



The Role of Organisational Support in Employee Wellbeing and Industrial Relations in Malaysian Public and Private Sectors: A Comparative Study

Alison Kee Poh Ling, Gabriella Lee Mei Yan, Keerthana A/P Selvamani, Marini Abdullah*, Prisca Natellya Anak Dinnes, Vallentina Anak Jemy

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, 94300 Malaysia

*Corresponding Author's E-Mail: 99610@siswa.unimas.my

Abstract

Background: Employee wellbeing and organisational support are crucial factors that influence industrial harmony and productivity. Particularly in Malaysia's public and private sectors, sectoral differences play a significant role in shaping these dynamics. Focusing on Work-Life Balance (WLB) and managerial support, this study explores the relationship between organisational support, employee wellbeing, and industrial relations, using Social Exchange Theory and Institutional Theory as frameworks. **Objective:** This study aims to investigate how employee wellbeing and WLB policies contribute to industrial harmony and productivity, and how sectoral contexts influence these relationships. It also seeks to identify existing gaps in employee-centric goals and organisational performance. **Methods:** A qualitative, multiple-case study approach was employed, with semi-structured interviews conducted with employees from both the public and private sectors in Malaysia. Data were analysed thematically using reflexive thematic analysis to uncover key patterns and challenges. **Results:** The findings reveal sector-specific differences in the implementation of wellbeing and WLB policies. Public sector employees benefit from structured organisational support and formal conflict resolution mechanisms, while private sector employees experience more variability in support, particularly regarding seniority-based differential treatment. Sectoral challenges, such as rigid public sector structures and managerial inconsistencies in the private sector, were identified as barriers to achieving optimal wellbeing and productivity outcomes. **Conclusion:** Organisational support, including effective wellbeing initiatives and WLB policies, is essential for enhancing employee motivation and productivity. Sector-specific strategies should be tailored to address the unique needs of each sector.

Keywords: Employee Wellbeing; Industrial Harmony; Institutional Theory; Organisational Support; Sectoral Differences; Social Exchange Theory

Introduction

In today's changing working environment and conditions, organisations have recognised the significance of work-life balance (WLB) and employees' wellbeing as a strategic tool in increasing productivity and promoting workplace harmony. By supporting WLB policies, it can also help the organisation to improve their performance and reputation that aligns with the quality of their workers. Organisational support ensures that employees feel valued, secure, and motivated through workplace policies and their effectiveness. However, these dynamics may serve as a challenge, especially in the

aspect of sectoral differences between the public and private sectors in reaching its industrial harmony and productivity.

This study examines the interplay between employee wellbeing and organisational support, analysing their combined impact on industrial harmony and productivity. It compares how public and private sector strategies balance managerial support with employee benefits while addressing challenges in implementing workplace policies without undermining satisfaction (Girigiri & Badom, 2021). In addition, Hariri *et al.* (2024) underscores the symbiotic importance of wellbeing in relation to productivity and job satisfaction, as these factors collectively enhance workplace outcomes.

Objectives of the Study

- To investigate to which extent the wellbeing and work-life balance policies contribute to industrial harmony and productivity.
- To explore how the organisation and sectoral contexts influence or moderate these relationships.
- To identify the gaps that exist between employee-centric goals and organisational performance to address the issues.

Literature Review



Figure 1: The Cycle Process of Organisational Support in Employee Wellbeing and Industrial Relations and the Differences between Sectors

The Role of Personal Wellbeing in Shaping Employee Productivity and Job Satisfaction

Various studies have demonstrated the significant impact of personal wellbeing on job performance and satisfaction. According to research by Spreitzer *et al.* (2012), employees who perceive themselves as thriving, characterised by vitality and continuous learning, are more likely to show significant levels of motivation, engagement and job satisfaction. Employers who promote employee wellbeing through flexible scheduling, acknowledgement and positive leadership typically have more committed and effective employees. Similarly, Krekel *et al.* (2019) highlighted that employee wellbeing directly contributes to productivity, satisfaction and retention, especially when supported by positive workplace relationships and work-life balance. Although job insecurity may reduce this link, Kundi *et al.* (2020) highlighted the importance of both hedonic (happy) and eudaimonic (purpose) wellbeing in enhancing emotional commitment and performance.

The research of Kosec *et al.* (2022) found that job and life satisfaction significantly correlate with performance, while overall wellbeing had a lesser effect, suggesting that satisfaction may be a more direct driver in such roles. Dumitriu *et al.* (2025) further argued that the physical and social work

environment as well as intrinsic job aspects like meaning and perspective are key factors in enhancing wellbeing. As a whole, these studies affirm that personal wellbeing is a multidimensional factor with far-reaching implications for individual and organisational success. A holistic and sustainable approach to wellbeing is essential to cultivate a motivated, resilient, and high-performing workforce.

