably, within high performance contexts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the urgency of this agenda, accelerating the adoption of wellbeing strategies across sectors, particularly in professional services and sales. In these industries, where client relationships, trust, and intensive collaboration are critical to success, the rapid shift toward flexible and hybrid work models has disrupted long standing norms and introduced new cultural uncertainties (Kniffin et al., 2021). Organisations face challenges to reconcile the management of high-performance cultures with the need to safeguard mental health and accommodate diverse expectations about 'work life balance'. Leadership sits at the centre of this pressure. Raghuram et al. (2019) propose that managers must find ways to sustain performance while visibly demonstrating commitment to employee wellbeing. At the same time, changing workforce values emphasising autonomy, purpose, and flexibility are reshaping what "performance" means in these settings (Caligiuri et al., 2020).

Empirical evidence offers valuable but incomplete insights into these dynamics. Bloom et al. (2024) large scale, randomised controlled trial found that allocating two 'work from home' days per week reduced quit rates by a third over six months, without harming performance or promotion outcomes over two years. as highlighted in the literature review, this detracts from challenges that assume hybrid work necessarily diminishes output.

Taken together, these studies point to persistent gaps in understanding how wellbeing initiatives interact with performance culture in high-pressure, output driven sectors:

- There is limited empirical focus on how wellbeing initiatives influence organisational performance culture in professional services and sales.

- Few practical, tested frameworks exist to align wellbeing initiatives with performance management in these contexts.

- The trade-offs leaders must navigate between maintaining performance and enhancing wellbeing remain insufficiently examined.

- Little is known about whether and how employee attitudes toward performance management shift in response to evolving work-life balance and mental health expectations.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter details the methodology adopted to investigate how wellbeing initiatives influence organisational performance management and culture from the perspective of managers in professional services and sales organisations. It outlines the approach, design and research philosophy, as well as the processes, strategies, and analytical techniques employed. The chapter also explains the sampling strategy, methods for data collection that covers both primary and secondary sources and the procedures used to analyse the findings. Secondary data is examined in detail to ensure alignment with the research questions, supported by the Saunders Research Onion framework in figure 3 (Scott, 2014). Ethical safeguards, reflexivity considerations, and the rationale for methodological choices are also addressed to provide transparency and enable a thorough assessment of the research process.
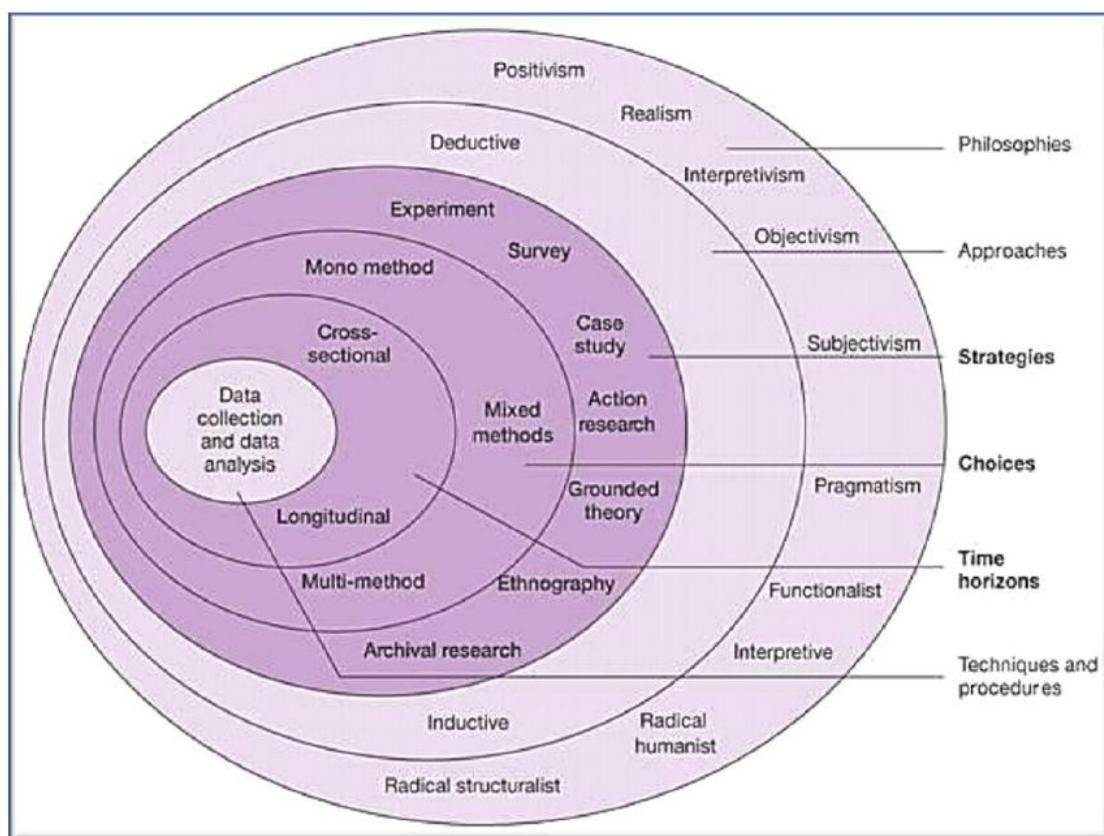

Figure 3: Saunders Research Onion

(Scott, 2014)

3.2 Research Philosophy

This research adopts a pragmatic paradigm, reflecting both the applied nature of the research questions and the requirement to capture a full spectrum of evidence from quantifiable performance outcomes to nuanced, subjective experiences.

Pragmatism, as outline by Creswell and Plano Clark (2017), is driven by the principle that methodological choices should be determined by the nature of the problem under investigation, enabling the integration of diverse data types and analytical logics. In the context of high-performance sales and professional services environments, the complexity of the wellbeing and performance relationship cannot be adequately addressed through a purely positivist stance, which assumes a single objective reality, or through a purely interpretivist approach, which risks subjective individual context which underplays empirical analysis.

