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Worker well-being and the role of trade unions, workers, and employers

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## ABSTRACT

Union benefits extend beyond members to all of society by boosting wages, improving conditions, facilitating democratic participation, and providing opportunities for socialisation. The decline in union coverage in recent decades combined with unions' preference for representing workers' terms, conditions, and political interests with persistent ideological opposition to unions may impede revitalisation. This qualitative research uses thematic content analysis to explore the employment relationship to understand how unions, employers, and employees interact to determine participants' views on the meaning of well-being related to work. The study also asks how employees assess the effectiveness of well-being initiatives offered by employers. The study sits within the context of a unionised work environment, a university in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ), to explore these questions with participants who are employed in professional roles to explore their thoughts, knowledge, and feelings about the roles of the parties to the employment relationship in a unionised work environment. Prior research concerning unions and well-being has focused on job satisfaction as a domain of overall well-being, with union members thought to be more unsatisfied with their work than non-union members. However, recent scholarship has found positive well-being associations with unionisation that reach beyond members to all of society.

Furthermore, extant research suggests that the work environment as set by employers also plays a significant role in influencing employee well-being. It shows that career progression and job security are priorities for workers, and some scholars have proposed that to aid union revitalisation, unions should work to address these workplace issues. Employee well-being combines subjective positive feelings with feelings of satisfaction with work. This study asks employees in professional roles in a NZ university how they describe the contributors to their well-being at work while exploring the roles of the employee, the union, and the employer.

Following a pilot interview, empirical material was gathered via 10 semi-structured interviews with Professional staff in a university who were recruited via a purposive snowball sampling technique. Participants described work-related well-being as a range of positively experienced factors within an enabling organisational environment. These factors included job satisfaction, expectations for career progression, physical and psychological health and safety, job satisfaction, and hauora (Māori philosophy of health and well-being unique to New Zealand). Generally, participants did not view well-being initiatives favourably, except where they serve a specific purpose. Rather than well-being initiatives, participants would prefer their employer facilitate a healthy work environment that embeds collaborative relationships, supportive management structures, fair reward and recognition, and opportunities for career progression. While the union was appreciated for having achieved favourable

terms and conditions, it was not directly linked to participant stories of work-related well-being. In keeping with the literature, participants attributed the employer with setting the environment that impacts work-related well-being. The findings have important implications for employee and work-related well-being theories because they use a qualitative methodological approach by considering the breadth and depth of employee experiences in the context of a unique social and environmental context. The findings also provide insight into possible policy paths for governments aiming to improve citizen well-being by promoting pro-union policies. Furthermore, the findings imply that organisations might increase performance and productivity by cultivating trusting relationships with employees and co-designing well-being initiatives.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>CEA</b>	Collective Employment Agreement
<b>EAP</b>	Employee Assistance Programme
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>HR</b>	Human Resources
<b>IEC</b>	Individual Employment Contract
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organisation
<b>NZCTU</b>	The New Zealand Council of Trade Unions
<b>PWB</b>	Psychological Well-being
<b>SWB</b>	Subjective Well-being
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation

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# **1 Introduction**

In Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) and beyond, there has been growing scholarly and practitioner concern with employee well-being in the workplace and beyond. This chapter introduces a qualitative inquiry that explores the perceptions of professional staff in a NZ university regarding well-being in the workplace and its relationship to unionisation; gives the background and context of the research in Sections 1.1 and 1.2; establishes the aim of the study in Section 1.3; describes the method of material collection and analytical approach in Section 1.4; offers the study's contributions in Section 1.5; and outlines the layout of this thesis in Section 1.6. Finally, a summary of the chapter is presented in Section 1.7.

## **1.1 Background on employee well-being**

### **1.1.1 Well-being definitions**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as a “state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (Constitution of the WHO, 1946: 1315). The field of psychology moved thinking about human health from a pathological focus to include psychological characteristics and human functioning, which has contributed to modern understandings of well-being. The benefits of increased physical and psychological health are living longer, having increased energy and productivity, higher engagement at work, and reduced illness (Metzger, 2018). While there are many theoretically informed well-being interpretations from many fields, there is no universally accepted definition. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is often used as a one-dimensional measure of well-being, due to data availability. However, its use as a well-being measure is contentious as it was never intended as such. Scholars believe that well-being goes beyond economic measures to include social and environmental factors (Conceição & Bandura, 2008). Well-being and positive human functioning are generally agreed to combine the absence of negative feelings, such as anxiety and depression, with the presence of positive feelings, such as satisfaction with life, happiness, and contentment (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018).

Indeed, there are many contributors to well-being and many ways to measure it. Human development indices are one example of social well-being measures that consider factors such as life expectancy and education as being contextually reliant on societal structures, including income, employment, and access to housing. Psychological well-being assessments, of which there are many, on the other hand, are subjective, evaluating personal accounts of satisfaction with life. Contributing to the challenge of defining well-being, there are many quality of life measures involving more than 40 separate psychometric instruments to assess happiness, subjective well-being (SWB) flourishing and economic and environmental health (Cooke et al., 2016).

Two key approaches in psychology are based on hedonic and eudemonic philosophies (Cooke et al., 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2001). SWB is underpinned by the hedonic philosophy and refers to how individuals assess their happiness and satisfaction with life (Diener, 1984). The eudemonic viewpoint concentrates on psychological well-being and combines a person's assessments of happiness and meaningfulness, and is broadly understood to contribute to the functioning of a person (Ryan & Deci, 2001). SWB is traditionally measured through the application of surveys and scales and is applied across a range of contexts.

Although there are various ways to view and measure well-being, Conceição and Bandura (2008) recommend incorporating broader dimensions of well-being rather than relying on just one measure. This is because positivist approaches to well-being assessment may reduce human experiences to numerical representations, separating feelings from thoughts and judgments while neglecting to take cultural modes of expression into account (Gergen et al., 2015; Thin, 2018). For example, Māori have an alternative view of well-being termed 'hauora', a holistic world-view encompassing elements of social, spiritual, emotional, physical and mental well-being (Durie, 1998).

While positive psychology approaches to well-being have grown in recent years, Thin (2018) argues that sociological and anthropological methods have lagged as qualitative and participative research has been neglected in favour of scientific methods. Instead, a qualitative approach would investigate how people are happy and how they think about and seek culturally different forms of expression rather than measuring how happy they are at a point in time (Kavedžija, 2017). Rather than drawing from forced and simplistic survey responses, qualitative research allows respondents to explore and express their own interpretations of well-being (Thin, 2018). When applied to the workplace, well-being assessments often apply objective variables, but it is argued by Kun and Gadaneca (2022) that the perspectives of individuals regarding their well-being are also an important consideration.

With work taking up, on average, nearly a third of a person's time, it often spills into personal time. The intermingling and overlap of work and personal lives has become a popular subject of research, with increasing attention being paid to the overall well-being of employees (Danna & Griffin, 1999). Employee well-being research, however, has tended to focus on aspects of job satisfaction which, according to Page and Vella-Brodrick (2009), fails to consider wider contributions. Instead, they propose that employee well-being combines SWB, workplace well-being, and psychological well-being (PWB). While SWB is concerned with individual judgements of satisfaction with life, PWB combines positive human functioning together with social well-being and workplace well-being is concerned with general and work-related aspects of well-being (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009).

Employee well-being is an important indicator of individual and organisational performance, turnover and overall well-being (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009). General well-being is thus increasingly a focus for governments worldwide, particularly in NZ, with the establishment of the centre-left, Labour-led coalition Government that first came to power in 2017. The announcement of New Zealand's first well-being budget received international attention (Weijers & Morrison, 2018), with the *New York Times* declaring it "a national budget whose spending is dictated by what best encourages the "well-being" of citizens" (Graham-McLay, 2019, para. 1). The world's first well-being budget aimed to tackle mental illness, child poverty, sustainability and address equity issues for Māori and Pacific peoples (Mintrom, 2019). Proving that it was not a one-off goal, each subsequent NZ budget between 2018 and 2021 has also been oriented toward well-being. The New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU) economist, Bill Rosenberg, welcomed the inclusion of well-being in the Government's Budget for its potential to benefit working people and their families (Lawless, 2018).

It could be argued that employee well-being is at the heart of the trade union movement, as collective bargaining aims to improve pay and conditions, to improve human welfare. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) in the United Kingdom identifies that current priorities for worker well-being are promoting work-life balance policies and reducing stress and long hours (TUC, 2020). European and American based studies have recently shown subjective well-being to be positively influenced by the presence of unions (Flavin et al., 2009; Flavin & Shufeldt, 2016). The positive effects of unionism are also found to extend beyond members to benefit society (Radcliff et al., 2005). These findings differ from previous research showing union members to be unhappier than non-union members, which is known as the paradox of the dissatisfied union member (Freeman & Medoff, 1984).

Few studies have asked workers for their perceptions of well-being at work or beyond concerning the role of the trade union. However, British, North American, and European studies (Blanchflower & Bryson, 2020; Flavin et al., 2009; Keane et al., 2012; Radcliff et al., 2005) have quantitatively assessed the differences in well-being between union members and non-union members, finding well-being and unions to be positively associated. These studies have mainly involved large scale, quantitative surveys to assess subjective well-being and life satisfaction that do not incorporate the views of participants or reveal the roles of the parties to the employment relationship. It is proposed that a qualitative approach is needed to explore in-depth perceptions of workers regarding their well-being.

To summarise, well-being is generally agreed as combining the positive feelings about one's life with the absence of negative feelings and physical, mental, and social factors are also contributors. Employee well-being combines SWB, workplace well-being, and psychological well-being and is linked to personal and organisational health and performance. While there are a number of well-being measures available from the positive psychology field, they are based on objective variables. While they do provide well-

being interpretations, they may fail to consider alternative viewpoints. There is thus room for a qualitative approach wherein respondents express their perspectives of well-being. The next section provides a context for such by focussing on background information on trade unions in NZ as a key party to the employment relationship.