Organisational Policies Supporting Work-Life Balance and Their Effectiveness in Different Sectors

Work-Life Balance (WLB) policies are a strategic tool that enhances employee wellbeing, productivity, and overall organisational performance. Since people are the most valuable resource (Devi & Nagini, 2013), organisations must protect wellbeing and job satisfaction to achieve their goals. Strategic HRM decisions, such as WLB initiatives, can reduce turnover and absenteeism while improving productivity and reputation (Lazar *et al.*, 2010). Managerial support is critical; for example, a study of New Zealand government employees found that supportive leadership and organisational culture drive effective WLB initiatives and improve wellbeing (Skinner & Chapman, 2013). However, effectiveness varies by sector. Public sector organisations often provide family-friendly and flexible policies that increase satisfaction and security (Feeney & Stritch, 2019), while private sector employees may experience better Quality of Life (QoL) due to reduced stress and healthier lifestyles. Research in Lithuania showed that good Quality of Work Life (QWL) – including workload and employer–employee relations – positively influences QoL in both sectors (Ruzevicius & Valiukaite, 2017). Thus, the success of WLB policies depends on managerial support, workplace culture, and sectoral differences.

Furthermore, theories that can be applied here are Social Exchange Theory and Institutional Theory. The Social Exchange Theory, as discussed by Cook *et al.* (2013), is the relationship behavior between the organisation and employees that results in an exchanging process that acts as a reciprocal mechanism, such as work-life balance policies and organisational performance. Both dynamics complement each other either in a positive or negative outcome. Secondly, the Institutional Theory states that policies are implemented due to institutional, societal and governmental pressure that shaped organisational behavior (Lammers *et al.*, 2014). However, this theory depends on the adoption of sectors such as the public and private sectors' objectives in implementing WLB policies. For instance, to reduce workplace conflict, increase competition and quality workers, as a symbolic gesture, and enhance industrial harmony.

The Mediating Effect of Industrial Harmony (The Relationship between Wellbeing Initiatives and Workplace Productivity)

The literature review emphasises the significant mediating role of industrial harmony in the relationship between wellbeing initiatives and workplace productivity. Dobrzeniecki (2022) conducted a quantitative study involving 146 wellness programme managers and found that employee engagement plays a critical role in the effectiveness of workplace wellness programmes. They concluded that while the type of wellness initiative matters, its impact is greatly stated when employees are actively involved, thereby suggesting that engagement should be prioritised to maximise programme success and overall productivity. Supporting this, Juba (2024) highlighted that the integration of wellness, safety, and health programmes into an organisation's culture, especially with strong leadership backing, results in enhanced employee dedication, motivation, and output. However, the study also acknowledged ongoing debates around the strategic arrangement of such programmes.

Mastroianni and Storberg-Walker (2014) explored the qualitative aspects of workplace dynamics and found that positive interpersonal relationships at work marked by trust, respect, and cooperation greatly improve employee wellbeing and foster healthier behaviours, ultimately leading to better productivity. However, negative social interactions were shown to weaken wellbeing and performance, stressing the importance of organisational culture in supporting wellbeing initiatives. Isham *et al.* (2020) studied more general literature and established a strong link between personal wellbeing and labour productivity, noting that poor mental and physical health leads to absenteeism and lower work quality. They concluded that workplace programmes targeting both physical and psychological health, such as

resilience training, can significantly improve productivity, although they also got to know that various external factors may influence these outcomes.

Hamar *et al.* (2015) presented a case study of a midsize industrial employer who implemented a comprehensive wellbeing strategy over two years. The results showed significant improvements in employee health, decreased inactivity, and increased job performance. Moreover, when employees get strong support from their employers, both wellbeing and productivity improve better. The outcomes significantly improved. All this literature emphasises how important it is to have industrial harmony, which includes good communication, good social relationships, and a pleasant working culture, for the purpose of making sure that wellbeing programmes result in significant increases in productivity. Therefore, promoting harmony at work not only supports initiatives for employee wellness but also acts as an effective plan for the success of the company.

Employee Wellbeing and Productivity (How Personal Wellbeing Influences Job Performance and Satisfaction)

Numerous studies highlight the crucial role of employee wellbeing in shaping job performance and satisfaction across diverse work environments. Chang (2024) found that healthier, mentally sound employees experience higher motivation, focus, and job satisfaction, while poor wellbeing and negative work environments lead to decreased productivity and higher turnover. Similarly, Mohamad and Abiddin (2024) emphasised that holistic wellbeing, including emotional, spiritual, and motivational dimensions, enhances job satisfaction and engagement, with supportive organisational practices fostering thriving, productive workforces. Miller (2016) reinforced this connection, noting that wellbeing is multidimensional (psychological, social, physical) and directly influences performance and interaction in the workplace; however, there is still a gap in measurement and practical implementation of these insights.