A pragmatic stance supports a blended position, as it acknowledges that organisational performance and culture are socially constructed phenomena, shaped by human interaction and perception, while also recognising the value of objective, measurable indicators such as revenue growth, retention rates, utilisation figures and engagement scores (Saunders et al., 2019).This flexibility allows the research to generate insights that are both empirically grounded and contextually rich, ensuring relevance to both academic inquiry and practical application.

3.3 Research Approach

Due to the complexity of exploring lived experiences and organisational impact, the study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative insights from open-ended survey responses and secondary literature analysis.

This approach is particularly suitable for capturing both the measurable outcomes and nuanced perceptions of wellbeing in the workplace (Bryan et al., 2023). Mixed methods have been shown to be effective in evaluating workplace wellbeing interventions and their impact on performance, engagement, and retention (Krekel et al., 2019). Furthermore, the integration of qualitative and quantitative data allows for an in depth understanding of how wellbeing initiatives shape organisational culture and employee-manager relationships towards performance management (Clark et al., 2018).

The quantitative section of this study follows a deductive approach, testing predefined hypotheses derived from existing literature. The aim is to examine the measurable relationship between wellbeing initiatives and its impact on employee attitudes to

performance, drawing on empirical studies such as Boxall and Macky (2014), who found that high involvement work practices positively influence both wellbeing and performance outcomes. Structured survey instruments were used to collect data from a broad sample, enabling statistical analysis.

In contrast, the qualitative section is an inductive approach, aiming to uncover deeper insights into how employees and leaders perceive the alignment between wellbeing and organisational performance culture. This was achieved through semi-structured, open ended survey questions with sales and professional services leaders, whose narratives provided rich, contextual data. Thematic analysis was conducted using an inductive-deductive hybrid model, which allowed for both the emergence of new themes and the validation of existing theoretical constructs (Fletcher, 2022).

The integration of these two approaches enhances the validity and reliability of the findings through methodological triangulation, a process that strengthens conclusions by cross-verifying data from multiple sources (Rocco et al., 2003). This comprehensive approach supports more informed decision making for organisational leaders seeking to implement effective wellbeing strategies that align with the cultural and performance goals of sales and professional services organisations.

While the original research plan included semi-structured interviews, time constraints necessitated an adaptation, opting for retaining qualitative depth through expanded open ended survey questions and systematic secondary data review.

3.4 Research Design

The study employs a convergent parallel design, in which quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously, analysed independently, and then integrated during the interpretation phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

This approach was chosen for its capacity to enable mutual validation, allowing statistical patterns identified in the quantitative strand to be corroborated, refined, or challenged by the richer contextual insights emerging from the qualitative strand. The underlying rationale is that by bringing together two distinct but complementary forms of evidence, the research can capture both the measurable scope and the lived complexity of the phenomena under investigation. As Bian (2023) observes, such integration generates a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the research problem than would be achievable through either method in isolation.

In a convergent parallel design, both quantitative and qualitative data are collected during the same phase of the research process, analysed separately, and then merged for

interpretation. This design is particularly effective when the goal is to validate or corroborate findings across methods, or to explore different dimensions of a complex issue such as the relationship between wellbeing initiatives and organisational performance management culture (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

The quantitative component of this study involved structured surveys distributed to sales and professional services leaders. These surveys were designed to capture broad patterns in experiences with wellbeing initiatives and their perceived impact on performance culture and performance management. This allowed for the identification of trends and statistical relationships across a larger sample (Classen et al., 2018).

The primary data, qualitative secondary sources including human resource policy documents and published organisational case studies were examined to provide contextual depth and to triangulate the findings. Incorporating both internal and external perspectives on wellbeing practices strengthens the credibility of the research and enriches the interpretation of results (Rocco et al., 2003).

The convergent parallel design was selected for its capacity to balance breadth and depth, enabling the study to investigate not only what is occurring in relation to wellbeing and performance, but also why and how these dynamics emerge and evolve within specific organisational contexts. This approach is particularly suited to organisational research where both practical applicability and nuanced understanding are essential (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The analytical framework was grounded in existing literature on wellbeing interventions, performance management systems, and organisational culture, with propositions assessed quantitatively for measurable patterns and explored qualitatively to capture the contextual and experiential dimensions of these relationships.

3.5 Sampling Strategy & Participants

3.5.1 Population & Context

The target population comprised managers in sales and professional services organisations operating in the UK, Ireland and Nordic markets. These organisations were selected for their high-performance business models and the ongoing debate over whether wellbeing initiatives enhance or detract from performance outcomes (De Neve et al., 2024).

3.5.2 Sampling

A multistage, non-probability sampling strategy was employed for both the quantitative and qualitative components. In organisational research, non-probability sampling is appropriate when the objective is to gain in depth insights from specific subgroups rather than to generalise to a wider population (Etikan et al., 2016).

For the quantitative survey, purposive sampling was used to target leaders in high-performance sales and professional services contexts. Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- Managerial responsibility for a team or function.
- Direct involvement in performance management processes.
- Exposure to or implementation of wellbeing initiatives.

To broaden reach and participation, snowball sampling was also utilised, with initial respondents encouraged to refer colleagues who met the inclusion criteria. This technique is particularly effective for engaging senior leaders and specialised populations, as trust can be built through peer referrals, thereby improving response rates (Parker et al., 2019).

3.5.3 Sample Size

The final quantitative sample comprised 52 managers from five organisations, representing a range of sales and professional services settings and organisational cultures. The qualitative strand drew on open-ended survey responses, 47 of which contained qualitative content and a further 8 were contained in organisational HR documents.