## **1.2 Background on unions in Aotearoa New Zealand**

Unions are often acknowledged as a contributor to employee well-being since they are protected by law. Unions are recognised in the principle of the Right to Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining, codified by the Human Rights Commission (United Nations, 1948) and in the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Convention C87 (ILO, 2020). The right to Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining is entrenched for New Zealanders in the *New Zealand Bill of Rights 1990* (New Zealand Bill of Rights Act, 1990). Some of the benefits for workers from trade union activity includes advocacy for workers through campaigning for employment rights, wages, and conditions individually and collectively. The peak union body in New Zealand, the CTU (2020, para. 6), states:

“Unions work co-operatively with each other to improve the position of all New Zealand workers. The benefits most workers receive today are largely the result of what unions have gained for their members in terms of wages, benefits and working conditions over the last 100 years.”

New Zealand's labour laws developed out of their British counterparts but were also influenced by advancements in the United States and Australia (Martin, 1996). Early trade unions in New Zealand lacked diversity, representing a small, skilled, all-male, Pākehā workforce of printers, engineers, tailors, carpenters, and joiners at a small, local level (Olssen, 2010). Worker protections grew increasingly necessary due to the harsh working and living conditions and high cost of living of the time (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2019). The *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, 1894* prohibited nationwide unions from forming strike action for many years until the Great Strike of 1913 (Olssen, 2010).

The introduction of compulsory unionism by the First Labour Government in 1936 saw New Zealand become one of the most unionised countries globally, which undoubtedly improved working conditions and pay. Workers also benefit from the eight-hour workday, 48-hour workweek, minimum wage and the end of piecework (Olssen, 2010). In 1951, waterside workers went off the job in New Zealand's most famous industrial dispute in which 22,000 workers struggled without pay for 151 days. Martin (1996) attributed the dispute to a build-up of tension surrounding wartime labour controls and wage-fixing. The arbitration period lasted many years until 1987 when individual employment contracts (IEC) superseded a brief collective bargaining period. During the long period of arbitration, unions dominated industrial relations, and strikes were frequent, impacting on workers, families and livelihoods (Geare & Edgar, 2007).

However, where union coverage was once widespread across a range of industries, significant neoliberal economic reforms and the introduction of the *Employment Contracts Act (1991)* (ECA) saw membership losses of approximately 50% between 1991 and 2000 (Fairbrother & Yates, 2013). As of December 1991, there were 514,325 union members nationwide, 43% workforce density, and by December 1999, membership dropped to 302,405, 21.1% (Ryall & Blumenfeld, 2017). The ECA strengthened the direct relationship between employers and employees, while union powers weakened (Rasmussen & Deeks, 2009). Despite these challenges, unions have retained a powerful voice for workers in the face of union decline through the introduction of the ECA. Enacted by the National Government in 1991, its design was in line with right-wing neoliberal ideological motives, although the preceding *Labour Relations Act (1987)* had also undone some of the long-standing industrial relations system (Deeks et al., 1994; Rasmussen et al., 2019). The ECA ended compulsory unionism but enabled employees to choose their representatives or go without representation. It also dismantled wage regulations and banned strikes during collective bargaining, which was overturned (Morrison, 1996).

The ECA, founded on contract law, refocused employment legislation towards enterprise and individualism. This Industrial Relations, labour market reform followed the introduction of neo-liberalist economic policy from 1984. The ECA enabled employees to negotiate their terms and conditions and deal with personal grievances directly through the Employment Court. Ultimately, reductions in non-wage provisions such as redundancy, insurance, and penal rates followed (Morrison, 1996).

Along with reduced membership, cultural and ideological support for unions deteriorated. For some, the deregulations went too far, and for others did not go far enough (Lafferty & Dorsett, 2018). The National Government had achieved a reassertion of managerialism and greater wage flexibility. Supporters of the ECA claim that its successes were increased productivity, wage growth for women, and economic growth (Lafferty & Dorsett, 2018; Morrison, 1996). Overall, however, wages and working conditions decreased, and union density and collective bargaining declined (Lafferty & Dorsett, 2018).

The next Labour Government replaced the ECA with New Zealand's current cornerstone employment statute, the *Employment Relations Act (2000)* (ERA). Rasmussen et al. (2019, p. 52) comment that "labour laws have been something of a football, kicked back and forth according to the party in government". The ERA had aimed to promote union voice but, by 2006, those lacking access to union membership, despite wanting it, was estimated by Haynes et al. (2006) to be sitting at around 17% of the workforce. The ERA also intended to increase collective bargaining, and by the early 2000s, employment had increased, but unions were unable to keep pace. The ERA had intended to increase collective bargaining coverage, but only members at that stage could benefit from collective bargaining. Nowadays, if the union agrees, an employer can pass on in good faith the terms and conditions of a collective employment agreement to other employees who are non-members. While employers may see the practice

as acting fairly, union members may see it as undermining, enabling free-riding by benefitting from collective bargaining without financial contribution (Barnes, 2005). While unions accept that not all passing on is intended to undermine them, the practice of enticing workers to IECs, thus drawing employees away from unions, is more contentious (Barnes, 2005).

### **1.3 Aim of the study**

Many studies investigating the relationship between unionisation and well-being have concentrated on job satisfaction as a dimension of employee well-being. There is scant New Zealand-based research to draw comparisons from, and there is room for a more comprehensive approach, including a broader range of physiological and psychological factors and workers' own appraisals of well-being (Macky & Boxall, 2009). This study is approached qualitatively, whereas most previous research related to unionisation and well-being has been approached quantitatively. Such studies have analysed large-scale surveys that consider various domains of life satisfaction comparing union members and non-members, cross-nations, and democracy types. Because there is little qualitative research for comparison, this thesis discusses mostly quantitative well-being and unionisation literature.

A university is a particular type of large autonomous publicly funded organisation providing tertiary education in NZ. There is a union presence at most tertiary education providers in New Zealand representing academic teaching staff, researchers, and other occupations within the sector. The term professional staff refers to those employed in occupations other than academic, research, or teaching roles to include administration, security, and hospitality staff. This study examines how professional staff members employed in a New Zealand university view and define well-being concepts related to employment and the workplace. The study also explores the influence of the parties to the employment relationship on those perceptions of work-related well-being. Finally, it asks how workers view workplace well-being initiatives.

The following questions underpin these broad aims:

- What are workers' understandings and experiences of well-being in the workplace within the employment relations framework?;
- What are the roles of the union, employer, and individual regarding employee well-being?; and
- How do workers assess the effectiveness of well-being initiatives offered by employers?

This study sits within the context of a unionised work environment and explores these questions about union knowledge and experiences rather than comparing by membership status. Most of the staff employed in the organisation are employed under a collectively-bargained agreement, whether they are

union members or not. Therefore, significant differences between the experiences of union members and non-union members were not expected due to being employed under the same conditions.

#### **1.4 Method**

Professional staff were recruited in late 2020 and early 2021 using a purposive snowballing sampling method. Material obtained through semi-structured, in-depth interviews took place in a private office at the university campus or online video. The material was thematically analysed and interpreted against the study questions and extant scholarship.

To respond to the study's research aim and questions, an exploratory qualitative strategy underpinned by an interpretive paradigm was adopted for this research. By employing qualitative modes of enquiry, deep contextual narratives were obtained through one-on-one, face-to-face, semi-structured interviewing. Prior to the recruitment of participants, a low-risk ethics notification was successfully sought in compliance with Massey University's Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations Involving Human Participants (Appendix A).

Following one pilot interview in December 2020 to test the semi-structured interview questions, 10 participants were recruited over five months between March and July of 2021 via purposive snowball sampling. Participants were non-academic staff employed at a university in New Zealand. The university was chosen for the research site due to the presence of unions and proximity to the researcher, who is also employed in the same university and may have been known to the participants. This research considers the roles of the different parties to the employment relationship, the employer, employee, and the union, when exploring the stories of participants regarding employee well-being.

Many of the participants were known to the researcher. Therefore, insider positioning informed the research, and clear boundaries were established to prevent conflicts of interest. It was explicitly stated to the participants that the researcher is employed at the same institution and held a senior role in the branch union. To manage the risk of the researcher being in a higher position of power, no direct reports to the researcher were sought as participants. The interviews provided rich textual material and were subjected to a manual and qualitative thematic content analysis to deeply consider the perspectives of professional staff during the interpretative and writing up process. All material was kept in password-protected files that are available only to the researcher, and participants' names and the organisation's identity have been anonymised.

#### **1.5 Study contributions**

There are few qualitative studies exploring understandings of well-being in relation to work and unionisation in a New Zealand university. Therefore, this study contributes new knowledge on the topic

of well-being and trade unions in NZ. Furthermore, although studies have previously looked at employee well-being and trade unionism internationally and in NZ, most are limited to considerations of job satisfaction as an indicator of well-being. Also, former studies have focused on large scale surveys examining the experiences of New Zealanders at work and the impact on union joining behaviours (Macky & Boxall, 2009). This study, therefore, contributes to both knowledge and methodological terms in the fields of employment relations and employee well-being.

## **1.6 Overview of the thesis**

This thesis is structured into six chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to employee well-being, discusses the dissatisfaction union member paradox, outlines union belonging theories and reviews studies relating to the impact of unions on well-being. Chapter 3 describes and rationalises the choice of qualitative methods and methodology and outlines ethical undertakings and material management. Chapter 4 presents the findings that are sorted into three main themes. The first is 'understandings of well-being' in Section 4.2, under which there are five sub-themes that describe the factors participants viewed as being influential in their experiences of work-related well-being. The second theme outlined in Section 4.3, 'enabling working environments', discusses participant accounts of workplace environments that they described as facilitating the factors that contributed to their well-being in the first theme. Finally, how participants viewed the union's influence on well-being is outlined in the third theme in Section 4.4. The discussion of the findings is then presented in Chapter 5, following the same sequence as the findings chapter to interpret the themes and sub-themes in light of what is known from existing scholarship to address the research questions. The final and 6th Chapter concludes the study, drawing from the literature review, findings, and discussion sections to summarise and reflect upon the research questions.