Sahai and Mahapatra (2020) further demonstrated that subjective wellbeing, which encompasses life satisfaction, positive affect, and work-life balance, strongly predicts job satisfaction, creativity, and resilience, particularly when organisations invest in interventions that bolster personal strengths and reduce stressors. Bogdanova *et al.* (2008) revealed that environmental stressors such as noise, safety issues, and workload pressures diminish wellbeing and, consequently, performance, while also underscoring the bidirectional nature of this relationship: high psychological wellbeing not only boosts job performance but also lowers absenteeism and enhances interpersonal connections. Collectively, these studies highlight the profound and multifaceted impact of employee wellbeing on organisational productivity and satisfaction, while calling for evidence-based, supportive practices that bridge the gap between wellbeing policy and lived experience.

Industrial Harmony (The Role of Conflict Resolution, Union Involvement, and Collaborative Labour Relations)

Ismail *et al.* (2022) noted that industrial harmony fosters collaboration between employees and managers to achieve organisational goals while elevating satisfaction. Studies highlight that harmonious labour–management relations, built on reciprocity, boost worker morale (Girigiri & Badom, 2021) and sustain the tripartite relationship between workers, unions, and employers. Historically, labour relations were resisted, but today unions are widely accepted as partners in addressing workplace issues (Ugoani, 2019). Factors such as labour laws and state policies also shape industrial harmony (Rosaline *et al.*, 2024). Strategies include raising conflict awareness, reshaping organisational culture, and improving management–employee communication. Malaysia's Code of Conduct for Industrial Harmony (1975) and the Industrial Relations Act (1967) provide frameworks for union formation and conflict resolution (Augustine *et al.*, 2023). As Obiekwe and Obibhunun (2019) emphasise, collective union strength, rather than individual persuasion, enables effective bargaining and industrial peace, enhancing welfare and productivity. Trade unions, through collaborative efforts and collective representation, play a pivotal role in sustaining industrial harmony and organisational performance (Price *et al.*, 2014).

Sectoral Differences (Comparative Challenges in Public and Private Sector Implementation)

Previous research shows that the public and private sectors have distinct approaches to project implementation and strategic management. According to Blaskovics *et al.* (2023), public sector managers tend to focus more on regulatory compliance, stakeholder transparency, and accountability. On the other hand, managers in the private sector prioritise efficiency, innovation, and profit-driven outcomes. These differences are influenced by organisational structures, with public organisations being more formal and hierarchical, while private companies are typically more flexible and adaptive.

Meanwhile, Adetoro *et al.* (2025) studied Public-Private Partnership (PPP) implementation in low-income countries such as Malawi and identified contrasting limitations between the two sectors. Public agencies often face weak institutional capacity, limited financial resources, and bureaucratic delays. At the same time, private investors are discouraged by policy uncertainty and high investment risks. As a result, these imbalances contribute to coordination gaps and hinder effective collaboration.

According to Alford and Greve (2017), public sector strategies are often shaped by political influence, public accountability, and complex stakeholder environments, making implementation more rigid and challenging. In contrast, private sector strategies are more focused on gaining competitive advantage and responding to market demands, enabling quicker and more efficient decision-making.

Batjargal and Zhang (2021) identified structural and cultural barriers in PPPs, such as unclear responsibilities, weak legal frameworks, poor partner selection, and communication failures. As a consequence, these issues lead to misaligned expectations and delays in project implementation. In terms of performance management, Van Helden and Reichard (2016) found that although both sectors apply similar tools – such as goalsetting and outcome tracking – their objectives and constraints vary. The public sector is often affected by political pressures and diverse stakeholder needs, while the private sector focuses on financial returns and operational effectiveness.

Overall, these studies emphasise the importance of recognising the unique realities faced by each sector. Therefore, implementation strategies should be tailored to fit the specific structures, capacities, and objectives of each sector rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach.

Research Methodology

Research Paradigm

This study is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which views reality as socially constructed and context-dependent. Rather than uncovering universal laws, interpretivism focuses on understanding how individuals interpret their lived experiences. This aligns with the goal of this research to explore how workers from the public and private sectors perceive their own wellbeing and the organisational support they receive, and how these influence workplace harmony and productivity. By emphasising subjectivity and meaning-making, the paradigm allows researchers to draw deep insights from the personal narratives of the two interviewees, highlighting how sectoral culture and structure shape employee experiences.

