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HAPPINESS AND WELLBEING MANAGEMENT IN TOURISM STARTUPS. A study of Organisational Leadership and Entrepreneurship

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KEYWORDS

Tourism; Communication; Happiness; Startup; Well-being; Leadership; Entrepreneurship

ABSTRACT

Recent research has established that happiness at work is a crucial factor in optimising performance and commitment within organisations. This research analyses the internal strategies used by tourism start-ups to promote the well-being and happiness of their workers, as well as satisfaction in this type of business according to gender. Using a systematic review of the scientific literature together with the testimonies of tourism start-ups through a focus group, the results show a predisposition towards corporate policies where the employee is placed at the centre of corporate wellbeing management strategies.

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1. Introduction

Studies on well-being in organisations highlight the importance that corporate happiness management has acquired in recent years, both in the scientific community (Rando Cueto et al., 2024; Rando-Cueto et al., 2023; Ravina Ripoll et al., 2022; Robina-Ramírez et al., 2022), and in the professional sphere (Jambrino-Maldonado et al., 2022; Llamas et al., 2019; Núñez-Barriopedro et al., 2021; Ripoll et al., 2021). In the business world, start-ups, as emerging entities that drive innovation and social renewal(De Las Heras-Pedrosa et al., 2024; Thomas & Darnton, 2006), stand out in the implementation of strategies that seek a better quality of life for their professionals and their environment. The drivers of startups, mostly leading companies in digital transformation, are committed to promoting the human factor and well-being within an economy of happiness, which is committed to preserving the environment and future generations (Sánchez Bayón & García Ramos, 2021).

With regard to organisations in the tourism sector, the scope of these companies' activities is directly related to the consumer experience at the destination (Frochot et al., 2017). Tourism, which has experienced continuous growth in recent decades, has overcome numerous obstacles and launched a wide variety of business and management initiatives to meet growing and unpredictable demand (Badulescu et al., 2024). The planning and systematisation of actions aimed at increasing the well-being of tourists is on the rise, and the trend in the tourism industry towards responding to social well-being and health promotion needs is gaining strength (Go & Park, 2021). In their development, it is essential that these customer-centric business strategies are also promoted within the organisation, from the inside out (Go & Park, 2021; Yan et al., 2023). The consideration and incorporation of happiness and wellbeing into organisational management is a tool with great potential for the progress of small start-ups (Page et al., 2017).

Despite the growing number of studies on well-being and happiness in tourism, recent research has focused mainly on tourist experiences and destination related outcomes, while the internal management of well-being within tourism organisations remains underexplored. Furthermore, previous research has paid little attention to the role of leadership styles and gender dynamics in the implementation of happiness and well-being management in these emerging companies, especially from a qualitative perspective.

In response to these research gaps, the present study aims to explore how happiness and well-being are managed in start-up companies in the tourism sector. Consequently, this research addresses the following research question:

How do start-ups in the tourism sector perceive and apply happiness and wellbeing management practices in relation to organisational culture, leadership and gender dynamics?

2. Well-being and happiness management in organisations

Although most research on tourism has focused primarily on the well-being and quality of life of tourism service customers, an increasing number of studies are focusing on the social and emotional factors of leaders due to the deterioration of these factors (Bichler et al., 2020; Peters et al., 2019). This change is based on the importance of entrepreneurs as key players in the sector for its political and economic stability, which makes it necessary to take care of their mental health, reduce stressful situations and develop other types of skills that help them face challenges (Peters et al., 2019). In this way, corporate happiness management is linked to aspects related to education, professional experience, training and entrepreneurial qualities (Uy et al., 2013; Yan et al., 2023), as well as individual motivation (Cetin et al., 2022) and the ability to recover from adversity (Ratten, 2021).