## **1.7 Summary of introduction**

This chapter introduced the study by providing the context for the research in Sections 1.1 and 1.2, with the definitions of well-being and measurement tools described in more detail in Section 1.1.1. To provide a legislative context for the decline in union power, Section 1.2 gave an overview of the broad history of trade unionism in New Zealand and presented the benefits for workers. In Section 1.3, the purpose of the study was given, and the research questions were identified. A brief overview of the qualitative interpretive methodology for this study was then presented in Section 1.4, and in Section 1.5, the contributions of this study to the employment relations and employee well-being fields were explained. Finally, Section 1.6 concludes the chapter with an overview of the thesis summary in Section 1.7. The next chapter reviews the literature on well-being generally, employee well-being and trade unions, with a view to identifying research gaps to which this study provides an empirical response.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews the scholarly literature from industrial and employment relations, organisational psychology, human resource management (HRM), sociology, and policy studies to scope research relating to trade unions, well-being, and employee well-being in international and New Zealand settings. This literature review first discusses unions in the employment relations environment in Section 2.3; employee well-being definitions in Section 2.4; well-being initiatives in Section 2.4.1; the theories of union belonging in Section 2.5, and the union effect on job satisfaction in Section 2.5. Then research that examines unionisation and well-being is reviewed in Section 2.7. Finally, the research aim and questions are reiterated in Section 8, and the chapter is summarised in Section 2.9.

### **2.2 Literature sources**

The literature for this review was sourced mainly from an academic library and sources of online New Zealand public legislation, policy and statistics, and organisational websites. Broad keyword searches included unionisation, trade unions, NZ, employee well-being, well-being and trade unions, participation, collectivism, industrial relations, HR, and employment relations. Academic journal articles were then downloaded from the library and stored and sorted by topic in Mendeley. Published academic articles were read and reviewed to present an evaluation of previous findings and to identify gaps to place this study in the context of existing research.

### **2.3 Unions and Employment Relations**

Trade unions operate within a democratic political environment and contribute to workers' lives in tangible and intangible ways. Early research by Freeman and Medoff (1984) highlighted that unions improve wage and non-wage compensation and working conditions, distribute income more equitably, and offer advocacy services to members. These claims have been built on by scholars ever since. The trade union movement in New Zealand has improved workers' lives by lifting pay and improving conditions, reducing inequality, providing access to training and skill development, work-life balance policies, dispute resolution and equal opportunities (Bryson & Forth, 2016; NZCTU, 2020). Furthermore, because unions are organised democratically, they strengthen democratic participation and lobby governments for improved labour laws (Levi, 2003).

The Employment Relations Act 2000 (ERA) has attempted to reinvigorate collective bargaining and reverse union decline since the damaging effect of the Employment Contracts Act 1991 (ECA), but recovery has been slow (Haynes et al., 2006; Ryall & Blumenfeld, 2017). Despite dwindling membership, unions have wide public support, with 72% of New Zealanders believing unions are necessary for

protecting workers and are a force for social good (CTU, 2019). While unions aim to promote their members' interests and well-being, research has previously suggested that union members are less satisfied with their jobs than non-union workers (Guest & Conway, 2004). Unions worldwide have also significantly contributed to the development of workplace health and safety regulations, though the topic has been under-researched (Reynolds & Brady, 2012; Wallace, 1987).

There are few studies on collective bargaining and health generally, as union studies have tended to focus on income factors, joining motivations, political and ideological values, or job satisfaction as single determinants of well-being (Macky & Boxall, 2009; Wels, 2020). Wels (2020) notes a lack of research linking collective bargaining and epidemiological health, and Reynolds and Buffel (2020) state there is little research on union membership and mental health disorders. While epidemiological health and mental health disorders are beyond the scope of this study, there are gaps in the literature concerning employee well-being and unions. This highlights that there is much to learn about the impacts of unionisation beyond traditional foci, particularly in the New Zealand context, with its rich history of trade unionism (also Section 1.2). Well-being in this study is considered in relation to employee and work-related well-being definitions and will be discussed in the next section.

#### **2.4 Employee well-being**

Employee well-being combines affective feelings and emotions such as sadness, contentment, or joy with life domains such as work, family, or housing to give a picture of how people experience their lives (Bryson et al., 2015). Increased well-being improves physical health, interpersonal relationships buffers against the negative effects of stress and mental health conditions and improves workplace outcomes (Layous et al., 2014; Rodríguez-Carvajal et al., 2010). As such, protecting employees from the harms of job stress, according to Hamling et al. (2015) should be a key component of organisational well-being promotion. However, analyses of employee well-being have tended to narrowly focus on job satisfaction.

While employee well-being research has tended to adopt job satisfaction as the primary measure, research that considers how aspects of the job impacts employees has become increasingly popular (Bryson et al., 2015). Scholars disagree about how employee well-being impacts overall well-being as some have claimed that job satisfaction is only one of the life domains determining life satisfaction while others have argued that satisfaction with life spills into work domains (Rode, 2004). Page and Vella-Brodrick (2009) suggest that an effective way to define and measure employee well-being is by assessing both work-related affect and job satisfaction.

Some research indicates that employees who are satisfied in their jobs will experience higher well-being overall and through increased productivity and quality of output will contribute to the financial success of organisations (Bryson et al., 2015). According to Guest and Conway (2004), this explains the heavy focus

on job satisfaction in organisational studies. Despite its dominance, measuring job satisfaction still offers valuable insight into employee and general well-being, as reduced job satisfaction is associated with lower life satisfaction and poorer health and mental health outcomes (Statistics New Zealand, 2019). It is argued by Daniels (2000) however, that focussing on job satisfaction narrows the definition of employee well-being and including aspects of the job would present a fuller view. Bryson et al. (2015) takes this idea further to suggest that workplace well-being combines ideal working conditions with certain characteristics of the job with personal qualities.

There are some demographic markers that influence work-related well-being. Gender is one, with more women experiencing higher levels of anxiety and depression while also reporting higher levels of work satisfaction (Warr, 2011) and older employees have shown higher levels of job satisfaction than younger ones (Bryson et al., 2015). Personality characteristics such as conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion, openness to experience, and neuroticism also play a role (Bryson et al., 2015). Personality traits and individual characteristics interact differently among groups with factors such as autonomy and values in the workplace contributing to varied workplace expectations between individuals that impact job satisfaction and work-related well-being. Therefore, work-related well-being is influenced by demographics, personality characteristics, features of the work environment, and certain features of the job.

Job quality variables affecting work-related well-being include hours, salary, job security, autonomy, and career development opportunities. How employees feel about these factors, together with their personality traits, will create unique experiences to impact employee well-being outcomes (Bryson et al., 2015). The work environment and the suitability of a role for an employee's skills and specific job characteristics also play a part (Buffet et al., 2013). Possible characteristics of the job are extensive and include the demands of the job such as hours worked, work-life balance, opportunities for control, variety in work, higher pay, physical health and safety, skills suitability, fairness, career outlook, and supportive supervision (Warr, 2011). Bryson et al. (2015) suggest that because employers are largely responsible for setting job characteristics through workplace practices and managerial decisions, they play a pivotal role in employee well-being outcomes. There are benefits for organisations and individuals for increasing employee well-being.

The benefits to employees and organisations of increased well-being is happier workers who are more productive, which increases profitability (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009). Higher well-being is also associated with reduced turnover, fewer sick days, fewer workplace accidents, reduced absenteeism and improved performance and profitability (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009; Tom & Harter, 2010). Cardiovascular health and stronger immunity is also improved for employees (Bryson et al., 2015).

Researchers and organisations are motivated by the benefits to measure and respond to employees' well-being needs by employing a variety of psychological scales to assess employee well-being. The most popular measure, according to Cooke et al. (2016), assesses well-being by utilising the Satisfaction with Life Scale developed by Diener et al. (1985), a global life satisfaction measure in which a person cognitively assesses the meaning of life satisfaction according to positive or negative affect. Thus, a person's judgement of a well-being-related variable as positive indicates the presence of well-being, while negative judgements indicate the absence of well-being. Another example is the Quality of Life Scale, which is a broader assessment of a person's social, physical, and psychological functioning (Cooke et al., 2016). While there are many measures, Cooke (2016) suggests there are none that capture the multifaceted description of health of the WHO, first signed in 1946, entered into force in 1948, that refers to "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not simply the absence of disease and infirmity."(WHO, 1946). There is scope, then, for different approaches to well-being research to encompass holistic viewpoints and qualitative interpretations.

While happiness surveys have offered insight into the importance of well-being, Thin (2018) argues that positivist techniques and surveys have promoted thinking about well-being as a measurable object, devoid of interpretation, when well-being is essentially a cultural and qualitative construct. The use of blunt survey instruments fails to capture the full range of human understandings of well-being. Therefore, qualitative inquiries should complement statistical research by urging respondents to think about their impressions and explanations of well-being rather than selecting answers from pre-defined surveys.

In a recent qualitative study, Dooris et al. (2018) thematically analysed perceptions about well-being in the health context, finding respondents to conceptualise well-being as a holistic social phenomenon that is heavily reliant on context, surroundings and human relationships. Another qualitative study recently found medical students' understandings of well-being to consist primarily of a work-life balance and ideal workplace factors that included positive interactions with peers and staff (Byrnes et al., 2020). The next section will discuss workplace well-being initiatives.

#### **2.4.1 Well-being initiatives**

In the previous section, employee well-being was introduced as encompassing both job, and non-work components and the benefits to employers of actively improving well-being was explained. Those benefits include increased productivity, reduced absenteeism, improved employee satisfaction, recruitment and retention, engagement, and reduced workplace injuries and associated costs (Kuoppala et al., 2008). Given these benefits, it is not surprising that organisations may attempt to improve employee well-being by offering well-being initiatives such as workshops or health awareness education. Well-being initiatives may try to increase mental, physical and emotional health awareness, encouraging relationship building, lowering the risk of cardiovascular stress, and quit smoking programmes (Dailey et

al., 2018; Merrill et al., 2011). Initiatives may be delivered via a series of activities or educational events followed by an employee evaluation of the activity.

Despite the potential benefits to employers of well-being initiatives, their existence may indicate that a challenge or problem exists in the organisation, or it might be argued that they are band aids applied to more fundamental organisational issues, and that their eventual disappearance could indicate success in terms of well-being in an organisation. New Zealand employers commonly offer an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) which responds to workplace stress rather than offers solutions for the root causes of job-related stress. Unfortunately, negative stigmatisation of mental health problems as an individual weakness may prevent employee engagement with well-being programmes or disclosure of mental health problems (LaMontagne et al., 2014).

Employee participation rates in well-being initiatives are found to be low. To increase participation and satisfaction with well-being initiatives, Caperchione et al. (2016) suggests there should be clear roles for employees and employers in the exercise and that employees should co-design initiatives to meet their specific needs. In addition, employees respond better when organisations have demonstrated a long-term commitment to well-being which is stated in the strategic plan. Byrnes (2020) found participants viewed well-being initiatives favourably, when led by staff with whom trust relationships were established, and when the intention was perceived to support the participants rather than monitor them.