This sample size was considered sufficient for exploratory analysis and pattern identification in organisational research (Boddy, 2016). Data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached, to the point that no new insights or themes were emerging and ensuring the adequacy and completeness of the qualitative dataset (Bouncken et al., 2025).

3.5.4 Access & Recruitment

Permission was obtained from the Chief People Officer and the Compliance Officer in each participating organisation. Recruitment emails outlined the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures, and the voluntary nature of participation. Surveys were distributed via Microsoft Forms, a secure online platform that enabled participants to respond at their convenience while ensuring anonymity.

3.6 Construction of the Research Instruments

The construction of research instruments is a critical phase in any empirical study, particularly in mixed methods research, where the integration of quantitative and qualitative tools must be both methodologically sound and contextually relevant. Instrument construction refers to the process of designing tools such as surveys, interview guides, and document analysis frameworks that can capture valid and reliable data aligned with the research objectives (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

The construction of instruments in this research followed a convergent parallel mixed methods strategy, ensuring that both quantitative and qualitative data could be collected

simultaneously and integrated meaningfully. This approach is effective in organisational research where both measurable outcomes (e.g. performance metrics) and subjective experiences (e.g. perceptions of wellbeing) are essential to understanding complex environments (Dawadi et al., 2021).

3.7 Quantitative Survey

The survey was designed to investigate the relationship between wellbeing initiatives and performance management practices from the perspective of leaders in high-performance sales and professional services environments. Survey items were grounded in validated constructs drawn from the literature on high involvement work practices, employee wellbeing, and organisational performance (Boxall & Macky, 2014), ensuring both conceptual relevance and methodological rigour.

Prior to distribution, the survey underwent pilot testing with a small group of managers who met the inclusion criteria, to evaluate the clarity, relevance, and reliability of the items. This process reflects best practice in instrument development, where expert review and pilot testing are used to refine content and improve validity and reliability (Grand-Guillaume-Perrenoud et al., 2023).

The final instrument combined closed-ended Likert-scale questions with open-ended prompts to capture both measurable trends and richer contextual insights. Closed-ended items were adapted from established scales measuring:

- Perceived organisational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986)

- Job resources and demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007)

- Psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999)

- Perceived alignment between wellbeing and performance culture (Boxall & Macky, 2014)

A five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) was used for attitudinal items. For multi-item scales, a reliability threshold of Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.7$ was set in line with Nunnally and Bernstein's (1994) recommendations.

Qualitative data was collected through two channels:

1. Open-ended survey items, such as: "Please describe an example of a wellbeing initiative in your organisation and how it impacts on your team's performance culture."

2. Secondary sources, including HR policy documents, publicly available organisational case studies and peer-reviewed literature relevant to the sectors of the participating organisations.

This multi-source design allowed for triangulation between quantitative trends, qualitative narratives, and organisational documentation, enhancing both the credibility and contextual depth of the findings.

3.8 Data Collection Procedures

The search strategy for this study was designed to ensure comprehensive coverage of literature directly relevant to wellbeing initiatives, performance management, and organisational culture in sales and professional services contexts.

The researcher uses defined and subject specific keywords, including:

- ("employee wellbeing" OR "well-being" OR "mental health") and ("performance" OR "productivity") and ("2021–2025").

- ("performance management" OR "performance measurement") and ("wellbeing" OR "burnout") and ("paradox" OR" trade-off") and ("2021–2025").

- ("sales" OR "professional services") and ("burnout" OR "wellbeing" OR "public rankings" OR "quotas" OR "pressure") AND ("2021–2025").

- ("psychological safety" OR "psychosocial safety climate") and ("performance") and ("2021–2025")

This approach allowed for precise targeting of relevant literature while filtering out unrelated topics.

The initial search retrieved 82 sources. Of these, 41 were excluded due to a lack of direct sector relevance, outdated publication dates, or absence of empirical data. A further 18 were excluded because they were not published in English and translation was deemed impractical within the project timeframe.

The final selection comprised 23 peer-reviewed empirical studies and systematic reviews, meeting the inclusion criteria of sector relevance relating to sales or client-facing professional services and a clear focus on performance or wellbeing outcomes. Exclusion criteria eliminated opinion pieces, trade press articles, consultancy white papers without empirical evidence, and non-sector specific studies unless their mechanisms were directly transferable to high-performance, client facing contexts.

Multiple databases were consulted to ensure comprehensive coverage, including ProQuest eBook Central, O'Reilly, EBSCO Business Source Premier, and Google Scholar for in-press or working papers. The search period covered 2000–2025, with an emphasis on literature from 2021–2025 to capture post-pandemic developments in wellbeing strategies, hybrid working, and performance measurement. Foundational works predating 2010 were included only where they provided essential theoretical frameworks, such as transformational leadership or the competing values framework.

3.9 Data Analysis

The quantitative data analysis began with data cleansing, which involved removing incomplete responses and identifying any outliers. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise measures of dispersion and central tendency, while inferential tests, including Pearson correlations, independent sample t-tests, and multiple regression analysis, were conducted to examine relationships between perceptions of wellbeing initiatives and ratings of performance culture. Prior to these analyses, assumptions of multicollinearity, normality and homoscedasticity were tested to ensure statistical validity. Reliability analysis, using Cronbach's α, confirmed internal consistency, with all multi-item scales achieving values above the 0.7 threshold.