2.1. Entrepreneurship and tourism

The consolidation of these aspects in business culture has recently been key to curbing a crisis such as that caused in the last five years by the COVID-19 pandemic (Lindsay-Smith et al., 2022). Some authors highlight the importance of having previous experience in setting up businesses before embarking on any new venture, as this generates security and confidence, as well as greater well-being in business (Tomassini & Baggio, 2022; Yan et al., 2023). There is even a perceived trend towards prioritising an ethical and sustainable approach in the organisation of small tourism businesses and a moral concern for the well-being and happiness of their audience, as opposed to the traditional economic goal of

generating capital as their main mission (Alrawadieh et al., 2021; Andrade-Valbuena et al., 2022; Tomassini & Baggio, 2022). This paradigm shift is also evident in the scientific literature; most research on the relationship between tourism and development, which focuses on economic and short-term effects, is giving way to research that analyses the participation of small businesses in intangible aspects, such as the well-being of their leaders (Adiyia et al., 2017).

In crisis situations such as this, some researchers point out the importance of public administrations and private institutions supporting the organisational capacities and resilience of tourism entrepreneurs, their motivations and initiatives, in order to promote the economic, social and environmental development of the area (Devkota et al., 2020; Ferrara et al., 2023; Meera & Vinodan, 2023; Peters et al., 2019; Sumalrot et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2023; Yan et al., 2023). In particular, close institutional relationships between both parties can contribute positively to the health and well-being of emerging entrepreneurs (Fillis et al., 2022).

2.2. Gender and female entrepreneurship

In the case of female entrepreneurs, according to Yan et al. (2023), give less priority than men to their mental health and well-being, this support would be particularly relevant in sustaining and promoting the initiatives of female entrepreneurs in the tourism sector (Boluk & Panse, 2022). This group is a key element for economic development and gender equality in the tourism industry (Rodríguez Vera et al., 2024). Thus, the role of female leadership in promoting happiness at work is particularly significant (De Las Heras-Pedrosa et al., 2024).

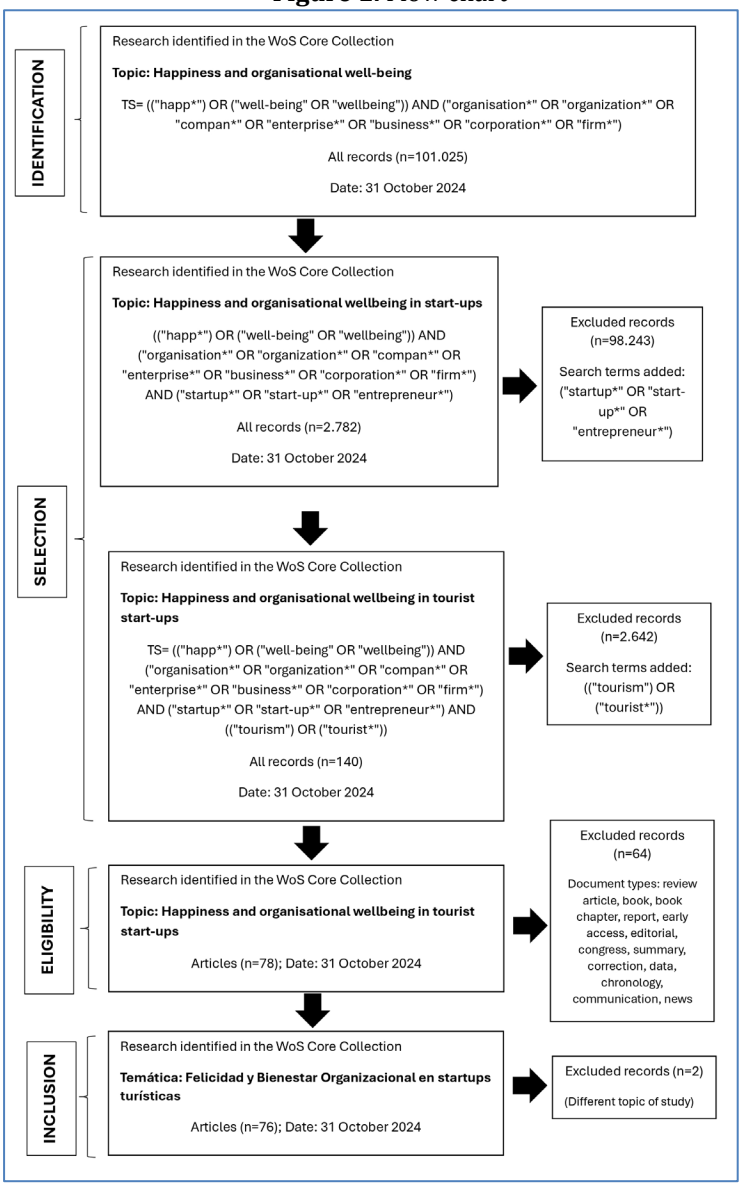
In line with these arguments, other researchers add that social and institutional support for women entrepreneurs is essential, as they bring benefits to the community by approaching their businesses in a more holistic way (Schmidt et al., 2024). It is women entrepreneurs who consider that they achieve success not only when they ensure customer satisfaction, but also when they cling to a constant pursuit of happiness in their work, thus broadening the concept of entrepreneurial achievement (Halim et al., 2020). Those with greater psychological empowerment and a stronger growth mindset are the ones who make the most progress in their business ventures, even in unfavourable contexts (Ertac & Tanova, 2020).