Research Approach

The study employs a qualitative multiple-case study approach, which is well-suited for comparing and contrasting phenomena across different sectors, specifically the public and private sectors. This method allows for a comprehensive, in-depth examination of each sector as a distinct "bounded system." By focusing on the experiences of employees, the study explores key elements such as organisational culture, work-life balance policies, interpersonal dynamics, and employee motivation. The flexibility inherent in the case study approach allows for the nuanced interpretation of data, making it particularly effective in capturing rich, descriptive insights into complex topics like wellbeing, productivity, and sector-specific challenges. This approach ensures a detailed exploration of how organisational support and wellbeing policies are perceived and experienced by employees in both sectors.

Data Sampling

The target population for this research consists of full-time Malaysian employees from both the public and private sectors. Given the small scale and qualitative nature of this study, the sample includes two participants, each representing one sector. The aim was not to generalise but to extract meaningful, sector-specific insights from informed individuals who are embedded in their respective work environments. The public sector participant is a quantity survey officer with 21 years of tenure, while the private sector participant is a learning centre teacher with over 10 years of experience (Table 1).

Table 1: Profile of Participants

Participant ID	Sector	Job Role	Tenure	Gender
P1	Private	Teacher (Learning Centre)	10 years	Female
P2	Public	Quantity Survey Officer	21 years	Female

Sampling Technique

This study utilises purposive sampling with a convenience element. Participants were selected based on specific criteria: (i) full-time employment, (ii) awareness or experience of workplace wellbeing and WLB policies, and (iii) willingness to participate in an in-depth interview. Purposive sampling ensures that selected individuals are information-rich cases, directly relevant to the study objectives. Since the participants were identified through academic and personal networks, convenience played a role in gaining access. While this limits generalisability, it is appropriate for qualitative, exploratory research.

Data Collection Tools

The primary tool for data collection was a set of semi-structured interview questions, allowing for flexibility while covering core themes related to employee wellbeing, work-life balance, industrial harmony, and productivity. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted via Zoom. The interviews were audio-recorded (with consent), then transcribed verbatim and subjected to member checking to ensure accuracy. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to probe deeper into respondents' experiences, ask clarifying questions, and capture emotional undertones that may not be apparent in more structured formats.

QUALITATIVE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW: EXPLORING WORKER EXPERIENCES (PUBLIC & PRIVATE SECTORS)

◆ Section 1: Employee Wellbeing & Productivity

1. How would you describe your current overall wellbeing (physically, mentally, emotionally) in relation to your work?
2. Can you share a time when you felt particularly well (or unwell) at work?
 - What effect did that have on your motivation or productivity?
 - What kind of value or contribution did you feel you made during that time?
3. Did your organization do anything to support you during that period?
 - If yes, what did they do well?
 - If not, what do you wish they had done?
4. Do you think workers in your sector (public/private) face unique challenges that affect wellbeing?

◆ Section 2: Work-Life Balance (WLB) Policies & Experience

5. What work-life balance practices or policies exist in your organization (e.g. flexible hours, leave policies, remote work)?
6. How have those practices affected your daily routine, stress levels, or ability to manage personal responsibilities?
7. When you experience good balance between your work and personal life, how does it affect your performance at work?
 - What kind of value do you think you contribute during those times?
8. When work-life balance is poor, how does it impact you and your work?
 - How do you think your organization should improve or invest in better balance?
9. Is there a difference between what's stated in your organization's WLB policy and how it's actually implemented?

◆ Section 3: Industrial Harmony & Employee Relations

10. How would you describe the general relationship between employees and management in your organization?
11. Are there any formal systems for resolving workplace problems or disputes (e.g. grievance processes, mediation, union involvement)?
12. Is there an employee representation system (like a union or staff committee)?
 - If yes, how effective is it?
 - If no, do you think one would be helpful?
13. Do you feel that conflict resolution and communication contribute to harmony at work—or create tension?

◆ Section 4: Barriers and Sectoral Challenges

14. What do you think are the biggest obstacles to improving employee wellbeing or work-life balance in your organization?
15. Do you think these challenges are specific to your sector (public/private)?
 - If yes, how so?
16. If you had the power to change or improve one thing in your organization to support employee wellbeing or work-life balance, what would it be?