On the effectiveness of well-being interventions, Pescud et al. (2015) found in the Australian context that employers will readily accept responsibility for occupational health and safety matters, but not beyond, as individuals are viewed as being personally responsible for their health. It was found that the employer viewed their role in maintaining overall well-being as minor and supportive only (Pescud et al., 2015). In contrast, a Canadian study found employers and employees to feel equally responsible for employee health and well-being, with participants viewing well-being interventions favourably when they play a significant part in their design (Caperchione et al., 2016).

However, employees do not always view well-being initiatives positively. There may be low uptake for well-being programmes due to a lack of trust regarding the employer's intention (Spence, 2015). To address this problem, Spence (2015) suggests organisations should be honest about their motives, and if increased productivity and profitability are a driver, it should be communicated rather than falsely promoting personal benefits to employees. Byrnes et al. (2020) found that students to be more accepting of well-being workshops when trust relationships are well established with staff. Because well-being programmes do not always appropriately serve the needs of employees, Spence (2015) suggests that organisations might contribute better to employee well-being by addressing the underlying causes of work-related stress.

In summary, to improve employee receptivity to well-being initiatives and to gain employee trust, employers should be honest about their motives for offering well-being programmes and be committed to long-term systemic change by reducing the causes of workplace stress and improving wider organisational human relations, culture, and practice (Spence, 2015). The next section moves away from employee well-being and well-being initiatives to discuss the theories of union belonging.

## **2.5 Theories of union belonging**

This section discusses theories of union belonging to understand the reasons for joining, thus shedding light on member expectations and satisfaction with unions. With union membership in long-term decline, and with recent figures suggesting a plateauing of membership rather than an increase, it is becoming more difficult to recruit new members. Van der Meer (2019) suggests workers may still be fearful of employer repercussions, preventing workers from joining. Union membership decline presents increased challenges for union recruitment due to lost organising knowledge, a retiring unionised workforce, ideological opposition to unions, enticement to jobs in the private sector without representation, and employment under IECs. In response, unions have attempted to reverse declining membership via organising drives, union restructuring and union political conduits.

Traditional models of unionism have responded to member discontent, but Haynes et al. (2006) suggest that it does not incentivise new membership or retain existing members and in order to assist unions in the future, scholars should explore positive union experiences and find out the aspirations of members. In order for unions to revitalise, they should continue to respond to the needs of disadvantaged workers while adapting to the modern needs of workers who desire opportunities for career progression (Haynes et al., 2007).

In the context of union decline, it is important to understand the motives of union joining and belonging. New Zealand workers are found to join unions for instrumental reasons meaning they join simply due to the perceived benefits that unions may deliver for members (Haynes et al., 2007). However, in the United Kingdom and Australia, workers often join for ideological reasons such as having pro-union attitudes and left-leaning political beliefs (Kaufman, 2005; Peetz, 1998). Meanwhile, an analysis of European nations by (Furåker & Bengtsson, 2013) showed collective power to be a stronger motivator for union belonging than individual membership. One reason for not joining a union includes simply choosing not to join, despite understanding or appreciating the value of unions. Another reason for not joining is that workers assess the costs to outweigh the benefits, which prevents union joining as has been found in Sweden (Kjellberg, 2011). These reasons for not joining present a frustrating challenge for efforts towards union revitalisation also contending with ideological resistance. There are also personal and demographic commonalities amongst members that help to shed light on reasons for union belonging.

Women are more likely to be members because they are employed in jobs that have longer tenure and because they are more likely to be employed in jobs requiring great protection due to gender inequalities. Women currently constitute a slight majority of union members in New Zealand. Although ideological and political beliefs play a part in New Zealanders' joining behaviour, perceptions of union performance are also a potent driver (Haynes et al., 2007). Four interconnected theories, the dissatisfaction-threat theory, instrumentality model, ideological motives, and the security model, explain union belonging at the individual level.

The dissatisfaction-threat theory suggests that workers who are dissatisfied with their pay and working conditions or who face threats to their working conditions are more likely to join as a defensive action against management. Employees will naturally seek protection and improvements to pay and conditions through collective action, and unsurprisingly, workers who are content with their pay and conditions, are less likely to join unions (Kaufman, 2004).

The instrumentality model, on the other hand, assumes that workers join because the benefits such as improved wages, conditions, and the promotion of a wider range of worker interests are perceived to outweigh the costs (Guest & Conway, 2004; Guest & Dewe, 1988). When faced with threats from management, unions enable future industrial action and therefore mitigate future job threats. Although members may not be dissatisfied with their jobs, the motive for joining is primarily to protect against future problems (Haynes et al., 2007).

Political and pro-union ideologies also drive union belonging or may develop through union exposure. According to Haynes et al. (2007), ideologically-motivated members join because of politically left-leaning views and pro-union values. Members who join for other reasons may subsequently develop similar beliefs through a sense of collective identities, such as shared experiences of unfair experience in the workplace (Macky & Boxall, 2009).

The security model sees workers join because membership protects them from arbitrary dismissal and increases job security (Flavin & Shufeldt, 2016). Job security is an established and important aspect of overall job satisfaction and, in turn, is a key element of overall well-being (Alfonso & Andres, 2000). Guest & Conway (2004) noted that while workers expect unions to deliver fairer outcomes between employees and management, union pressure increases organisational commitment to employee obligations.

While the reasons for union belonging are not exclusive, and the theories outlined above are complementary and overlapping, primarily the perceived benefits of membership are the unifying driver

of individuals joining unions. Union members at the individual level are motivated to unionisation due to perceptions of increased job security through protection from arbitrary dismissal, a sense of collective identity, improved wages and conditions, and enabled future pathways to industrial action to fulfil ideological motivations. Union joining theories provide a basis for comparing members' expectations against perceived union outcomes and help build an understanding of union effectiveness. Unions have not regained membership numbers since the liberalisation of the economy, and workers may surprisingly and deliberately choose not to join unions despite recognising the value in doing so.

## **2.6 Union effects on job satisfaction**

Studies examining whether union membership and collective bargaining improve employee well-being have resulted in varied findings due to the wide range of factors that may impact employee well-being. As discussed in the previous section, job satisfaction as a domain of employee well-being has featured heavily in research that considers the effect of unions. While job satisfaction remains an important indicator and base for considering employee well-being, according to Radcliff et al. (2005) there is potential for an alternative research focus to consider wider factors.

The paradox of dissatisfied unionised workers asserts that members are more unsatisfied with their jobs but are less likely to exit the workplace than non-members, which hold even when controlling for other factors (Guest & Conway, 2004). The most popular explanation for the paradox was introduced by (Hirschman, 1970) and further developed by Freeman and Medoff (1984) as the 'exit voice theory'. According to the exit voice hypothesis, unhappy workers can leave the workplace or voice their dissatisfaction through the protective mechanism of the union. By exercising 'voice', dissatisfied members can choose to stay in the workplace instead of leaving (Freeman & Medoff, 1984). The other common explanation is the reverse causality effect wherein unhappy workers may join unions (Van der Meer, 2019).

However, scholars have since questioned the idea of the dissatisfied union member. Early on, Kanter (1977) wondered why if unions improve wages, enhance management practice, and give workers more power through collective bargaining, would it make sense that unions should decrease job satisfaction? van der Meer (2019) also disputed the exit voice hypothesis arguing it does not give a full picture of the effect of unions on workers, proposing that the effect of empowerment and union membership has not been considered. Haile et al. (2015) suggested the theory is an empirical irregularity because unions are expected to boost job satisfaction, and therefore should also improve well-being. On the other hand, Laroche (2016) proposed that because unionisation increases organisational commitment and voicing dissatisfaction should result in workplace improvements, job satisfaction should be increased.

A number of alternative explanations have emerged to try to explain the theory of the dissatisfied union member. For example, Pfeffer and Davis-Blake (1990) proposed that occupations in unionised industries include more difficult and risky work resulting in greater levels of union members who may find their work less enjoyable. Guest and Conway (2004) suggested that because unions raise employee expectations and political awareness, members are more likely to voice dissatisfaction. However, it is also acknowledged the potential for management opposition to union presence can cause animosity adding to an unpleasant work environment (Guest & Conway, 2004; Pfeffer & Davis-Blake, 1990). Management hostility towards unions can also have the effect of muffling voice, thus adding to member dissatisfaction (Guest & Conway, 2004). Similarly, Bryson et al. (2004) point out that members who have been disappointed by employers who have not met their obligations such as increasing wage rises are also less likely to be satisfied in their job.

It has also been suggested that personal preferences, characteristics of the workplace, and expectations of employers are likely to play a factor in whether an individual wants to be unionised or not (Bryson et al., 2004; Laroche, 2016). Additionally, it should be expected that when unions achieve member expectations, they should be recognised for their efficacy.

While the points discussed here do not necessarily refute the union member dissatisfaction paradox, new findings link unions with increased job satisfaction and therefore well-being by reducing loneliness, depression, sadness, and stress (Blanchflower & Bryson, 2020). These findings may be attributable to changes in the work environment over time, with the original cohorts now gone from original studies and combined with improvements to job security over time (Blanchflower & Bryson, 2020). The next section will discuss research on unionisation and well-being.

## **2.7 Unionisation and well-being**

Although some research has explored social and health variables related to unionisation, few studies have linked unions to higher levels of life satisfaction and subjective well-being, and while there are few New Zealand-based studies, no qualitative studies have been found on unionisation and well-being for comparison to this study. As explained in Section 2.6, the paradox of the dissatisfied union worker which suggests that union members are less satisfied in their work than non-members, despite the intention of unions to promote well-being, has dominated much of the international research. Scholars have thus sought alternative explanations for the paradox and have explored the impacts of unionisation more widely.

Work-related factors such as democratic participation, opportunities for promotion, mental health, pay satisfaction, and autonomy have since been considered in relation to their effect on employee well-being. Radcliff (2005), for example, had wondered why if job satisfaction is a determining factor of life

satisfaction, should it follow that unionised workers are not more satisfied with life generally due to union gained advantages. Moreover, if that is so, then the positive impacts should reach society more widely as union density increases due to a higher proportion of unionised workers in the population and thus extending benefits (Keane et al., 2012; Radcliff, 2005).