This supports the concept of *entrepreneurial spirit* focused on the social aspects of entrepreneurs, rather than on maximising economic profit, who not only take financial risks when starting a business (Bichler et al., 2020; Celebi et al., 2020). The correlation between good harmony and the working environment, both among employees and on the part of the management of the tourism organisation, is a stimulus for the growth of a company (Kockelkoren et al., 2023). This sense of well-being is fuelled by the satisfaction of the need for autonomy and competence, as well as the motivation provided by the opportunities experienced by entrepreneurs in start-ups in the sector (Padilla-Angulo et al., 2024).

3. Methodology

In the first phase of the methodological process, a systematic review of the scientific literature was carried out following the models of Carneiro-Barrera et al. (2019 and Morales-Toro et al. (2019) and the PRISMA 2020 checklist provided by Page et al. (2021). The Web of Science (WoS) repository was consulted as a reliable reference source, as is customary in empirical research on tourism and hospitality (Jambrino-Maldonado et al., 2022; Kiráľová & Šperková, 2024; Matsimbe et al., 2022; Ogretmenoglu et al., 2022) for the extraction and analysis of records. The flow chart in Figure 1 describes the phases of the literature search process (identification, selection, eligibility and inclusion) for the analysis of the selected documents.

Figure 1. Flow chart



Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

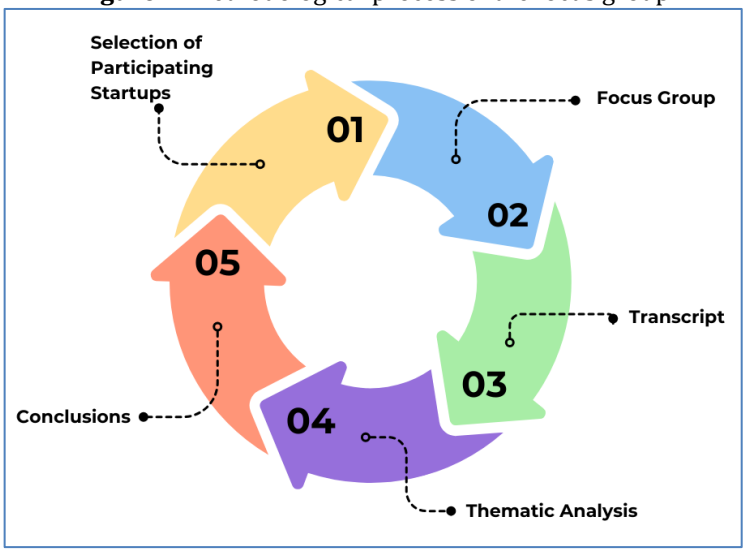
The study of scientific literature was complemented by the creation of a focus group involving the directors of five start-ups in the tourism sector, who contributed their professional insights to this work. The discussion group was held via a videoconferencing platform and included the participation of the directors of the participating companies. The session was moderated by two of the researchers following a semi-structured discussion guide aligned with the main research topics and lasted approximately one hour, during which the discussion was recorded on video and audio and subsequently transcribed for analysis. Prior to the session, all participants were informed of the objectives of the study and gave their verbal consent for the use of their information in the research and its future publication.