The qualitative strand was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019), which enabled both inductive identification of emergent patterns and deductive coding against established constructs from the literature. Validity in the quantitative strand was supported using validated scales and prior pilot testing, while qualitative trustworthiness was strengthened using an audit trail, reflexive journaling, and triangulation between open-ended survey responses and secondary human resource policy documents.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards applicable within the European Union, with all primary data collected via an anonymous survey administered through Microsoft Forms to ensure that no personally identifiable information was gathered or stored. Prior to participation, respondents were provided with a pre-survey information statement outlining the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, and the assurance of confidentiality. As the research did not involve sensitive personal data, vulnerable populations, or experimental interventions, formal ethical approval was not required by the National College of Ireland. Nonetheless, the study fully complied with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), with all data securely stored, access restricted

to the researcher, and no IP addresses or email identifiers recorded. Responses were anonymised at source, and raw data was permanently deleted upon completion of the analysis, in accordance with GDPR principles and institutional guidelines. The survey was designed to uphold transparency, confidentiality, and participant autonomy, ensuring that the research was conducted responsibly and ethically, consistent with best practice in organisational studies involving human participants.

3.11 Limitations of Method

Several limitations to this study are evident that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the use of a non-probability sampling strategy limits the generalisability of the findings beyond the participating organisations and contexts. Secondly, reliance on data that is self-reported has the potential for response bias, as participants' perceptions may be influenced by social drivers or individual interpretation of survey items. Finally, while open-ended survey responses contributed qualitative depth, the absence of the originally planned interviews restricted the opportunity for real-time probing and clarification of participant perspectives, which may have limited the richness and nuance of the qualitative insights obtained. Future research could address these limitations by employing probability-based sampling methods to enhance representativeness, incorporating mixed data collection techniques such as semi-structured interviews or focus groups to deepen qualitative understanding, and triangulating self-reported measures with independent performance and organisational data to reduce bias and strengthen validity.

3.12 Researcher Positionality & Reflexivity

The researcher's prior professional experience in organisational change within the sales and professional services sectors provided advantageous access to relevant participants and contextual understanding; however, it also introduced the potential for bias.
To mitigate this, reflexivity was actively maintained using a research journal and peer review of coding decisions. The original research design included semi-structured interviews to enrich the qualitative strand; however, delays in securing organisational access created time constraints that necessitated the removal of this research instrument option. In response, the survey was adapted to include more comprehensive open-ended questions, and the scope of the secondary document analysis was expanded to compensate for the reduced depth that might otherwise have been achieved through interviews.

Chapter 4 – Findings & Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical findings derived from an integrated thematic analysis of data collected through a cross-regional survey of 52 managers working in sales and professional services roles across the UK, Ireland, and the Nordic countries. In line with the convergent parallel mixed-methods design outlined in Chapter 3, the findings are generated through the simultaneous collection and separate analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, followed by their integration at the interpretation stage. Closed-ended survey responses provide measurable patterns and statistical trends, while open-text comments offer rich narrative detail, allowing for a holistic interpretation that connects numerical results with the lived experiences of managers. Rather than reporting findings solely by research question or data type, the results are organised into interconnected themes that reflect how wellbeing initiatives intersect with performance management, cultural expectations, and managerial practice. This approach enables each theme to be grounded in both statistical evidence and qualitative insights, ensuring that the complexity of the relationships between wellbeing and performance is captured in both breadth and depth. The analysis is further contextualised by recognising that organisational cultures differ substantially across geography and sector; UK and Irish organisations in the sample tended to emphasise hierarchical control, financial key performance indicators (KPIs) and individual competitiveness, while Nordic organisations prioritised flatter hierarchies, psychological safety and a more balanced integration of performance and wellbeing. These cultural distinctions influenced how managers perceived wellbeing initiatives and the extent to which such initiatives were embedded into routine performance management practices.

4.2 Sample and Context

The survey captured responses from managers across multiple organisational functions, with representation from frontline sales, professional services delivery, and back office operational roles. While the sample size of 52 reflects a purposive, non-probability recruitment strategy, the diversity of roles and geographies provided a rich basis for comparison.

For the purposes of this study, survey respondents were grouped into two regional categories; UK & Ireland were one, and Nordics were the other. The UK and Ireland category comprises the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) and the Republic of Ireland. This grouping reflects geographic proximity, a high degree of economic

integration, and broadly similar labour market regulations and performance management traditions, particularly in sales and professional services contexts (Eurofound, 2022). The Nordics category includes Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. These countries share cultural and institutional characteristics commonly referred to as the "Nordic model," which is underpinned by high levels of social welfare provision, strong labour protections, collaborative labour relations, and flatter organisational hierarchies (Andersen et al., 2020). Characteristics have been linked to distinctive workplace norms, including a stronger emphasis on work life balance, employee autonomy and psychological safety (Eurofound, 2021). This regional grouping was applied to enable meaningful comparison of wellbeing performance dynamics between two distinct organisational cultures; one characterised by more hierarchical and KPI-driven approaches (UK & Republic of Ireland), and one by more egalitarian and wellbeing integrated approaches (Nordics). The grouping aligns with the study's goal to explore how cultural context mediates the relationship between wellbeing initiatives and performance management practices.

4.3 Wellbeing as a Driver of Managerial Change

The majority of managers (63.5%) indicated that wellbeing initiatives had directly influenced their approach to performance management. In open text responses, this influence was described as a shift toward more empathetic leadership, greater consideration of work life balance when setting targets and more deliberate monitoring of workload distribution. As one UK based professional services manager reflected, *"We have to consider the human cost of our delivery schedules now, not just the client deadline."* In the Nordic context, similar sentiments were expressed, though typically framed as an extension of established cultural norms rather than a behavioural shift; *"Wellbeing has always been a factor here, but recent programmes have formalised it into performance discussions,"* reported a manager from the Nordics.

Equally, 36.5% of respondents reported no change in their performance management approach. This was attributed either to scepticism about the relevance of wellbeing aligning to hard performance metrics or to the perception that wellbeing initiatives had not been meaningfully integrated into their role.

These findings are consistent with Croft et al. (2024), who argue that wellbeing programmes are less effective when they focus on individual level interventions rather than addressing the systemic drivers of workplace stress. This divergence supports the role dependency pattern observed later in the analysis, where managers in target driven roles experience

greater tension between wellbeing allowances and output delivery than their operational counterparts.