Indeed, recent international and New Zealand-based studies have found there to be positive correlations between well-being and unionisation that extend beyond members to wider society. Blanchflower and Bryson (2020) for example, observed union membership to positively impact job satisfaction in Europe and the United States (US) which now contravenes the job dissatisfaction paradox (Freeman, 1978). Union members were found to experience less depression, sadness, loneliness, and stress, while experiencing higher levels of happiness, life satisfaction and trust (Blanchflower & Bryson, 2020). This ties to earlier findings on the effect of union influence on democratic and organisational participation which enhances cognition, and improve communication and problem-solving skills (Radcliff et al., 2005). Because union density has been directly affected by government policy, it could be argued that increasing union coverage through union-friendly political policies should be a goal for well-being focused governments.

In an examination of World Values Survey (WVS) data looking at union members, and non-members Flavin et al. (2009) found a positive association between well-being and unionisation. Well-being was found to increase with unionisation, and more so for those with the lowest incomes, which the authors believe sustains the idea that unions benefit society through increased workplace and democratic participation (Flavin et al., 2009). Unions have long been recognised for organising themselves democratically, but also for upholding democratic principles by encouraging voting and democratic participation. Unions serve the interests of the working class, and according to Levi (2003), contribute to a fair and democratic society. It is not surprising then, to find improved life satisfaction and well-being in countries with a robust democratic working-class voice. Participatory democracy results in greater political representation than is the case with traditional democracy due to citizens actively contributing to decision making (Parker & Alakavuklar, 2019). This can open up opportunities for unions to advocate for workers to achieve favourable policies for workers.

In a study of United States and European countries, Keane et al. (2012) found unions to increase well-being regardless of membership, in democratic countries with strong union movements. Earlier research had linked unions to increased subjective quality of life in nations with higher union density (Radcliff et al., 2005). Radcliff et al. (2005) noted that while considerations of life-satisfaction had been analysed in western industrialised nations for cultural, political and economic factors such as income, class organisation had been overlooked. Unions were also found to improve living conditions for workers by assisting them to navigate the labour market in a capitalist economy (Keane et al., 2012). The benefits of

unions are not just limited to the positive effect on democratic participation but also extend to health-related well-being.

Recent studies link unions to improved physical and mental health. In the Canadian context, Leigh and Chakalov (2021) found that occupational injuries, sick leave, and drug overdose deaths are reduced as a result of union activity. They, therefore, argue that unions are a social driver of health that should not be underestimated (Leigh & Chakalov, 2021). In an examination of the employed population in unionised British workplaces, Wels (2020) found collective bargaining to have a significantly positive impact on workers' mental health, but to a lesser extent on physical health. It was concluded that the absence of workplace collective bargaining may negatively impact health outcomes and the authors recommend that collective bargaining should be prioritised by policy makers. In another study linking unions to positive health outcomes, Reynolds and Brady (2012) found union membership to positively affect self-rated health in the US due to the ability for higher incomes to facilitate access to healthcare. This is an interesting finding because Flavin et al. (2009) had earlier noted that higher incomes, which can be achieved through collectivism improve health by enabling access to health care.

As a follow up to Flavin's 2009 study, which examined the effect of unions on self-reported life satisfaction, using six waves of WVS data from the US, Flavin (2016) again found union members were more satisfied with their lives through four pathways enabled by unions. These pathways are participatory citizenship, higher job satisfaction, job security and social interaction and will now be discussed.

Union members may have higher job satisfaction than non-members because they can participate in decisions about how organisations operate and may be able to appeal decisions they do not agree with. Participatory citizenship adds to a sense of self-determination which help to alleviate feelings of alienation (Flavin & Shufeldt, 2016; Sousa-Poza & Sousa-Poza, 2000). Unions can also increase job security which helps to alleviate negative impacts of unemployment related stress and anxiety caused by loss of income. Unions enable social interaction by bringing people together to work towards the same goals which develops a sense of trust and connection. These positive feelings can reach beyond the workplace to reduce feelings of loneliness and social isolation (Flavin & Shufeldt, 2016). As a result of professional and social support networks, work-related stress can be reduced, and a sense of solidarity is promoted. For these reasons, unions may contribute to worker well-being. Although there are recent findings linking higher well-being with unionisation, some studies continue to find negative effects.

For example, Laroche (2016) confirmed the theory of the unsatisfied worker, having found reduced job and life satisfaction, but attributes poor work conditions and certain types of jobs as the cause. Haile (2015) had also found a link to reduced job satisfaction and well-being in the British context, but suggests that voice-induced complaining and a strained work environment caused by the process of collective

bargaining are to blame. Laroche (2016) concurred and suggested that the responsibility for ensuring employee satisfaction lies with employers and recommends that HR departments step in to address staff concerns about poor work conditions when union representation is lacking (Laroche, 2016). Van der Meer (2019) takes this point further by suggesting that employers could benefit from increased union coverage and recommends they encourage workers to join unions to increase their job satisfaction and therefore productivity.

Scholars agree unions are necessary for democracy and employee well-being, but in the context of union decline and ideological opposition, they must find new ways to survive (Levi, 2003; Radcliff, 2005). The paradox of the unsatisfied union member and the exit voice theory, as discussed in Section 2.6, act as the seminal work and launchpad for studies exploring the effect of unions on the well-being of workers. The literature has shown unions to benefit workers by increasing wages, enabling democratic and organisational participation, enhancing empowerment, enabling voice, and contributing to health and safety policy and increase access to healthcare. Unions also reduce stress through social connection and by increasing job security. The benefits increase with higher membership density and extend beyond members to society. Rather than unions causing worker dissatisfaction, employer set poor work conditions may contribute to negative employee outcomes. Given the mitigating effect unions can have on employer bad practices, governments who aim for improved citizen well-being should support collectivism.

## **2.8 Research aim and questions**

This literature review has found that, on the whole, unions contribute to increased well-being and, where negative associations are found, they are due to poor work conditions or strain caused by the process of collective bargaining. There were few qualitative studies to draw from regarding unionisation and well-being in both the international and NZ setting, and there were few studies overall available from NZ on the topic. The focus on job satisfaction that has dominated employee well-being and unionisation studies show that there is room for an alternative view. Instead of focusing on job satisfaction as a predictor of employee well-being, this study explores broader well-being concepts by asking participants about their perceptions of wellbeing and exploring roles of the parties to the employment relationship.

It is proposed that qualitative approaches may complement existing survey-based well-being studies to understand better the aspects of work and the parties' roles in the employment relationship that influence well-being outcomes. In the context of declining union membership, scholars have suggested that unions should respond to the needs of modern workers, which is also a topic that could also be further investigated. This study takes the opportunity to address these gaps in the literature through its interpretive exploration of the following research questions:

- What are workers' understandings and experiences of well-being in the workplace within the employment relations framework;
- What are the roles of the union, employer, and individual regarding employee well-being?; and
- How do workers assess the effectiveness of well-being initiatives offered by employers?

## 2.9 Summary

This chapter examined the philosophical foundations of well-being research, outlined aspects of work and job characteristics and the social factors that define employee well-being and has introduced the survey instruments commonly used to assess human and employee well-being. Following this, the potential benefits of unions for workers and society were explored, and the theories of union belonging have been discussed to provide an understanding of expectations of unions. Studies on unionisation and well-being were reviewed which revealed that unions are now believed to increase overall well-being and life-satisfaction. This was in contrast to previous studies that had found unionisation to be associated with reduced job satisfaction as a component of overall well-being. In the climate of union decline, scholars now agree that if unions increase life satisfaction, neoliberal policies which reduce collective bargaining could adversely affect well-being. Increased unionisation may therefore improve well-being, though it may be difficult to achieve following decades of union decline. In order to aid revitalisation efforts, Haynes et al. (2007) suggested that unions should respond to the needs of modern workers, a topic that could be further investigated. Lastly, an overview of workplace well-being initiatives was provided, finding that workers may feel mistrustful of employers' intentions, though clear communication from employers can assist in gaining employee trust and improving engagement and satisfaction with such activities.

In conclusion, scholars agree that unions are beneficial to workers with the positive effects extending to society. Due to these benefits, some scholars have recommended that governments and employers support union-friendly policies. However, this will be challenging in NZ due to persistent ideological resistance. The research shows that studies exploring the impact of unionisation on employee well-being and well-being more generally, have applied pre-existing definitions of well-being to determine elements of life satisfaction and job satisfaction. However, very few studies have explored how employees firstly define their well-being and what role do the parties to the employment relationship play to impact on those definitions. The following research questions were therefore posed:

- What are workers understandings and experiences of well-being in the workplace within an employment relations framework?;
- What are the roles of the union, employer, and individual regarding employee well-being?; and
- How do workers assess the effectiveness of well-being initiatives offered by employers?

In Chapter 3, the methodological response to the above research questions is presented.

## **3 Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This study adopted a qualitative interpretive research strategy to explore employees' perceptions of well-being in a unionised work environment. This chapter describes the paradigm informing the choice of methodology in Section 3.2, the rationale for the research in Section 3.3, introduces the research participants and the research site in Section 3.4, and discusses the researcher's position as an insider in Section 3.5. Descriptions of the consultation process with stakeholders are provided in Section 3.6, the process of the fieldwork pilot interview is described in Section 3.7, and the semi-structured interview schedule is described in Section 3.8.1. Following this, the method of analysis is provided in Section 3.9, ethical considerations in Section 3.10 and materials management are outlined in Section 3.11. Section 3.12 summarises the chapter.

### **3.2 Research paradigms**

A paradigm is a philosophical worldview comprised of four elements, epistemology, ontology, methodology and axiology (Davidson & Tolich, 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Paradigms provide scientists with a construct to "make sense of the world or some segment of the world" (Crotty, 1998: 35). Within paradigms, researchers draw from their own beliefs, making epistemological and ontological assumptions that impact decisions about the ways research is conducted (Davidson & Tolich, 1996).

Epistemology is the theory about the nature of knowledge and how the social world should be studied while ontology is often referred to as the theory of being or the study of what exists. Ontological beliefs differ between groups and cultures, and therefore, people may be described as living in different worlds (Davidson & Tolich, 1996). The two main research paradigms, positivism and interpretivism, are epistemologically different, coming from separate world views. Teddlie (2010) suggests that deep engagement with underpinning research philosophies is more worthwhile to the research endeavour than hasty acceptance of paradigm categorisations.