The choice of this qualitative methodology responds to the objective of achieving a greater understanding of the perceptions, beliefs and experiences of those who participated in the discussion group. In this way, and as some authors argue (Krueger & Casey, 2009), the participants enriched the qualitative analysis by sharing their professional experiences of the welfare policies, leadership and organisational culture implemented in their companies, thus enabling them to capture and share nuances of this context during their presentation (Wilkinson, 1998)

The information obtained from the interventions recorded during the focus group session was processed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as summarised in Figure 2, which offers a systematic approach to identifying and analysing patterns in the data obtained and allows for the

interpretation of different experiences based on individual roles and perceptions. The researchers first familiarised themselves with the data by repeatedly reading the transcript, followed by a manual coding process led by the researchers to identify recurring patterns related to wellbeing management, leadership practices and gender dynamics. These codes were then grouped into broader themes, which were reviewed and refined to ensure consistency and coherence with the study objectives.

Figure 2. Methodological process of the focus group



Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

The start-ups selected to participate in the focus group (Table 1) were emerging Spanish tourism companies. The business activity of these entities stands out for its innovative approach to organisational well-being in tourism. With an average of eight employees per company, the predominant business activity of the participating start-ups covers areas related to accommodation experiences, sustainable mobility and technology applied to tourism services.

Table 1. Participating start-ups

Startup	Activity start date
AMALia	2024
Electric Car Tour	2018
Host and Boat	2017
Sexta Planta	2014
Coaching Airlines	2013

Source: Completed by the authors based on participant data, 2025

The questions raised during the focus group are summarised in Table 2. These have been classified into different thematic blocks, according to the different areas addressed in the research. In this way, in addition to exchanging opinions on future lines of business and their link to organisational happiness management, key aspects have been addressed, such as:

a.- Well-being at work, with the aim of identifying specific policies and practices that start-ups implement to promote it. In this regard, Guest (2017) highlights how important it is to analyse employee wellbeing in this type of emerging tourism company, whose success depends largely on customer satisfaction.

b.- Organisational culture, as one of the main factors affecting satisfaction and motivation in the workplace (Denison, 1996).

c.- Leadership and existing gender differences. Previous research has shown how women and men may have different experiences and expectations at work due to structural and cultural factors (Kose & Avcioglu, 2023). Leadership has a direct impact on employee happiness, especially in start-up

environments, where leaders tend to be more accessible and flexible and can significantly influence the creation of a positive workplace environment (Skakon et al., 2010).

Table 2. Questions asked in the focus group

BLOCK	JUSTIFICATION	QUESTIONS
Culture and organizational climate	Organisational culture has a direct influence on the perception of employee well-being, especially in startups where the structure and values tend to be more flexible than in traditional companies.	- How would you describe the organisational culture in your startup, especially in terms of the values and principles that promote workplace wellbeing? - How does the size and structure of the startup impact the work environment and wellbeing policies? - Do you think there is a balance between job satisfaction and employee wellbeing?
Strategies for well-being and happiness at work	The objective of this section is to identify the specific policies and practices that startups implement to promote well-being.	- Have you implemented policies or strategies in your company to promote the happiness and well-being of employees? Which ones? - How is well-being measured in your organization? Are there regular surveys or evaluations of employee satisfaction? - How do you manage the balance between employee happiness and productivity demands?
Satisfaction at work and gender	Possible differences in work experiences and expectations between women and men.	- Do you perceive that men and women experience happiness at work differently within your startup? - Do you think that gender influences the perception of work-life balance in your company? - Are there differences in growth or leadership opportunities that could affect the well-being of women and men?
Impact on leadership	Leadership has a direct impact on employee happiness, especially in startup environments where the leader tends to be more approachable and flexible.	- How do the company's leaders react when problems related to employee satisfaction or well-being arise? - What characteristics of leaders do they consider essential to foster an environment of well-being?
The future of well-being at work	This block addresses how participants see the future evolution of welfare policies in startups, which is relevant given that labour welfare is constantly changing and developing.	- What new trends or tools do you think could be useful for improving employee wellbeing in the future? - Do you think that wellbeing will be a growing priority in the development of tourism startups? - What improvements would you like to see in the wellbeing policies within your company?