4.4 Tensions Between Wellbeing and Performance Delivery

More than half of respondents (53.8%) acknowledged that wellbeing policies had created challenges in delivering performance targets. This tension was most pronounced in sales functions, where commission structures and "sense of urgency" cultures dominate. Several sales managers expressed reluctance to enforce strict targets after extended mental health leave or reduced workloads, fearing they might appear unsupportive.

One respondent noted, *"I worry about pushing too hard, even when the numbers are slipping."* In contrast, operational managers without direct KPI accountability were less likely to report such conflicts, viewing wellbeing measures as enablers that improved focus and morale without undermining delivery schedules.

This divergence reflects what Buckland (2024) terms the "priority displacement effect," where the drive to meet wellbeing commitments can unintentionally shift attention away from output metrics a phenomenon most visible in high-performance, short cycle sales environments. This finding reinforces the role dependency dynamic identified across the dataset, where the nature of a manager's targets and performance pressures shapes whether wellbeing is perceived as a support or a constraint.

4.5 Wellbeing's Influence on Resilience and Adaptability

A clear consensus emerged on role of wellbeing in improving how employees handle stress, feedback, and workload. 78.8% of managers reported positive changes, with narratives highlighting greater composure under pressure and more constructive engagement with performance feedback.

One Nordic respondent described, *"Team members now voice concerns earlier, which allows us to adjust before burnout becomes a risk."* However, the 21.2% who did not see improvements often pointed to inconsistent programme design or poor integration into daily operations. This reflects Torkington (2023) finding that managerial capability, not just policy presence, determines whether wellbeing translates into resilience. Without training in psychological safety and early intervention, wellbeing risks becoming an HR compliance measure rather than a leadership responsibility.

These results also intersect with the cultural mediation mechanism identified, as Nordic respondents more frequently framed resilience gains as a natural extension of existing

organisational norms, whereas UK and Irish respondents described them as a newer managerial adjustment.

4.6 Accountability Tensions

Responses were split on whether wellbeing initiatives unintentionally reduced accountability or motivation (51.9% agreed; 48.1% disagreed), highlighting a cultural fault line in high-performance sectors. For some, the concern centred on a perceived erosion of ownership. As one UK sales leader observed, *"Once wellbeing becomes a shield, it's harder to have the tough conversations about missed numbers."* Others argued that, when structured correctly, wellbeing reinforces accountability by keeping staff engaged and capable of sustaining performance. This supports Tangwancharoenchai's (2022) assertion that wellbeing's accountability impact depends heavily on how it is framed within organisational culture. These results link directly to the structural alignment mechanism in the synthesis section, as accountability outcomes appear to hinge on whether wellbeing expectations are explicitly embedded within performance frameworks.

4.7 Productivity Perceptions

When asked if wellbeing initiatives had positively influenced employee productivity, 40.4% agreed, 55.8% were neutral, and 3.8% disagreed. Neutrality often reflected uncertainty rather than negative perceptions, particularly in performance driven settings. Respondents reported that benefits were more visible in softer metrics such as reduced absenteeism and improved collaboration than in hard performance delivery figures. This ambiguity mirrors Spicer's (2024) caution that many wellbeing programmes address symptoms rather than the structural causes of performance drag.
A recurring theme was the absence of integrated measurement systems linking wellbeing to productivity outcomes. This ties directly to the structural alignment mechanism, as the lack of embedded tracking meant managers struggled to attribute productivity changes to wellbeing initiatives with confidence.

4.8 Engagement Effects

Nearly half of managers (48.1%) reported increased engagement with their teams due to wellbeing initiatives, while 42.3% were neutral and 9.6% saw no impact. The main drivers of improved engagement were increased openness in communication and stronger perceived trust, especially in hybrid teams. However, neutrality suggests that many managers either lack the skills to integrate wellbeing into their engagement practices or do not see it as part of their remit.

This aligns with the role dependency mechanism, as managers in non-target carrying roles were more likely to report engagement gains, while those under high sales pressure viewed wellbeing as separate from core performance conversations.

4.9 Synthesised Interpretation

The integrated analysis of quantitative survey data and qualitative open text responses reveals that wellbeing initiatives can influence managerial behaviours, strengthen resilience, and enhance team engagement, though their perceived effects on accountability and productivity remain less consistent. Across themes, the convergence of numerical trends and narrative evidence suggests that wellbeing's greatest strengths lie in fostering empathy, adaptability, and open communication, while its limitations emerge in contexts lacking clear alignment with role specific performance expectations.

Three mechanisms emerge from the integration of both data strands:

- Cultural mediation: statistical patterns indicate regional differences in perceived alignment between wellbeing and performance, while qualitative narratives explain why; in Nordic contexts, wellbeing is culturally embedded and seen as complementary to performance but in UK and Irish contexts, tensions between output metrics and wellbeing allowances are more pronounced.

- Role dependency: quantitative results show higher reports of performance tension among target carrying managers, and qualitative accounts describe this as stemming from the pressure of commission structures and short delivery cycles.

- Structural alignment: both data types point to the absence of integrated measurement frameworks linking wellbeing to performance outcomes. Quantitative neutrality scores on productivity, correspond with qualitative admissions of "lack of measurement" or "difficulty proving impact."

This synthesis demonstrates that the most meaningful improvements occur when wellbeing is embedded into performance frameworks, supported by managerial capability, and measured alongside traditional key performance indicators. Where integration is absent, initiatives risk being perceived as superficial or even counterproductive. The mixed-method approach was essential in reaching this conclusion. Quantitative data highlighted the distribution and strength of views, while qualitative narratives illuminated the contextual, cultural, and role-based nuances behind those patterns.

4.10 Rival Explanations and Sensitivity

While the findings suggest clear patterns in how wellbeing initiatives influence performance management, several alternative explanations must be considered. Five rival explanations were tested against the data.