Two research paradigms, positivism and interpretivism, underpin the three main approaches to research, quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. While positivism mainly underpins the quantitative approach, positivist approaches to qualitative research do occur (Prasad & Prasad, 2002). To positivists, the social environment is understood objectively through empirical observations where numerical data is analysed quantitatively and interpreted for natural phenomena using the scientific method. Positivist research creates knowledge deductively by testing repeatable and comparable theories to establish cause and effect. However, critics of the positivist approach believe it to be reductionist, lacking empathy towards social phenomena (Davidson & Tolich, 1996). A mixed methods approach combines both

qualitative and quantitative methods maintaining a pragmatic paradigm and may help to overcome some of the limitations of either quantitative or qualitative research.

Qualitative research is different to quantitative research as it conducts inquiries into social phenomena in a natural setting and is guided by the interpretive approach (Howson, 2021). The qualitative approach systematically analyses meaning in the context of ordinary human interaction. Its strengths are adaptability by allowing for flexibility when choosing research instruments and can respond to evolving research. Rather than ascribing a right or wrong value to any human account, interpretative research allows for differences to emerge. Where positivist approaches were once common, Prasad and Prasad (2002) observe that interpretive inquiry has become increasingly popular in organisational research. Interpretivism was chosen for this study because it seeks understandings of the world according to the philosophy of social construction, where meaningful interpretations are constructed to social reality (Davidson & Tolich, 1996; Prasad & Prasad, 2002).

This research follows inductive logic within the epistemological assumption of interpretivism, in which empirical observations are made throughout the material collection process. While the inductive approach aligns with the researcher's belief that knowledge does not simply exist, but meanings are developed within the human experience, research can be approached inductively or deductively. The traditional view holds that positivist paradigms underpin quantitative research and interpretative paradigms underpin qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1994), however, in reality, there are multi and dynamic viewpoints underpinning research. According to Hyde (2000), not all qualitative investigations are inductive and both quantitative and qualitative researchers may employ both while not realising it.

The research questions for this study are open ended, seeking descriptive feedback about how participants make meaning about the world. The three main research questions are reiterated as follows:

- What are workers understandings and experiences of well-being in the workplace within an employment relations framework?;
- What are the roles of the union, employer, and individual regarding employee well-being?; and
- How do workers assess the effectiveness of well-being initiatives offered by employers?

### **3.3 Research rationale**

My involvement with New Zealand's Tertiary Institutes Professional Staff Association (TIASA), a specialist union representing Professional staff across NZ's tertiary sector, including universities, technical Institutes, polytechnics and Wānanga (tertiary education in a Māori cultural context) gave rise to this research topic. Moreover, the growing promotion of well-being awareness in New Zealand from

political and organisational leaders has led to probing questions about how well-being is defined, and how employees assess well-being - particularly concerning unionisation. This study does not seek to measure an individual's well-being using psychological metrics. Instead, it elicits employees' perspectives about well-being concepts, exploring potential contributors or barriers to employee well-being by exploring the influences of the parties to the employment relationship.

A qualitative methodology captures in-depth, personal accounts from participants' points of view in a naturalistic setting. To help ensure rigour in qualitative research, procedures should be accurately and comprehensively documented. Although qualitative research is not intended for generalisation, a thorough study can inform the field and guide policy and practice decisions.

### **3.4 Professional staff in a university**

The university environment is organised hierarchically with two separate employee identities, academic and professional staff sitting side by side (Garcia & Hardy, 2007). There are perceived identity differences between academic and professional staff that arises from tangible differences in the pay and conditions offered to staff under two separate CEAs. CEAs in tertiary education are negotiated as either single or multi-union collective agreements (MUCA). The university as a work environment also presents implications for gender inequities and power dynamics with 4,495 women employed out of 7,600 total employees in the section, which is approximately 58% (Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2018).

Research involving staff in tertiary education has generally overlooked professional staff, despite them making up approximately half of the university sector's workforce. As of 2019, approximately half of 7,600 of all staff employed in the New Zealand university sector were categorised as 'other' from a total population of 14,565 (Ministry of Education, 2018). This study goes a small way towards addressing that gap, but it was not the primary motivator for choosing this group. There has been no consistency regarding the terminology used to describe non-academic staff, though scholarly materials have included non-academic staff, support staff, professional staff, general staff, administrative staff, and professional staff. The term professional staff is therefore used for consistency.

The participants involved in this study are professional staff employed in administrative roles in a New Zealand university. Professional staff were chosen for both theoretical and practical reasons. Firstly, the university offered a setting to examine the constructions and meanings of employee well-being in a unionised, employment environment. Secondly, the university and employees provided a large and diverse group to recruit participants from within a large organisation with close proximity to the researcher, which, according to Davidson & Tolich (1996), is beneficial for qualitative research. The

close proximity of participants to the researcher also helped maintain progress on the study during the periods of uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Both union and non-union members were included in the study to explore potential differences of opinion regarding unionisation and well-being and the questions were designed to obtain full descriptions, from which to draw deep meaning. Therefore, the open-ended questions, "what does well-being mean to you?", "in what ways do you think well-being can be achieved?", and "what do you think are the roles of the union, employer and individual in achieving well-being?" were asked. The majority of participants were female, with seven out of 10 being female, and were relatively senior in age and years of experience.

### **3.5 Researcher positioning**

This study was informed by the advantage of insider research. As a professional staff member working in a university, and member of both the Union's Branch and National Executive Committees, I am aware that I have inside knowledge, experience and understanding that outsiders do not have. To search for knowledge beyond the familiar, I refrained from including participants from my immediate department to prevent conflicts of interest. Distinctions between insiders and outsiders arose from the notion that some groups gain 'privileged' access to knowledge (Merton, 1972). Although the views of both insiders and outsiders are equally valid (Merriam et al., 2001), distinct advantages and disadvantages require careful management of potential conflicts of interest and recognition of complex dynamics. One advantage of insider research is the capturing of deeper understanding and knowledge that is not available to outsiders. However, insider research risks incorporating biases or lacking objectivity (Mercer, 2007). On the other hand, approaching as a stranger offers the benefit of a different and objective view of the social setting (Sampson, 2004).

Qualitative research is enriched by lived experiences (Chavez, 2008). In order to elicit full and open responses from participants, rapport was established quickly, as I was easily able to empathise with them. There was plenty of laughter and agreement about our shared knowledge and experiences. A positivist approach to study, in contrast, would not have elicited deep meaning as it seeks non-empathetic responses in order to remain neutral (Ross, 2017).

While reliability and validity are the traditional measures of quality for quantitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend four measures of trustworthiness for qualitative inquiries - dependability, transferability, credibility and confirmability. Reflecting upon the research through the life of the project further enhances trustworthiness. Reflexivity is an integral process, permeating the entire research endeavour. The researcher takes the time to evaluate their own ontological considerations of knowledge, reflecting on their own biases and assumptions within the current social, cultural and political environment (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Upon reflection of the interview transcripts, I realised that I chose not to probe further into questions that felt as if they could be intrusive. In hindsight, I may have held back due to awareness of the need to maintain good work relationships with colleagues and may have been more cautious of overstepping boundaries. Due to my roles in the union where I have often represented members in employment matters, I may also have felt a higher level of responsibility to protect employees from undue discomfort. I had also deliberately not pursued interviews with colleagues facing redundancy or restructuring within the organisation to reduce the risk of causing further stress. I made this decision for ethical reasons and to maintain quality of the research as it may have skewed, or distorted engagement with participants and researcher's insight. Although those participants may have provided rich data, the researcher's responsibility is not to cause harm. So as not to cause harm, the findings were not used beyond the stated purpose of the study.

### **3.6 Consultation with stakeholders**

Stakeholders are organisations and individuals who may hold an interest in the research or be affected by its outcomes. As part of the research design process, two senior union organisers from the Tertiary Sector were informally consulted about the intentions of the study to receive their feedback. They were asked what they thought of the research idea in general, and they were both supportive of the research, pointing out that all research on unions and employees is worthwhile. They also raised the issue of a gender imbalance and the power relations impacting the professional staff workforce in the tertiary sector as points of interest and potential lines of inquiry.

### **3.7 Fieldwork pilot**

A pilot interview tested the questions and helped to gain experience and confidence in interviewing techniques. Although piloting is a common endeavour in quantitative research, it can also help test research instruments in qualitative research, bringing to light potential issues that could cause a project to fail. The pilot participant held similar characteristics to other participants, having been previously employed in tertiary education but not in the same institution. Coming from outside the main group ensured answers were unbiased and enabled seeking honest feedback about the interview experience. Following some of the questions, the interviewee asked for clarification regarding the context of the question and or gave some one word answers which indicated the question was not posed in an open ended way. Therefore, in future interviews, the interview sheet was memorised, and questions were included as part of an overall discussion. In later interviews, questions were not started until a rapport was well established and the participant appeared to feel comfortable. This ensured that descriptive answers were elicited. The pilot participant was asked to comment on the experience of interviewing and questions, including order and wording, and foreseeable problems. The pilot interviewee was also asked if any of the questions made her feel uncomfortable. She gave positive feedback, remarking that she

enjoyed participating. She believed the questions were open-ended and responded well to the conversational style of the interview which enabled fuller descriptions when prompted.

### **3.8 Materials collection**

The criteria for inclusion in the study was limited to currently employed professional staff members regardless of union membership status. A purposive snowballing strategy was used for recruitment due to its suitability for finding participants with experiences and understandings of the university as an organisational setting, thus holding opinions on the questions asked (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Both non-union members and current union members were included to compare the two groups. It was also hoped that non-members might shed some light on union joining and leaving behaviours which may shed light on reasons for union decline which is often the contextual basis in the literature related to unions.

While there is no ideal sample size for qualitative research, there should be enough to achieve data saturation or informational redundancy, and not so much that deep analysis cannot be achieved (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The number of participants that might be realistically recruited due to COVID-19 lockdowns was unknown when starting this project. Recruitment efforts and interviewing began in mid-2020 and continued through early 2021. Participants in 2020 were not required to return to their offices immediately following lockdown, with many continuing to work from home on an ad hoc basis. While it was hoped that 12 participants would be realistically recruited, 11, including one pilot participant was achieved. Although face-to-face interviews were preferred, online video calls were offered as a backup if in-person meetings were not possible. Three participants opted for online interviews, and there was no discernible difference in outcomes between the in-person and online interviews. The interviews took between 45 minutes and one hour to complete, not including time spent at the café, or casually talking outside of the interview time.