Source: Own elaboration, 2025

4. Results

Organisational happiness is not considered a novel field of research, as can be seen from the number of records found since 1800 (when WoS compiled the first documents on this topic). However, the exponential increase over the years in the amount of scientific research on this topic published in high-impact journals suggests a growing interest within the scientific community.

In this context, start-ups have become an attractive area of research in terms of well-being, although the increase in records in the academic literature is much more recent. Table 3 shows a report of publications and citations with data from the WoS repository, offering a comparison of the research evolution of the scientific community. From a deductive study perspective, the data corresponding to research on the management of happiness and well-being in the field of tourism start-ups are added as the object of analysis of this work.

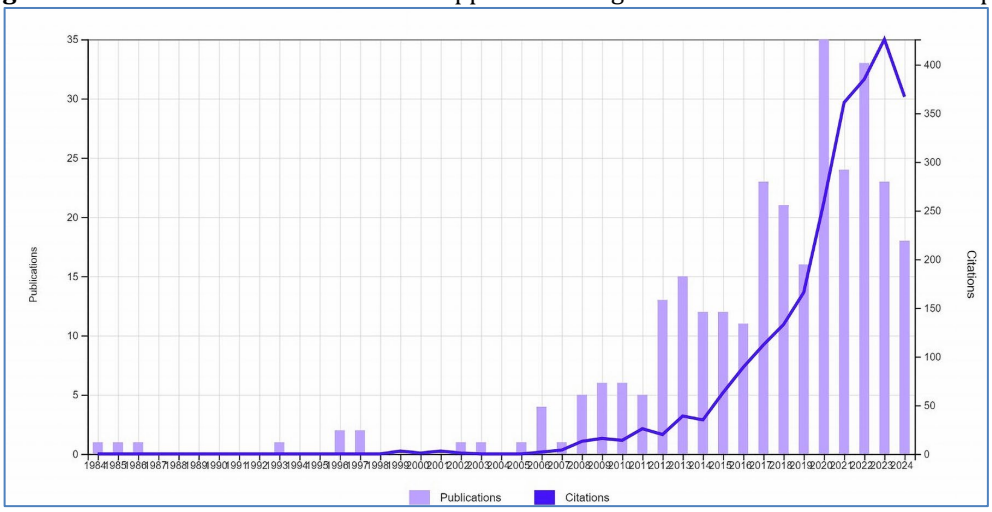
Table 3. Bibliography citation report

Subjects of bibliographic searches	Happiness and organisational well-being	Managing happiness and well-being in startups	Promoting happiness and well-being in tourism startups
Nº. of records found (until 31 October 2024)	105,881	3,043	160
Year of first record found in WoS	1,800	1,958	1,986
Citations	43,301 (from 2022, when WoS offers this data, for less than 10,000 records)	16,425	1,319
Citation average	6.67	14.03	8.24
H-Index	55	58	20

Source: Web of Sciences, 2025. Own elaboration.

In the case of start-ups dedicated to tourism, it was not until after 2019 that activity exceeded ten articles per year. Despite their recent appearance in scientific literature, the data reflect an upward trend in terms of the number of citations and the H-index. Figure 3 shows the growth in the number of publications and citations.

Figure 3. Publications and citations on happiness management in tourism sector start-ups.



Source: Web of Sciences, 2025

Beyond the quantitative growth observed in the literature, the systematic review reveals an emerging shift from an outcome-oriented understanding of well-being towards a more strategic and organisational perspective. Recent studies increasingly present happiness and well-being as concepts linked to leadership practices, organisational culture and long-term sustainability, rather than as isolated individual outcomes. This trend highlights a growing interest in internal organisational dynamics, especially in small, emerging tourism businesses.