1. self-selection bias may have inflated positive perceptions, as managers who already value wellbeing could be predisposed to view its impact favourably.

2. Temporal effects may limit visibility of outcomes, with some initiatives implemented too recently to register measurable productivity changes.

3. The programme novelty effect could explain early enthusiasm, as recently launched measures may generate short term positive sentiment that diminishes over time.

4. Role specific pressures particularly in target driven sales functions may shape perceptions independently of wellbeing programmes, reflecting inherent differences in job design.

5. An attribution gap emerged, where managers were uncertain whether observed changes in productivity were the result of wellbeing initiatives or other factors; several qualitative responses explicitly linked this uncertainty to a "lack of measurement" mechanisms.

Robustness checks using chi-square tests confirmed the statistical significance of some role-based differences ($p < 0.05$), although effect sizes were moderate (Cramér's V = 0.25–0.30). This indicates that role and regional context influence outcomes.

4.11 Summary

The data shows that wellbeing initiatives influence leadership behaviours, performance management practices, and cultural dynamics in high-pressure environments, with outcomes shaped by regional norms. UK and Irish organisations in the sample tended to prioritise hierarchical control, financial KPIs, and individual competitiveness, whereas Nordic organisations emphasised flatter hierarchies, psychological safety, and balanced integration of performance and wellbeing.

Across contexts, wellbeing was understood as encompassing mental, emotional, and social dimensions, extending beyond physical health. Consistent with Brennan (2025), it is increasingly viewed by employers as not just a moral imperative but a strategic investment in business success. While initiatives were not universally transformative, their potential was substantial when strategically aligned with organisational goals, culturally embedded, and supported by capable leadership. In such cases, benefits extended beyond health outcomes

to include resilience, engagement, and sustainable delivery. Conversely, poor integration risked rendering initiatives tokenistic or counterproductive.

The findings highlight the need for high-performance, target-driven sectors to move from treating wellbeing as an HR add-on to embedding it as a performance enabler. Achieving this requires robust measurement, leadership capability enablement, and alignment with role specific and organisational objectives to ensure wellbeing delivers both human capital and commercial value.

5. Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The discussion chapter positions the findings from this research within the broader context of organisational theory, performance management practice, and the evolving discourse on workplace wellbeing. Drawing on both primary data that has been collected from 52 managers in sales and professional services organisations across the UK, Ireland, and Nordic regions. The discussion will also build on relevant academic and practitioner literature. This section examines the implications of the findings at a macro level.

The chapter progresses from a concise recap of the key results to an exploration of their theoretical and managerial significance, before considering policy implications, boundary conditions and future research directions. Limitations are addressed transparently to situate the study's contribution and scope to empirical research.

5.2 Recap of Key Findings

The integrated analysis of quantitative and qualitative survey data from 52 managers in sales and professional services organisations across the United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, and the Nordic countries revealed five core findings. First, nearly two-thirds of managers (63.5%) reported that wellbeing initiatives had altered their approach to performance management, often citing shifts toward more empathetic leadership, greater consideration of work life balance, and closer monitoring of workloads; however, 36.5% saw no change, indicating gaps in integration and leadership capability. Second, while 40.4% perceived a positive effect on productivity, a majority (55.8%) remained neutral, with qualitative feedback suggesting this uncertainty stemmed from limited measurement systems and challenges in attributing performance changes directly to wellbeing programmes. Third, managers were almost evenly divided on whether wellbeing reduces accountability (51.9% yes, 48.1% no), reflecting differing interpretations of support in high performance contexts; some viewing wellbeing as a shield from scrutiny, others as a foundation for sustainable delivery. Fourth, just under half (48.1%) believed wellbeing initiatives had strengthened managerial engagement with teams, while 42.3% were neutral and 9.6% reported no impact with engagement gains which was most evident where wellbeing was actively embedded into daily leadership practices.

Conclusively, cultural context emerged as a key mediator; Nordic respondents reported fewer tensions between wellbeing and performance, describing wellbeing as culturally

aligned with productivity, whereas UK and Irish managers more frequently highlighted friction between wellbeing goals and performance targets.

The findings in this study intersect with several established theoretical frameworks in organisational behaviour and strategic human resource management (SHRM). From a SHRM perspective, the fact that 36.5% of managers reported no change in their performance management approach despite the implementation of wellbeing initiatives suggests that such programmes are often positioned as HR led add-ons rather than embedded strategic levers (Wright & McMahan, 1992).

The absence of direct metrics linking wellbeing to performance reinforces an execution gap in operationalising strategic human resource management principles, underscoring the need for initiatives to be integrated into key performance indicators, leadership competencies and appraisal systems. Extending the Competing Values Framework, the results reveal an additional axis of organisational tension; care versus accountability. The near even split on whether wellbeing reduces accountability reflects how, in high output cultures, wellbeing can be perceived as lowering standards, whereas in trust-oriented cultures, it is seen as reinforcing sustainable performance (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983).

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model covered by Bakker & Demerouti (2017) is also supported, with 63.5% of managers indicating wellbeing culture contributed to changes in performance management practices, suggesting that wellbeing can act as a performance enabling resource when effectively embedded. Critically, the changes to performance management practices are not proof of a positive impact on target related objectives.

The high neutrality on productivity (55.8%) implies that generic programmes may fail to address the specific demands of high intensity, target driven contexts, aligning with critiques of "one size fits all" approaches (Curran, 2024). Social Exchange Theory covered by Blau (1964) is partially challenged, as the accountability divide shows that framing matters; where performance expectations are unclear, wellbeing may be seen as reducing accountability rather than enabling it, highlighting the role of leadership communication and cultural framing in shaping perceived reciprocity.