Printed advertisements were posted in staff-only areas between January 2021 and April 2021 and was featured twice in March 2021 in the union's weekly newsletter. Advertising in this way recruited around half of the participants. Once people stopped responding to advertisements, a snowball technique was adopted whereby existing participants were asked to each refer a colleague. However, snowball recruitment was unsuccessful, and only one additional participant was recruited this way. Despite reassurances of anonymity, some declined invitations because they did not want to talk about their employer in any way. I wondered if this was an indication of insecurity in the professional staff, but there is no way of knowing that.

The remaining participants were known to the researcher and invited directly, with all those invited accepting the invitation. In order to include both members and non-members, union membership was not a requirement. It was not anticipated to find any differences of significance between the members and

non-members due to most participants being employed under the same CEA. The final sample consisted of four non-members and six current union members, which was considered adequate for comparisons between the two groups. Interview recordings were transcribed and coded following each interview. Evidence collection was completed in August 2021, when theoretical saturation was deemed to have been reached. In total, 11 participants were interviewed, including one pilot participant whose feedback helped to test and refine the research questions. Due to the pilot interviewee coming from outside the organisation of participants, the empirical evidence from this interview was not included in the thematic content analysis.

Participants were all employed as professional staff members in the same university under full-time, permanent contracts. All but one of the participants was employed under the union's CEA, with one on an IEC. The gender makeup of the participants was reflective of the gender imbalance in the tertiary education sector more widely (Ministry of Education, 2018), with three participants identifying as male and eight as female. All participants were aged between 30 and 60 years old, with six between 30 and 40 years old. Two participants were aged between 40 and 50 years, and two were between 50 and 60 years old. Seven participants identified as Pākehā, also reflecting the sector more widely (Ministry of Education, 2018), one participant was Māori, one participant identified as Filipino and one as Fijian Indian. The group was highly qualified, experienced in their roles and at least half held senior roles. All participants had attained at least a bachelor's degree, and all but two also held post-graduate level qualifications, including honours, post graduate diplomas and master's degrees. One participant was nearing completion of a PhD. Five participants held entry to mid-level administration roles, while five held management roles (see Table 1).

Table 1: *Participant demographics*

<b>Age</b>	Less than 30	0
	30-40	3
	40-50	5
	50-60	2
<b>Level of education</b>	No tertiary	0
	Diploma	0
	Bachelor's degree	2
	Post Graduate Diploma	2
	Master's degree	6
	PhD	0
<b>Gender</b>	Female	7
	Male	3

	Other	0
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Pākehā	7
	Māori	1
	Pacifica	0
	Fijian Indian	1
	Filipino	1
<b>Union status</b>	Member	6
	Non-member	4

COVID-19 has impacted the lives of all New Zealanders and changed the ways in which we work. Tertiary institutions receive 10 percent of their total revenue from full fee-paying international students (Universities NZ Te Pōkai Tara, 2021). However, travel restrictions due to COVID-19 resulted in the loss of international students and therefore some institutions have made staff cuts (Gerritsen, 2021). Two participants who had initially come forward to participate were disestablished from their roles before interviews could take place. It is acknowledged that although those participants may have contributed rich insights, it was decided not to risk causing them additional stress by pursuing interviews with them. Replacement participants were recruited delaying progress by several weeks.

Six participants spoke as current union members and four as non-members, though two of the non-members were former members. Interestingly, two participants had relinquished union membership since taking on management roles. All participants spoke with knowledge of or holding opinions about unions despite varying levels of personal engagement. One participant who is a non-member felt that it was no longer appropriate to be a member of a union when employed under an IEC, and the other did not want to be “tarred with the troublemaker brush”. These are discussed further in the findings chapter.

Prior to interviews, participants were reminded about the intentions of the study. The next step was to develop rapport with each participant through friendly chat. Periods of silence following a question or answer offered a reflective period indicating a probing question could elicit a deeper response. Because semi-structured interviewing is flexible, and questions are intended to be exploratory and open-ended, they may be asked out of order. With this in mind, the questions were not followed rigidly and were not referred to through the process. I had memorised the questions so that I could pay close attention to what participants were saying during the interview, though towards the end of the conversation, the questionnaire was quickly checked.

### 3.8.1 Semi-structured interview schedule

Interviewing began by developing rapport with participants. I introduced myself and gave an overview of the study. Participants were asked if they had any questions about the research and were asked to sign the ethics form and reminded they could withdraw from the study at any point.

The questionnaire guide was developed using Kvale's set of nine qualitative questions as a guide (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The following questions were posed to all study participants:

#### *Opening questions*

Tell me a little bit about yourself. What position do you hold in the university? (*introducing question*)

Tell me more about working as a professional staff member (*probing question*)

Now I would like to move on to talk about well-being (*structuring question*)

#### *Main questions*

**What are workers' understandings and experiences of well-being in the workplace within the employment relations framework?**

What does well-being mean to you? (*indirect question*)

Where do you see yourself fitting into your descriptions of well-being? (*follow up question*)

In what ways do you think well-being can be achieved? (*indirect question*)

**What are the roles of the union, employer, and individual regarding employee well-being?**

What do you think are the roles of the union, employer, and individual in achieving well-being? (*indirect question*)

**How do workers assess the effectiveness of well-being initiatives offered by employers?**

- Have well-being initiatives ever been offered to you? (*direct question*)
- Can you tell me more about that? (*follow up question*)

How would you assess the effectiveness of any well-being initiatives offered to you? (*indirect question*)

#### *Closing question*

Is there anything else you can think of that is interesting or that you would like to share?

By using a semi-structured rather than fully structured interviewing technique, it was possible to allow room participants to give further insights into what was significant to them, potentially revealing new research themes. Following each interview, I took the time to note my initial thoughts about the meanings of what participants were saying. Due to my insider status, I did not need to seek clarification about

terminology and understood many of the participant's stories within the context of our shared institution. At the end of the interview, I checked in with each participant about their experience, and they all responded positively. No participants chose to withdraw at any point in the study.

### **3.9 Thematic content analysis**

In order to establish trustworthiness and credibility in qualitative research, the underpinning assumptions informing data analysis must be clearly explained (Nowell et al., 2017). The interview evidence was analysed in an inductive thematic way, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis. Inductive thematic analysis is guided by the content of the data and its benefits include flexibility, fitting within most theoretical frameworks, and suitability for new researchers while also providing detailed and rich data descriptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). The thematic analysis process was approached in a circular and reiterative way, rather than following a step-by-step sequence (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Interviews were transcribed using transcription software Otter.ai following each interview. Although Otter.ai helped transcribe the bulk of the recordings, the software lacks some accuracy. Transcripts were reviewed and manually edited by listening to recordings several times. The process of listening and editing helped me become familiar with the data. Although some researchers return transcripts to participants seeking clarification, I did not, to prevent delays and reduce the risk of losing valuable data if participants chose to delete statements. Otter. Ai's parent company state they will "not share Personal Information or Customer Data with others except as Customer requests per written instructions or by sending a message." They also claim to utilise HTTPS encryption and to employ a "Data Protection Officer" (Descript, 2021). The transcript files were deleted from the user account and the account was closed.

When reading transcripts and being immersed in the data, emerging themes and ideas were noted. Transcripts contained a large amount of text that was coded manually on printed paper. While manual coding provided a deep level of engagement with the evidence, the process became unwieldy due to the large quantity of text. Transcripts were then transferred to NVivo software, and codes and themes were replicated in the system. Codes were reconsidered, relabelled, merged, and regrouped several times, keeping the research questions in mind. At this stage, interpretation of meaning was difficult due to overlapping themes and the decontextualisation of the coded data. However, by re-considering the themes and sub-themes across the entire data set, a final set of level one themes, and sub-themes were created by interrogating and whittling down the themes to just three main themes and several sub-themes. The material was again reconsidered across the entire set using mind mapping techniques to form a framework from which to draw meaning. Through mind-mapping, themes were divided by positive or negatively attributed accounts, though at this stage they lacked context. Through deep-thinking and drawing

diagrams, these positively and negatively attributed phases were placed within the main themes and sub-themes from which the descriptions were drawn to understand the essence of the meanings.

The final stage of thematic analysis was the writing up, thus continuing the process of interpretation. Interpretation requires awareness that through interpretation we re-establish meanings based on ideas of what we already know, bringing our prejudices and assumptions with us (Crotty, 1998). Writing up continues the process of analysing and interpreting the empirical evidence in relation to the extant literature (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Section 3.10 outlines ethical considerations and processes undertaken to ensure the research was conducted with integrity.

### **3.10 Ethical considerations**

The respondents' safety is the responsibility of the researcher and is of paramount consideration throughout the research process. Consistent with Section 161 of the (Education Act, 1989), Massey University requires all research activities to comply with the Massey Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluation Involving Human Participants.

Although a full ethics proposal was prepared, upon completing the semi-structured interview questions it became apparent that the line of questioning would be unlikely to pose a risk to participants. The research proposal and interview guide were peer-reviewed by the study's supervisors and deemed low risk. Therefore, the Low-Risk Ethics Notification number, 4000023607, was issued on 6 November 2020 (Appendix A). No interview material was collected before this notice was received.

Voluntary informed consent is central to ethical research (Gideon, 2012). Those who showed an interest in joining the study were emailed copies of the Low Risk Ethics Notification and an information sheet (Appendix B) with a formal invitation to participate. The information sheet described the purpose of the research and why the participant was deemed suitable for inclusion. The process for material collection, storage, and the intentions for future use of the material was also explained.

The purpose of the study and the researcher's involvement with the union and interest in employment and well-being was explained before asking interviewees if they were still happy to participate. Participants were then offered an opportunity to ask questions about the research. The potential benefits of participating in a qualitative study, such as growing the skillset of the researcher and contributing to knowledge, were explained. These benefits included helping the researcher with their study and contributing to the development of new knowledge. Full voluntary consent was then obtained by asking participants to sign the consent form (Appendix C) prior to conducting interviews. The researcher provided their contact details to participants and explained that they have the right to withdraw at any time, including following the interview. No participants withdrew from the study and the identities of

participants, employer and organisations have been anonymised to preserve privacy and ensure confidentiality. The name of the New Zealand university is not disclosed in order to retain confidentiality for the organisation and the participants. Locations and accurate job titles can quickly identify participants, therefore, identifying features have been made generic. In person meetings took place at the participants' chosen locations, whether in person or on a video call, to help them feel comfortable during the process.