The most notable results obtained from the interaction of the participants in the discussion group, following the analysis of the different thematic blocks, are presented below:

4.1. Organisational culture and climate

According to the section on organisational culture and climate, three main aspects characterise the culture of the participating tourism start-ups: flexibility; open communication and transparency; and human value.

a.- Flexibility. As a pillar of organisational well-being, flexibility is considered one of the fundamental values mentioned by startups. In the tourism sector, where customer demands and expectations can vary, flexible working is considered an essential strategy for promoting well-being and preventing employee burnout. The startup AMALia, for example, highlights that it applies practices such as flexible working hours and respect for personal boundaries, allowing employees to adjust their working time

according to their family and personal needs. In addition, as Electric Car Tour points out, setting clear boundaries on working hours is essential to avoid work overload.

b.- Open communication and transparency. Open communication and transparency are other elements that start-ups highlight as fundamental to maintaining a positive organisational climate. Participants emphasise that continuous, barrier-free communication helps to create an atmosphere of trust and security. For example, Host And Boat mentions that its team, which operates in different time zones, maintains open and constant communication to ensure that everyone is aligned with the company's objectives. This practice fosters a work culture in which employees can express their ideas and concerns without fear of being judged, promoting a sense of belonging. AMALia also emphasises the importance of transparency in decision-making, which allows its employees to better understand the company's priorities and objectives. This transparency is seen as a way to strengthen team cohesion and promote collaboration, as employees feel that they are an integral part of organisational processes.

c.- **Humanisation and emphasis on human value.** The responses reflect a strong emphasis on humanising organisational culture, promoting a vision in which employees are valued not only for their contribution to the workplace, but also as individuals with personal needs and aspirations. As one of the participants in the Sexta Planta focus group states, “human value is above all else”, reflecting an organisational approach in which work is adapted to people and not the other way around. This perspective contrasts with the more rigid culture of traditional companies and highlights the commitment of start-ups to a culture that prioritises human well-being.

4.2. Strategies for wellbeing and happiness

In the section on strategies for wellbeing and happiness at work, three main strategies were identified that start-ups in the tourism sector implement to promote the wellbeing and happiness of their employees: policies for work-life balance; measuring wellbeing through continuous communication; and trust and autonomy as drivers of wellbeing.

a.- Work-life balance. The start-up AMALia, for example, describes how they prioritise flexibility to help their employees balance their personal responsibilities with their work commitments. This company applies flexible working hours and allows teleworking when necessary, creating an environment in which employees can adapt their working time to their personal needs. The startup Sexta Planta has also adopted wellbeing practices such as on-call duty for emergencies during weekends, allowing employees to respond quickly and effectively in urgent situations, thus minimising the impact on their daily lives or days off. This not only reduces stress for the team, but also reinforces the confidence that the company takes into account and respects the personal situations of each employee.

b.- Well-being through continuous communication. Although some start-ups do not have formal structures in place to measure well-being due to their size, they use continuous communication as an assessment tool. Start-ups Host and Boat and Electric Car Tour, for example, point out that they do not need to implement formal surveys, as the small size of their team means that daily communication and direct feedback are sufficient to monitor employee well-being. This approach reflects a more informal but effective method of assessing the organisational climate in small start-ups, where daily interactions allow leaders to gain a clear understanding of team satisfaction and wellbeing. In addition, these continuous communication practices not only provide a measure of wellbeing, but also promote an environment of openness and trust, where employees feel comfortable sharing their concerns and needs.

c.- Trust and autonomy as drivers of well-being. Several start-ups highlight that their well-being strategy focuses on providing an environment of autonomy in which employees feel empowered to make decisions and manage their own time. This level of trust helps employees feel a greater sense of belonging to their work, which is perceived as motivating and reduces the stress associated with constant supervision. This trust-based approach is also supported by Sexta Planta, which mentions the importance of giving employees the freedom to manage their tasks according to their own styles and rhythms. This autonomy and trust not only boost morale, but also encourage greater innovation and commitment, as employees feel valued and empowered to contribute to the company's success.