Figure 2: Four Sections of Interview Questions

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. This method was chosen due to its flexibility and suitability for identifying patterns of meaning across a small dataset. The analysis process began with data familiarisation, where the researchers repeatedly read the verbatim transcripts to immerse themselves in the content. This was followed by the generation of initial codes based on recurring concepts and notable statements. Using these codes, the researchers identified emerging themes that captured the essence of the participants' experiences. The themes were then reviewed to ensure they accurately reflected the dataset and refined for coherence and clarity. Each theme was defined and named to highlight the central message it conveyed. Finally, the findings were compiled and interpreted in light of the research questions and relevant literature. To ensure rigour, cross-case comparison was conducted between the public and private sector responses, allowing the researchers to identify both sector-specific nuances and shared patterns. Throughout the process, attention was given to researcher reflexivity and context, acknowledging that meaning is co-constructed through interaction with the data.

Scope of the Study

This study is delimited to two participants only, reflecting a narrow but deep scope. The findings are not intended for generalisation but rather to provide insightful comparisons of employee experiences across sectors. Other delimitations include the following: no managerial perspectives were included, it focuses solely on employee narratives, and the research captures a snapshot in time and does not account for evolving wellbeing trends.

Research Ethics

Ethical standards were maintained at every stage of the research. Participants received information explaining the study's aims, the voluntary nature of participation, their right to withdraw at any time, and how their data would be used and stored. Pseudonyms (P1, P2) were used to protect identities. All data, including recordings and transcripts, were stored on encrypted drives and will be retained for five years before being securely deleted.

Results and Discussion

The researcher analysed and interpreted the data collected and discovered findings on public and private sector employees' wellbeing and the effect on productivity, the importance of work-life balance policy implementation and the loopholes within the policies, the implications and the approach in achieving industrial harmony, and the underlying challenges affecting the effort to improve employee wellbeing and work-life balance within a public and private sector organisation.

Public Sector

The first qualitative research question examined the relationship between employees' wellbeing and productivity. A public sector construction worker reported good physical, mental, and emotional conditions despite normal stress and fatigue, which enhanced her performance, job satisfaction, and teamwork. This aligns with Spreitzer *et al.* (2012), who found that vitality and continuous learning increase motivation, engagement, and satisfaction. However, she noted that toxic behaviours from colleagues and superiors – such as being bossy, backstabbing, or self-centred – negatively affect wellbeing. To cope, she ignores negativity and focuses on her work, which helps her remain motivated. The main challenge is the exhaustion from constantly dealing with such workplace behaviours. Regarding organisational support, the respondent highlighted annual appreciation ceremonies and moral support from the Head of Department, who addresses conflicts through meetings or personal discussions. As Devi and Nagini (2013) emphasise, people are the most important asset, and protecting their wellbeing enhances productivity and organisational success. This analysis shows that employee wellbeing improves productivity when supported through appreciation, conflict resolution, teamwork, and resilience.

The analysis of respondents' experiences with Work-Life Balance (WLB) policies shows that her organisation implements measures such as annual leave (35 days), sick leave, outdoor activities, flexible working hours, and Work from Home (WFH). For instance, during the ASEAN Summit 2025 in Kuala Lumpur, employees worked from home to avoid traffic congestion. The respondent stated these policies boosted her motivation by allowing more family time and supporting her role as a mother. However, site visits far from home sometimes caused stress and pressure. This aligns with Feeney and Stritch (2019), who emphasise that family-friendly, flexible policies enhance wellbeing and performance. She added that good WLB fosters motivation and a healthy mindset and improves both Quality of Work Life (QWL) and Quality of Life (QoL), consistent with Ruzevicius and Valiukaite (2017). Poor WLB, by contrast, reduces motivation and trust in management. As Mastroianni and Storberg-Walker (2014) note, positive workplace dynamics improve wellbeing and productivity. The respondent also stressed that public sector organisations must comply with government policies under the Employment Act. This reflects Social Exchange Theory (Cook *et al.*, 2013) and Institutional Theory (Lammers *et al.*, 2014), highlighting reciprocal support and institutional pressures in shaping behaviour. Overall, WLB policies positively influenced her wellbeing, QoL, QWL, and productivity.

The study also examined industrial harmony and employee relations in the respondent's organisation. She described overall relations between employees and management as good, supported by formal mechanisms such as the Penasihat Undang-undang (PUU) for resolving contractual disputes, a counselling unit for behavioural issues, and the Majlis Bersama Jabatan (MBJ), an effective employee representation council. MBJ meetings and town halls involve representatives from different departments to address issues and reach consensus, reflecting Girigiri and Badom's (2021) findings that such systems strengthen harmony through reciprocal worker–management relations, consistent with Social Exchange Theory. However, matters like salary or minimum wage remain under government authority, with MBJ limited to internal concerns such as facilities, hygiene, and working conditions. The respondent stressed that structured conflict resolution and open communication foster harmony, with MBJ, PUU, and the counselling unit ensuring fairness and discipline. In line with Obiekwe and Obibhunun (2019), employee representation systems promote industrial peace and wellbeing, enhancing organisational productivity.