Hofstede (2001), cultural and contingency perspectives are reinforced by the Nordic versus UK & Ireland contrast, with Nordic respondents reporting fewer tensions due to flatter hierarchies and strong societal support structures, while UK and Irish managers more often described friction between wellbeing and performance demands. Collectively, the study extends strategic human resource management literature by demonstrating that while wellbeing initiatives can positively shape leadership behaviours and resilience, measurable performance impacts remain inconsistent unless initiatives are strategically aligned,

culturally adapted, and underpinned by integrated performance and wellbeing metrics (Armstrong, 2006).

5.3 Implications, Future Research, and Limitations

The findings from this study generate a range of implications for senior leaders, HR professionals, and policymakers. The 36.5% of managers reporting no change in performance management due to wellbeing initiatives highlights the pressing need to embed wellbeing into core performance systems, integrating it into appraisal criteria, leadership KPIs, and organisational scorecards to avoid being perceived as a token benefit. Clear communication is essential to address the 51.9% to 48.1% accountability split, ensuring that wellbeing support is positioned as enabling sustainable delivery rather than lowering expectations. Building managerial capability is equally critical, given that 42.3% were neutral on engagement; targeted training in psychological safety, empathetic communication, and early intervention can help bridge this gap (CIPD, 2022).

Organisations should also adopt data driven approaches to link wellbeing metrics with tangible business outcomes, such as sales, retention, and customer satisfaction, to strengthen return on investment narratives. Cultural and sectoral tailoring remains important in Nordic organisations. An example would be the benefit from societal norms supporting work life balance, whereas target driven sectors may need to focus on workload design and recovery time over lifestyle benefits. Beyond organisational practice, the findings also carry policy and ESG implications. In the UK and Ireland, where statutory wellbeing obligations are less prescriptive than in some Nordic countries, the onus rests heavily on employers; policymakers could provide incentives or guidance to promote integration. The "S" (social) dimension of ESG increasingly prioritises measurable wellbeing outcomes (ILO, 2023), and sector-specific professional bodies, such as the CIPD and Institute of Sales Professionals, could develop tailored wellbeing and performance frameworks.

The applicability of these findings is bounded by sector specific characteristics, with the sample limited to sales and professional services sectors marked by high client demands, performance pressure, and human capital dependency making generalisation to other industries, such as manufacturing or the public sector, uncertain.

Geographic scope was confined to Northern Europe, and the survey's post-pandemic timing means priorities and perceptions may shift over time. The role distribution was skewed towards mid-level managers and may not reflect the perspectives of senior executives or frontline supervisors.

These boundaries point to several research opportunities which include, longitudinal studies to assess sustained wellbeing impacts; cross sector comparisons to identify unique enablers and barriers; cultural moderation analyses to explore national organisational culture interactions; experimental interventions to test causal effects and leadership style investigations into how transformational, transactional, or autocratic approaches influence accountability and engagement.

Limitations must also be acknowledged. Purposive and snowball sampling may have attracted participants already engaged with wellbeing discourse, inflating positive perceptions; reliance on self-reported data raises the risk of social desirability bias; the cross-sectional design limits causal inference; construct interpretation may have varied between respondents, affecting comparability; and researcher positionality, while mitigated through reflexivity and triangulation, may have shaped interpretation.

5.4 Summary

The findings underline that the integration of wellbeing into performance management is neither linear nor universally understood. When strategically embedded, culturally attuned, and supported by capable managers, wellbeing can enhance productivity, engagement, and sustainable accountability.

However, poorly aligned or superficial initiatives risk breeding ambiguity and, in some contexts, perceptions of reduced performance discipline. At a macro level, this study reinforces the shift in both theory and practice from treating wellbeing as a peripheral benefit to embedding it as a core strategic capability. For practitioners, the message is clear; success lies not in the quantity of initiatives but in their strategic alignment, cultural fit, and quality of managerial execution. For academics, the findings challenge assumptions of universal positive reciprocity and emphasise the moderating role of culture, context, and leadership framing. Ultimately, these insights address the study's central aim by demonstrating how wellbeing can be leveraged as a performance enabler in sales and professional services organisations when organisational strategy, cultural context, and managerial capability are aligned.

Chapter 6: **Conclusion**

6.1 Introduction:

This chapter synthesises the findings of the research, drawing together the quantitative and qualitative insights to address the central research questions. It reflects on the theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions of the study, while acknowledging its limitations and boundary conditions. The chapter also positions the findings within the wider organisational and cultural context of sales and professional services sectors in the UK, Ireland, and the Nordics, highlighting how wellbeing initiatives interact with performance management systems in high-pressure environments. The discussion closes by considering the implications for both academic theory and managerial practice, offering final reflections and outlining the strategic challenge of embedding wellbeing as a performance enabler rather than a token initiative.

6.2 Key Findings and Contextual Factors

The research found that 63.5% of managers perceived a positive influence of wellbeing initiatives on performance management, signalling a gradual cultural shift toward integrating employee wellbeing into managerial practice. However, integration remains inconsistent, with many organisations still treating wellbeing as a peripheral HR activity rather than embedding it within performance systems. This supports earlier findings that sustainable performance requires systematic alignment of wellbeing with organisational strategy (Guest, 2017).

Managerial opinion was almost evenly divided; 51.9% believed wellbeing initiatives could reduce accountability, while 48.1% disagreed. This lack of consensus suggests the relationship between wellbeing and accountability is highly context dependent, shaped by leadership capability, clarity of performance expectations, and cultural norms. Without explicit frameworks linking wellbeing to performance standards, ambiguity and reduced role clarity can arise (Kaiser et al., 2015).

While 40.4% reported productivity gains and around half noted improved engagement, neutrality remained high (42.3% on engagement, 55.8% on productivity). This points to a persistent measurement gap, where the absence of robust data limits managers' ability to attribute performance changes directly to wellbeing programmes (Robertson & Cooper, 2011).