4.3. Job satisfaction and gender.

With regard to the section on job satisfaction and gender, three outstanding issues arise that reflect perspectives on gender differences in workplace wellbeing: differences in the need for flexibility and work-life balance; perceptions of the impact of gender on work-life balance; and equal opportunities for growth and leadership.

a.- Differences in the need for flexibility and work-life balance. The participating start-ups recognise that there are different needs between men and women, especially in relation to work flexibility. Several start-ups comment that women, in their role as mothers, tend to need more flexibility to balance their family and work responsibilities. They mention that they have observed a greater need for work-life balance among women due to the burden they assume in managing the family and caring for children.

b.- Perceptions of the impact of gender on work-life balance. Participants believe that there are differences in how men and women experience this work-life balance. Host And Boat points out that, in the case of women with children, teleworking and flexible hours are perceived as necessary tools for achieving an adequate balance. This type of flexibility becomes an essential resource, especially in the context of start-ups, where schedules can be more demanding and changeable.

c.- Equal opportunities for growth and leadership. In terms of growth and leadership opportunities, the start-ups in question say they seek to maintain an inclusive and equitable environment in which there are no gender barriers to professional development. However, as the Electric Car Tour participant pointed out during the discussion group, when presenting business proposals from the perspective of a woman, clients often ask about "the boss" or "who runs the company", reflecting implicit biases about female leadership. This observation highlights that, although startups work internally to maintain gender equality, external challenges and social stereotypes can continue to affect perceptions of female leadership.

4.4. Leader and boss

The section on the impact on leadership analyses three main areas: inclusive and empathetic leadership; the difference between a leader and a boss; and flexibility and adaptability in leadership.

a.- Inclusive and empathetic leadership. Startups highlight the importance of inclusive and empathetic leadership that prioritises communication and emotional support. AMALia mentions that they practise active communication, showing interest in the needs and concerns of each team member. This type of leadership fosters a work environment in which employees feel valued and listened to, promoting a culture of emotional well-being. For its part, Host and Boat highlights that its leaders adopt an approach of "honest and open communication", which allows all team members to share their concerns without fear.

b.-Differentiation between leader and boss. Several responses show a clear differentiation between the figure of the leader and that of the boss. Startups prefer a more horizontal approach to leadership, in which the leader is seen as just another member of the team and not as an authoritarian figure. Sexta Planta describes its approach as "shared leadership", in which there is no single leader, but rather collaboration and mutual support are encouraged. This distinction is also observed by Electric Car Tour, which mentions how leaders avoid imposing their authority and choose to foster a collaborative environment.

c.- Flexibility and adaptability in leadership. Host And Boat highlights that its leaders strive to respond constructively to issues related to employee wellbeing, adapting their approaches based on individual needs. Similarly, Coaching Airlines pointed out that leaders must be "flexible in their decisions", especially in situations where team wellbeing may be affected.

4.5. Future focus on organisational wellbeing

In the last section, three other relevant aspects were identified: the adoption of new technological trends to manage wellbeing; the increased priority of wellbeing in organisational culture; and proposed improvements in human resources and wellbeing practices.

a.- Adoption of new technological trends to manage wellbeing. Most of the participating start-ups note that technology will play an increasingly important role in managing wellbeing in the workplace. AMALia mentions that it would like to explore technological tools to optimise task

management and make internal communication more efficient, which would facilitate organisation and reduce the stress associated with workload. For its part, Coaching Airlines also expresses its interest in adopting digital tools that allow employees to manage their time and tasks autonomously.

b.- The growing priority of well-being in organisational culture. The start-ups surveyed agree that well-being at work will be an increasingly important priority in the management of emerging tourism companies. Specifically, Sexta Planta points out that meaningful work and team satisfaction are becoming key factors in attracting and retaining young talent, who deeply value work-life balance. Host And Boat also highlights the importance of offering employees the freedom to work from anywhere, a trend that, in its opinion, will continue to grow.

c.- Proposed improvements in human resources and wellbeing practices. In terms of improvements in wellbeing practices, the start-ups surveyed expressed their desire for more human resources to facilitate the implementation of effective wellbeing programmes. Electric Car Tour suggests that as the company grows, it would be beneficial to have access to structured wellbeing practices and policies, such as guidance or support from other more established companies in this area. AMALia also mentions that it would like to have a human resources team dedicated to improving team satisfaction and wellbeing, which would facilitate closer and more personalised monitoring of employee status.

4.6. Key concepts studied

The concepts discussed in the previous section are represented graphically by a word cloud, highlighting the most frequently used terms in the focus group responses (Figure 4). This visualisation graphically summarises the key concepts surrounding well-being and organisational culture in tourism start-ups.