The respondent identified key barriers and sectoral challenges in the public sector, notably the difficulty of reaching consensus between employees and employers on wellbeing and work-life balance (WLB) initiatives. While challenges vary by department, issues arise when some workers take policies for granted or resist change, often due to age gaps and rigid mindsets. As Blaskovics *et al.* (2023) note, public sectors prioritise regulatory compliance, transparency, and accountability, shaping how policies are implemented. The respondent suggested improvements such as "working vacations" to balance family and work and fairer workload distribution to prevent stress when covering absent colleagues' duties. She emphasised that work should be delegated fairly according to expertise to maintain satisfaction and healthy conditions. This reflects Chang's (2024) finding that positive wellbeing fosters motivation and productivity, while poor environments reduce performance and increase turnover. Overall, public sector barriers are limited, as policies and decisions ultimately follow government mandates, which both employees and management must comply with.

Private Sector

The respondent described her overall wellbeing as acceptable; putting it into a work context, she finds that she feels more overwhelmed mentally and emotionally in comparison with physical wellbeing. This may be due to the build-up of adaptability and resilience of the respondent to the amount of workload and work environment throughout the years with the organisation, therefore feeling less exhausted physically; and external factors outside of work, such as familial responsibilities as a parent, extending hours to tend to both personal and work life, which call for the need to implement flexible work-life balance policies. While many people that entered the workforce are starting to put high priority on balancing work and life, it is even more crucial for those who have parental responsibilities, as their resilience may be severely strained due to rigid organisational policies and expectations to be available and eager to work any hour of virtually every day (Seibert *et al.*, 2016). The respondent explains that in

the times when they are in poor health, it affects motivation, which then results in a causal effect of being less productive than the times when they are in good health. She underperformed compared to usual and could only contribute to the organisation minimally. These statements are supported by Chang's (2024) argument that employees experience increased motivation, focus, and job satisfaction when the employees are healthier and mentally well. This suggests that employee wellbeing and productivity have a close interrelationship that has reciprocal interplay, with both having effects on one another.

When an employee under an organisation could only perform minimally due to health issues, the organisation plays a significant role as an employer to provide support to which they are entitled as amended in the organisational policies. It needs to be comprehensively outlined, covering various aspects and a variety of issues. Organisational policies are an essential instrument in supporting the employees, who are the organisation's important asset, and the employees' wellbeing is protected to achieve organisational goals (Devi & Nagini, 2013). Evidently, the respondent stated that the organisation allows employees in poor health to take sick leave while also suggesting ways for recovery. This gesture demonstrates that the organisation cares about employee wellbeing, and the respondent would reciprocate with her services for about 10 years.

In the private sector, which is often capitalistic and focused on maximising output, work-life balance (WLB) policies have also been adopted to benefit both employees and organisations. However, the respondent highlighted discriminatory practices, particularly differences in treatment between senior and junior staff. While senior employees, including the respondent, received more consideration, newly hired employees faced less favourable conditions regarding sick leave, reflecting Thomsen's (2017) definition of differential treatment. Reported WLB practices included flexible hours, leave policies, and remote work, which improved personal-work balance, reduced fatigue, and boosted morale and productivity. The respondent valued remote work for enabling fulfilment of family duties but also noted inconsistencies: despite being allowed to work from home, she was sometimes expected to complete tasks during lunch breaks and outside normal hours. This study suggests that while private sector organisations promote WLB policies, stricter compliance is needed to ensure fairness and genuine implementation.

The organisation plays a pivotal role as an employer to ensure the effectiveness of work-life balance policy implementation. Besides the employer, the employees also must collaborate with the employer with a good intention to further leverage industrial harmony at the workplace. In a paper by Ismail *et al.* (2022), the researchers stated industry harmony establishes conditions in which the employer and employee work together to leverage employee satisfaction to a higher level within the organisation to achieve the vision and mission of the company. Through the analysis, the researchers identified the cause of hostility and toxicity, as stated by the respondent, as being due to the absence of a formal employee representation system, a trade union, or functional employee management to process grievances and resolve disputes within the organisation. The respondent stated that due to the capacity of the organisation, which is approximately 20 employees, the human resources are not as functional as those in larger organisations. The lack of proper channels to formally document grievances or resolve issues through proper communication leaves issues unresolved or completely forgotten and creates a hostile and tense workplace.

