

EXPLORING ENTREPRENEURIAL WELLBEING: A STUDY OF THE SCOTTISH HOSPITALITY SECTOR

ABSTRACT

Principal Topic: The purpose of this research is to contribute to the literature on the concept of wellbeing, by holistically and critically exploring the concept, practices and the role of environmental factors through the lens of business owners' perspectives within micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) hospitality sector in Scotland. The concept of wellbeing has in recent times resurfaced strongly even though the notion has been in existence for many years (De Neve and Ward, 2025; Dhand, 2025; CIPD, 2023; Philips et al, 2020; Gopinath, 2018; Fleurbaey, 2016; Ryan and Deci, 2014). Echoed in many disciplines and in social sciences such as in psychology, sociology, economics, and management, and now also prevalent in other disciplines (Turnalar-Cetinkaya and Islamoglu, 2024). The complexity and different perspectives make it an interesting area to explore. With the current push of the wellbeing agenda in businesses, larger organisations seem to be making greater efforts relative to micro, small and medium-sized firms (MSME) (CIPD, 2023; Cinar and Bilodeau, 2022). Empirical research reveals that wellbeing posits a human, business and investments case thus propelling the advantage for productivity, retention and attraction within businesses (De Neve and Ward, 2025). Consequentially, most research centres on the well-being of employees or the worker either in larger organisations, or looks at the quantitative nature of measuring wellbeing (Azeem and Kotey, 2023; Wang et al, 2023; Al Dogan and Talat, 2023; Wu et al, 2022). Although useful in some cases, research on entrepreneurial wellbeing is also limited (Bahsri et al, 2023; Azmi, 2020; Wiklund et al, 2019). The push of wellbeing predominantly by large firms compared to MSMEs is problematic given the importance of wellbeing to productivity, wider social and economic development, and the contributions of MSMEs in this space. (World Bank, 2023; Khan et al, 2022; Robertson and Cooper, 2011; Kingsley and Malecki, 2004; Schlogl, 2004). The limited emphasis on MSMEs is troubling for three reasons. First, wellbeing influences both working and non-working lives for entrepreneurs or business owners (Llyod et al, 2025; Stephan et

al, 2024). Second, the general resource-constrained nature, state, and operational dynamics of MSME organically lean itself to wellbeing considerations, research, and interventions. Third, the significant contributions of MSMEs to development and growth are being impacted by environmental factors and turbulence, and with the hospitality sector being one of the most affected (Ghabary Vanani et al, 2024; Putra et al, 2024). The hospitality sector is a welcome point for the wider society including locals and visitors, and a very dynamic, resilient, and fast adapting sector. This sector is also particularly adversely impacted by wellbeing issues. (Peter et al, 2019; Stockland et al and NIESR, 2023). With this consideration, if there is a significant impact on the wellbeing of owners in this sector, the wellbeing of employees and the wider society is also impacted. This is because entrepreneurs are the main decision takers within the MSME hospitality sector with their responsibilities rooted in a deep web of expectations (Gamage et al, 2023; FSB, 2021). Within the United Kingdom (UK) devolved administrations (Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland), Scotland has the highest number of registered businesses in this sector (Bureau Van Dijk FAME, 2023). Considering the sector's dynamic, resilient, and fast-adapting nature, and changes in the past to present, the research seeks to take a holistic approach to wellbeing from owner perspective within this sector. To broaden the scope of exploration and understanding of entrepreneurial wellbeing at the workplace, this research integrates psychological wellbeing theories: (Self Determination Theory (SDT), PERMA model and Ryff's six (6) dimensions of wellbeing) to operationalise and address the formulated research aim and questions (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Seligman 2011; Ryff, 2019).

Scope: This study seeks to explore wellbeing through the lens of business owners within the Scottish hospitality sector. It will explore and understand the entrepreneurs thinking and feeling as well as their micro and macro environment. The following research questions arise:

1. How is the concept of wellbeing defined and perceived by business owners within the Scottish MSME hospitality sector?
2. How do environmental factors and turbulence affect the wellbeing of business owners within the Scottish MSME hospitality sector?

3. Are there any wellbeing practices and programmes available tailored to the needs of the owner within the Scottish MSME hospitality sector?

Methods: This research is informed by an interpretivist stance and is purely mono-method research where qualitative data will be collected from micro and small business owners within the Scottish hospitality sector through semi-structured in-depth interviews (Saunders et al, 2019). A cross-sectional design will be used as a time horizon choice as the research will explore and interpret the research questions over a short period and not over a long period (Span and Tan, 2011; Eisenhardt et al, 2016). Interviews will be supplemented with Secondary data on external factors and the background of the business. Data sampling will be purposive as the research looks at micro and small businesses with employee sizes between (1-9) and (10-49) respectively within the sector. The snowballing technique will be employed where recruited participants will be asked to assist in identifying potential alike micro and small businesses. Participants will be sourced directly and through hospitality network groups. These approaches have been selected based on the objectives of the study as well as the intention to understand the narratives of the participants.

Results: At this early stage of the research, the research avoids any pre-informed decision on the research as this is an exploration to reveal the reality of the effect and impact of the concept. As far as the researcher is concerned, this is the first research of a kind to explore and investigate the concept within the hospitality sector in Scotland and bridge the dichotomy with owner perspective. Relevant literature confirms the nonexistence of a standard definition of wellbeing hence the research adds to the knowledge gap. The devolved administrations in the UK are set up differently with distinct devolved histories within the MSME space and would be interesting to explore and investigate how the concept interplays within Scotland. This research may help MSMEs in Scottish hospitality to deepen their understanding of the importance of wellbeing and the impact of environmental factors on their wellbeing. Business owners can prioritise the importance of wellbeing to business operations. Wellbeing practises and programmes may be promoted and improved within the MSME space in Scotland.

Limitations: The study is only looking at Scotland and within the hospitality sector but unsure at this stage if the finding can be generalisable to other sectors as well as the devolved and other nations.