The main terms, such as "communication", "well-being", "leadership", "flexibility" and "autonomy", reflect the pillars on which these companies build their strategies for job satisfaction. "Communication" emerges as a fundamental value, promoted by the participating start-ups to foster an environment of trust and openness, which is key in rapidly changing and growing environments. The concept of "well-being" occupies a central place in the policies implemented, with approaches that prioritise work-life balance and adaptability to individual needs. This is complemented by leadership that emphasises inclusion and empathy, adapting its styles to respond to the particular challenges of the sector. Finally, "flexibility" and "autonomy" stand out as essential components of job satisfaction in these start-ups, as they allow employees to manage their time and responsibilities autonomously, reinforcing their commitment and satisfaction at work.

This word cloud summarises the core aspects of the culture of wellbeing and leadership in tourism start-ups, reflecting the organisational values and practices that have become priorities for growth and success in the sector.

Figure 4. Word cloud



Fuente: Own elaboration, 2025

5. Discussion

A flexible workplace, highlighted by various authors (Guest, 2017; Yan et al., 2023), is confirmed as a fundamental pillar in this study, as the leaders of the start-ups that participated in the discussion group repeatedly emphasised flexibility as essential for balancing employee well-being and operational demands. However, this study shows that, in the tourism sector, flexibility responds both to the internal needs of employees and to the unpredictable and demanding nature of the tourism environment. These ideas reinforce the patterns identified in the systematic review, which point to a growing emphasis on

people-centred organisational cultures and wellbeing-oriented management approaches in tourism start-ups.

Open communication and transparency are also consistent with certain observations (Denison, 1996), but here it becomes clear how, in small start-ups, these practices are easier to implement due to the small size of the teams, which facilitates more personalised monitoring of wellbeing. Furthermore, inclusive and empathetic leadership, described by Skakon et al. (2010) as crucial to employee wellbeing, finds in these start-ups a horizontal and collaborative approach that contrasts with traditional hierarchical structures.

On the other hand, in terms of gender differences, the study reinforces the findings of Rodríguez Vera et al. (2024) highlighting the greater demands for flexibility on the part of female workers. However, external prejudices about female leadership, pointed out by participants such as Electric Car Tour, underscore the need to address persistent stereotypes more broadly, in line with previous observations (Boluk & Panse, 2022). The focus group data provide concrete empirical evidence of how gender-related challenges are experienced in practice, especially in contexts of external leadership and representation.

Regarding the incorporation of technological tools, the results confirm this trend, but add that these not only optimise processes, but also foster employee autonomy and motivation. This finding suggests a promising avenue for future research.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study not only reinforce existing research but also help address the research gap identified therein. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature on well-being and happiness management in tourism by focusing the analytical approach on the internal organisational context of tourism start-ups. By adopting a qualitative approach, the findings provide an empirical insight into how well-being is conceptualised and implemented through organisational culture, leadership styles and gender dynamics in tourism start-ups. From a practical perspective, the results offer relevant implications for tourism entrepreneurs and start-up leaders by identifying specific practices, such as flexibility, open communication, trust-based leadership, and attention to gender-related needs, that can serve as a basis for designing well-being-oriented management strategies in small tourism businesses. Furthermore, the findings can help decision-makers and support organisations develop initiatives aimed at strengthening leadership capacities and inclusive wellbeing practices in the tourism business ecosystem.

In conclusion, wellbeing at work is becoming a strategic pillar in start-ups, more specifically in this sector, forming part of the organisational identity and positioning itself as a factor in attracting and retaining talent. Wellbeing-focused policies allow these companies to differentiate themselves in a competitive market, creating an attractive working environment for those who value work-life balance. The recommendations observed in this study underscore the importance of continuing to develop flexibility policies, strengthening communication channels, and moving towards inclusive and empathetic leadership, all of which are essential aspects for consolidating a culture of wellbeing in line with the expectations of today's talent. Future research could build on these findings to explore wellbeing management practices in different cultural contexts, incorporate employee perspectives, or combine qualitative insights with quantitative approaches to further assess the impact of leadership and wellbeing strategies in tourism sector start-ups.

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