This results in a high turnover rate because some employees are unable to tolerate the tension within the workplace. While the formation of a trade union would help to resolve disputes, it is questionable whether it could thrive within a small-capacity organisation or whether it would instead opt to appoint a dependable mediator to conciliate between management and employees as an alternative to achieve a healthy and harmonious work environment.

The researchers also discovered that the incompetency of the organisation is the main challenge to improving employee wellbeing and work-life balance. The respondent had stated that although poor management is the major challenge in the private organisation she works in, it could also be a common challenge within the public sector.

Comparative Findings: Public vs. Private Sector

This section presents a detailed comparison between the public and private. It explores key aspects such as employee wellbeing, organisational support, implementation of work-life balance (WLB) policies, mechanisms for industrial harmony, and the sector-specific challenges that shape these dynamics.

Employee Wellbeing and Organisational Support

In both sectors, employee wellbeing is recognised as a critical factor contributing to motivation, job satisfaction, and overall productivity. However, the manifestation of support and how wellbeing is sustained significantly differ.

In the public sector, wellbeing is enhanced by structured organisational systems and formal recognition mechanisms. The respondent expressed satisfaction with her physical, mental, and emotional state, highlighting a positive environment underpinned by teamwork and appreciation practices. Annual events like "Anugerah Pekerja Cemerlang" and personalised support from the head of the department play an essential role in reinforcing morale and motivation. These practices align with the findings of Spreitzer *et al.* (2012), who emphasised the role of vitality and continuous learning in enhancing employee engagement and satisfaction. The predictability of government-structured policies ensures consistency in how support is distributed, which reflects the principles of Institutional Theory (Lammers *et al.*, 2014), where institutional norms guide organisational behavior.

Conversely, the private sector respondent experienced a more variable approach to wellbeing support. While she acknowledged that she received time off and emotional support when unwell, the level of care seemed to depend on the employee's seniority. Newer staff reportedly received less empathy, suggesting an inconsistency rooted in management discretion rather than institutional obligation. This reflects a lack of systemic structure and points to the absence of equity in how wellbeing is treated across hierarchies. Such disparities are detrimental, particularly for smaller organisations lacking comprehensive HR systems. Devi and Nagini (2013) asserted that employees are a strategic resource, and inconsistent support undermines this asset. The private sector's failure to institutionalise wellbeing frameworks undermines long-term productivity and retention, echoing Chang's (2024) assertion that poor wellbeing leads to demotivation and reduced output.

Work-Life Balance (WLB) Policies and Implementation

Work-life balance policies exist in both sectors, but their design, implementation, and enforcement differ sharply. In the public sector, WLB is systematically applied and guided by regulatory mandates. The respondent described a supportive environment characterised by generous leave entitlements (e.g., 35 days of annual leave), flexible work arrangements (e.g., 8-hour shifts, work-from-home during citywide events), and management awareness of familial responsibilities. These policies significantly improved her ability to manage stress and contributed positively to her Quality of work life (QWL) and Quality of Life (QoL). The institutional alignment between stated policies and their practical implementation demonstrates high policy fidelity, supported by Institutional Theory and Social Exchange Theory (Cook *et al.*, 2013), which emphasises the reciprocal relationship between employer support and employee commitment.

In stark contrast, the private sector respondent reported inconsistencies between stated policies and actual practice. Although remote work and flexible hours were technically permitted, she faced intrusions beyond scheduled hours and noted that these accommodations were selectively enforced based on seniority. This breach of WLB expectations not only increased stress but also diminished trust in management. As Skinner and Chapman (2013) argued, managerial support is essential for effective WLB policy implementation. When such support is absent or perceived as biased, it disrupts the psychological contract between employees and employers, leading to disengagement. Furthermore, Ruzevicius and Valiukaite (2017) found that QWL and QoL are strongly influenced by how policies are practised, not just what is written. Thus, the private sector's implementation gap reflects a structural weakness in policy execution.

Industrial Harmony and Employee Representation

Industrial harmony in the public sector is underpinned by established conflict resolution systems and employee representation structures. Entities like PUU (Legal Advisory Section), the Counselling Unit, and MBJ (Majlis Bersama Jabatan) provide formal platforms for grievance management, behavioural adjustment, and organisational feedback. The public sector respondent noted that these mechanisms were effective in maintaining a harmonious environment by addressing issues such as workplace cleanliness, interpersonal disputes, and workflow concerns. These systems mirror findings by Girigiri and Badom (2021) and Ismail *et al.* (2022), who emphasised the value of collaborative structures in promoting industrial peace and improving employee satisfaction.