Success factors identified include leadership commitment, integration into performance systems, targeted managerial training, and cultural alignment with wellbeing principles. External factors such as national welfare frameworks and sector specific performance pressures also influence outcomes, with highly competitive, KPI driven contexts posing greater challenges in balancing wellbeing with sustained performance (Van de Voorde et al., 2012).

6.3 Contributions

This study makes contributions across theoretical, methodological and applied domains. Theoretically, it extends the Competing Values Framework (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983) by introducing the tension between care and accountability as a defining dynamic in performance driven sectors, showing that this tension can either be a productive force for sustainable delivery or a source of friction that undermines performance if poorly managed. The research refines psychological safety theory (Edmondson, 1999) by demonstrating that KPI-intensive environments often create uneven distributions of safety, with levels of trust and openness dependent on the capability of individual managers to balance high demands with genuine support. It further advances Strategic Human Resource Management (Wright & McMahan, 1992) by evidencing that wellbeing, when disconnected from strategic objectives, risks being perceived as tokenistic or cosmetic.

The findings reinforce calls from the SHRM literature (Armstrong, 2006) for wellbeing to be structurally and culturally embedded into the fabric of performance management systems, influencing KPIs, leadership competencies, and appraisal processes, rather than remaining a HR led add-on.

Methodologically, the research demonstrates the value of a convergent parallel mixed-methods design for exploring complex organisational phenomena. By integrating quantitative survey findings with qualitative open text responses, the approach not only identified measurable trends but also uncovered contextual nuances, such as the different ways that managers frame accountability in relation to wellbeing. This dual lens method strengthens construct validity and offers a practical template for researchers seeking to capture depth without the time and resource demands of a separate interview phase. The inclusion of qualitative data within a primarily quantitative instrument enabled richer insight into variances in responses, particularly in explaining neutrality on key metrics like productivity and engagement, enhancing the interpretive power of the results.

The study delivers four actionable imperatives for senior leaders, HR professionals and line managers. Firstly, integrating wellbeing directly into core performance systems, embedding it into goal setting, appraisal criteria and leadership KPIs will avoid employee relegation to a tokenistic status.

Secondly, investing in managerial capability by equipping leaders with the skills and confidence to balance wellbeing with performance accountability, including training in psychological safety, empathetic communication, and early intervention will aid alignment with business objectives (CIPD, 2022).

Thirdly, clarifying the wellbeing accountability relationship by developing frameworks that link wellbeing initiatives to clear, measurable performance standards, reducing ambiguity and misinterpretation (Kaiser et al., 2015).

Fourthly, strengthening the business case by implementing robust metrics that track wellbeing outcomes alongside commercial indicators such as retention, sales performance, and customer satisfaction, thereby demonstrating return on investment (Robertson & Cooper, 2011).

These insights are vital for sales and professional services firms, where the commercial imperative to maintain high performance sits alongside mounting pressures to address burnout, attrition, and engagement. By combining strategic alignment, cultural fit, and rigorous measurement, the recommendations point towards a model of wellbeing that is both human-centred and performance enabling.

6.4 Recommendations

The synthesis of the literature review, discussion, and comparison with current guidance highlights key opportunities for organisational learning, targeted improvement and further academic investigation. Based on these insights, the following recommendations are presented as actionable strategies for organisations seeking to enhance the alignment of wellbeing and performance management practices.

- Treat wellbeing and performance as mutually reinforcing drivers of success rather than separate agendas.
- Integrate wellbeing measures into KPIs, appraisal criteria, leadership competencies, and organisational scorecards.
- Design initiatives that fit desired organisational culture and are relevant to the specific pressures of high-performance, KPI driven environments.

- Equip managers with the skills to balance wellbeing with accountability through targeted training in empathetic leadership, psychological safety, and workload management.
- Link wellbeing indicators to tangible business outcomes such as productivity, engagement, retention, and customer satisfaction to demonstrate ROI and secure ongoing investment.
- Leverage wellbeing as a differentiator in attracting talent, meeting ESG expectations, and building resilient, adaptive performance cultures.

6.5 Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations that may influence the interpretation and generalisability of its findings. First, the research focused exclusively on professional services and sales organisations, sectors characterised by high client demands, performance pressure, and a strong results-driven culture. As such, the conclusions may not be directly applicable to industries with different operational dynamics, such as manufacturing, healthcare or the public sector. The study also relied on self-reported data from managers, which introduces the potential for social desirability bias particularly relevant given the sensitive nature of topics such as wellbeing and accountability. While the research explored the impact of wellbeing initiatives on performance management practices, the perceived trade-offs between wellbeing and performance culture and responses to cultural change, the cross-sectional design reduces the ability to review causal implications. It captures perceptions at a single point in time, which may be influenced by recent organisational changes, economic conditions or post-pandemic adjustments.

Additionally, the sample size, while sufficient for thematic analysis, was not large enough to explore subgroup variations in depth, such as differences by managerial seniority or specific organisational contexts. Finally, given that the study concentrated on managerial perspectives, employee viewpoints were only indirectly represented, meaning that the lived experience of cultural change from the subordinate perspective warrants further investigation in future research.

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Appendix

Appendix C: Manging wellbeing at work, in professional services and Sales organisations

Managing
Wellbeing at Work,

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland
Research Students Declaration Form
(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

Name: Michael Ojo
Student Number: x23174897
Degree for which thesis is submitted: MBA
Title of Thesis: The Impact of Wellbeing Initiatives on Performance Management in Sales and Professional Services
Date: 24/08/25

Material submitted for award

    A.   I declare that this work submitted has been composed by myself.   ☒

    B.   I agree to my thesis being deposited in the NCI Library online open access repository NORMA.   ☒

    C.   ***Either*** *I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.
Or *I declare that the following material contained in the thesis formed part of a submission for the award of
_____
(State the award and the awarding body and list the material below)   ☒