By contrast, the private sector lacks formalised structures for employee representation and conflict resolution. The respondent described a culture where disputes are often ignored unless they significantly disrupt productivity. The absence of HR functionality and any formal grievance process led to unresolved tensions and increased turnover. Without a union or representative body, employees, especially junior staff, lack the voice and support needed to navigate workplace challenges. This conclusion is consistent with Obiekwe and Obibhunun (2019), who found that effective employee representation promotes collective bargaining and reduces internal conflict. The respondent's recommendation to establish a mediation mechanism points out the need for urgent structural reform to support industrial harmony in the private sector.

Sectoral Barriers and Organisational Challenges

Both sectors face unique and shared challenges in fostering employee wellbeing and policy implementation. In the public sector, the key challenges are institutional rather than managerial. Resistance to change, especially among older staff, bureaucratic rigidity, and slow adaptability hinder the advancement of progressive policies. Nonetheless, the presence of formalised structures and governmental oversight ensures a minimum standard of employee support and organisational compliance. Blaskovics *et al.* (2023) noted that public managers prioritise regulatory compliance, stakeholder transparency, and accountability, which explains the uniformity but inflexibility in public sector approaches. The respondent's proposal for working vacations and fair task delegation illustrates the potential for innovation within the constraints of public administration.

In contrast, the private sector's challenges are primarily managerial. The respondent identified poor leadership and inconsistent application of policies as core issues affecting morale, retention, and wellbeing. The lack of infrastructure for addressing employee grievances exacerbates existing tensions. The private sector's emphasis on output and efficiency, while necessary for profitability, often overlooks the need for sustainable employee engagement. Alford and Greve (2017) observed that private firms prioritise market responsiveness and competitive edge, but without balancing these goals with employee welfare, organisational effectiveness can suffer. The respondent's suggestion to create a department for employee mediation is indicative of grassroots awareness of this imbalance.

Summary of Comparative Insights

In sum, the comparative analysis highlights that while both public and private sectors recognise the importance of employee wellbeing and work-life balance, their methods and effectiveness diverge significantly. The public sector benefits from institutional structure, formal representation, and regulatory oversight, ensuring consistency and equity. However, it is often slow to innovate and adapt. The private sector, though more flexible, struggles with policy enforcement, equity, and organisational harmony due to a lack of formal systems and managerial gaps. Bridging these gaps by learning from each other's strengths could enhance employee wellbeing, strengthen industrial relations, and improve overall productivity across both sectors.

Limitations of the Study

This study faced a lack of time, which limited the number of respondents and interview sessions that could be conducted, particularly across different levels within the public and private sectors. This

limitation also made it difficult to explore sectoral differences in greater depth, especially concerning the long-term implementation of organisational support policies and work-life balance dynamics. In addition, the study received limited input from respondents regarding policy recommendations that could improve employee wellbeing and organisational effectiveness. Despite these limitations, the study still offers valuable preliminary insights into the relationship between employee wellbeing, organisational support, and industrial harmony.

Conclusion

This comparative study demonstrates that organisational support strongly influences employee wellbeing, industrial harmony, and productivity in Malaysia's public and private sectors. Employee wellness – covering social, psychological, and physical aspects – enhances job satisfaction, motivation, and loyalty, though sectoral differences shape outcomes: public sector workers often benefit from job security and family-friendly policies, while private sector employees rely more on positive workplace environments and effective management. Drawing on Institutional Theory and Social Exchange Theory, the study highlights how wellbeing policies are shaped by social expectations and reciprocal trust, with industrial harmony mediating their success. Evidence-based, holistic initiatives – such as resilience training, health and safety programmes, and supportive leadership – improve health, reduce absenteeism, and boost performance but require effective implementation aligned with organisational goals. Ultimately, fostering a healthy culture, adaptive leadership, and strong labour relations is essential for sustainable productivity and harmonious workplaces. Leaders and policymakers are urged to adopt flexible, employee-centred approaches that strengthen trust and cooperation, enabling Malaysia's organisations to build resilient, motivated, and productive workforces for long-term success.

Recommendation

To overcome the time constraints faced in this study, future research needs to be conducted earlier for a broader and more diverse respondent involvement, including participants from various levels within the public and private sectors. This will enable a more in-depth exploration of sectoral differences, particularly in the implementation of organisational support policies and work-life balance practices, and the discovery of potential policy recommendations from the respondents. Researchers are also encouraged to complete their work earlier to ensure better time management while allowing space for review of findings, correction of weaknesses in the research design or data collection tools, and adjustments to their approach if unexpected challenges arise. These steps will help improve the quality of the study and create a clearer understanding of how organisational support affects employees' wellbeing and industrial harmony in the long term.

Conflict of Interest

The authors affirm that there are no conflicting objectives.

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