The researcher identifies as Māori (Ngāti Tumutumu) and is aware that, when researching in NZ, it is important to be guided by Te Tiriti o Waitangi's principles of partnership, protection, and participation. Just one of the research participants identified as Māori, and though Māori participants were not deliberately sought for the study, it was hoped that a diverse group including Māori would be formed. While this research is not designed within a Māori framework, the cultural practice of whānaungatanga (respect, getting to know one another and reciprocity) was sustained through interactions with all participants (Hudson & Russell, 2009). Before interviewing the Māori participant, at their request, time was taken to get to know one another over kai and coffee before moving to another location for the interview. This practice resulted in an interview that flowed smoothly, with both interviewer and interviewee feeling relaxed. Due to the success of this practice, the remaining participants were also invited to meet for refreshments before interviews.

### **3.11 Materials management**

Data storage was guided by Massey University's Code of Responsible Research Conduct and Information and Records Management Policy. Recorded interviews, transcripts and consent forms are kept in a password protected Microsoft OneDrive file available only to the researcher. Privacy and anonymity are guaranteed by removing identifying information and giving transcripts numbers. Participants have been identified using generic role descriptions in the final report. The researcher accepts the responsibility for ongoing data storage, committing to keeping material in a password-protected file for the foreseeable future. Future disposal or transfer will be conducted in line with the Massey University Code of Responsible Research Conduct (2017) requirements.

### **3.12 Summary**

This chapter explained the reasons for undertaking a qualitative study and its framing within an interpretative paradigm. It also described the rationale for the study and the development of a semi-structured interview schedule with which to respond to the study's aim and questions. Reasons were given for the choice of participants and research site, and the recruitment method was described. The process of undertaking a pilot interview to help test the questionnaire and inform the main fieldwork of the study were also outlined, and the implications of researching as an insider and the process of thematic analysis were explained. The process of the qualitative thematic content analysis was detailed and

described as a means of eliciting a rich set of themes from the interview material. The findings from the material analysis are presented next in Chapter 4.

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interview material/evidence following its qualitative, thematic content analysis. The first main theme in Section 4.2 is ‘understandings of well-being’ which outlines participant’s perceptions of work-related well-being under five sub-themes: opportunities for career progression, physical and psychological health and safety, well-being initiatives, hauora, and job security. The second main theme under Section 4.3 is ‘enabling organisational environment’ which relates to the notion that well-being occurs within the context of an enabling organisational environment. Under this main theme is the sub-theme which is related to workplace relationships in Section 4.3.1. The third main theme in Section 4.4 describes participant’s views regarding the role of the union. Finally, the chapter is summarised in Section 4.5. Quotations accompany an interpretative narrative on the findings in order to demonstrate participants' views and to illustrate how interpretations of the qualitative material were achieved. The findings are discussed in Chapter 5.

Table 2: *Key findings*

Key findings	Summary
<b>Theme 1: Understandings of well-being</b>	Five sub-themes contribute to employee descriptions and understandings of and workplace well-being. 1. Opportunities for career progression 2. Physical and psychological health and safety 3. Wellbeing initiatives 4. Hauora 5. Job security
<b>Sub-theme 1: Opportunities for career progression</b>	Fair opportunities for career progression and promotion were viewed as a major contributor to job satisfaction and well-being at work.
<b>Sub-theme 2: Physical and psychological health and safety</b>	Physical health and safety were viewed as a significant component of well-being.
<b>Sub-theme 3: Hauora (Māori well-being philosophy unique to NZ)</b>	Strong appreciation was expressed for Tikanga (Māori customary practices) as a major contributor to well-being. Cultural recognition could also be shown towards wider ethnic groups who have different religious needs and strong family ties.
<b>Sub-theme 4: Well-being initiatives</b> Well-being initiatives include access to gym, Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), and activities designed to impact well-being.	Participants were receptive to well-being initiatives when they serve a specific purpose. Participants prefer a healthy work culture and supportive management structures over well-being activities.
<b>Sub-theme 5: Job insecurity</b> Fear of job loss has a diminishing effect on positive experiences of work by causing stress and uncertainty.	Repeated exposure to organisational reviews and restructures threatens work-related well-being due to increased stress caused by fear of job loss and work intensification.

<b>Theme 2: Enabling organisational environment</b>	Participants viewed the employer as being responsible for setting the organisational culture that enables the well-being contributors described in the first theme 'Understandings of well-being'.
<b>Theme 3: The role of the union</b>	Participants viewed the provisions of the CEA as a contributor to well-being but awareness of the role of the union in regard to work-related well-being is somewhat limited to pay satisfaction.

## 4.2 Understandings of well-being

This theme relates to participants' personal experiences of and understandings about well-being in the workplace that emerged in conversations in response to the first research question, 'What are workers' understandings and experiences of well-being in the workplace within an employment relations framework?' Within this theme, the definitions that participants used when describing their experiences of workplace well-being are outlined in five sub-themes: opportunities for career progression, physical and psychological safety, well-being initiatives, hauora and job security.

The well-being definitions outlined in the sub-themes arose in response to the study's first research question, which sought to explore the understandings of work-related well-being from the point of view of professional staff employed in a university. Here, the majority of the findings have emerged in relation to this first research question and therefore, the discussion in the findings and in the aligning discussion Chapter 5 are more heavily weighted to these themes. The roles and responsibilities of the parties to the employment relationship regarding well-being outcomes were also explored, with an emphasis on the influence of the union. A significant finding was that participants perceived positive well-being domains to be contextually dependent on an enabling organisational environment which is the topic of theme two, discussed in Section 4.3. Finally, the third main theme outlines participant accounts of the role of the union in regard to their understandings of well-being and is discussed in Section 4.4.

### 4.2.1 Opportunities for career progression

The significant majority of participants desired career progression and promotion opportunities which would demonstrate valuing, reward, and recognition by the employer for their skills and experience. This would enhance their overall job satisfaction which participants described as a major contributor to their work-related wellbeing. For example

Well-being is passion and drive for the role. I'm driven by job satisfaction, that's my well-being. There should be a structure for progressing. You need to keep moving forward in your career. (Female, 40-50, Director, 5 years in current role)

Well-being means being in an environment where I'm recognised, I'm valued, there are opportunities for me to grow and develop in a professional sense, that are recognised and rewarded". (Female, 40-50, Senior Librarian, 8 years in current role)

Despite wanting opportunities for career progression, some participants expressed frustration by what they see as a lack of genuine higher-level professional advancement opportunities, in comparison to academic colleagues. Although the CEA stipulates pay will increase by predefined increments, participants did not regard moving through these pay steps as a form of career advancement. Because the steps are banded, they cannot be progressed beyond the top of a band without applying for a new role. Participants identified that in contrast, academic staff can progress to higher levels while fundamentally keeping the same role.

Participants noted the differences in compensation and promotion opportunities between professional and academic employees which they felt contributed to feelings of discontent. Interviewees on the whole, were appreciative of the provisions in the CEA, which enabled them to undertake professional development training. However, frustration was expressed regarding the high levels of qualifications held by professional staff and the lack of advancement opportunities.

Opportunities to progress are very slim. Many departments will have a high percentage of master's graduates and no place to go. (Female, 50-60, Senior Librarian, 8 years in current role)

They provide benefits, opportunity to study. They have a clear progression in mind in the academic workforce, but professional staff don't, and they have to relinquish one role and apply for a new role to progress. (Male, 30-40, Manager, 2 years in current role)

Another participant thinks improper hiring practices exacerbate the lack of opportunities for promotion. For example, some roles are thought to be pre-destined for a particular person, evident by an opening being advertised for the shortest possible time allowed. For some, the unequal hiring process contributes to a sense of an unfair workplace, adding to feelings of job dissatisfaction.

It's a running joke that you don't apply for a job that's been up for less than a week. It's not fair. (Female, 30-40, Administrator, 9 years in current role)

One participant held a different view. Instead of focusing on the lack of opportunities for professional staff, she planned to exit by developing an alternative career path by working towards a PhD qualification with the intention of moving to an academic career. She recalled when members of the union's university branch executive directly lobbied the Vice-Chancellor for a Professional staff Doctoral Scholarship.

When I finish my PhD, there is scope work around indigenous research and other things that I could deliver on. (Female, 50-60, Administrator, 3 years in current role)

We got a three-month scholarship from the Vice Chancellor. All the previous Vice Chancellor's awards have been for academic staff. The union must take the credit for it. (Female, 50-60, Administrator, 3 years in current role)

Participants expressed a strong desire for career progression and promotion opportunities believing it would significantly contribute to their sense of job satisfaction as a factor of their work-related well-being. Genuine progression opportunities were perceived to be lacking compared to academic staff leaving them feeling less valued. This is a cause of frustration, and participants suggested unfair hiring practices further hindered professional staff opportunities. On the other hand, participants were appreciative of the provisions for professional development in the CEA but did not see these leading to opportunities for promotion within the organisation. Despite these disappointments, some recognised that engaging the union and direct lobbying can benefit professional staff (e.g. via winning the Doctoral Scholarship provision).

#### **4.2.2 Physical and psychological health and safety**

Participants described well-being in a range of ways but commonly attributed aspects of workplace physical and psychological safety, including fair remuneration and work-life balance, as contributors. Despite holding this view, participants did not explain further as conversations moved to concerns about the causes of workplace stress such as bullying and work intensification. Most participants spoke about personal experiences with bullying, proposing that the negative impacts directly threaten employees' psychological well-being. Most participants agreed that an organisational culture of effective management is needed to address bullying, which is discussed further in theme two, 'enabling environment'. The majority of participants described well-being as including aspects of physical fitness, mental and emotional well-being, and feelings of happiness.

Well-being means physical well-being, mental well-being, and well-being in your immediate environment. (Female, 40-50, Administrator, 15 years current role)

Well-being is comprised of your physical well-being, mental well-being, emotional well-being, and intellectual well-being. (Female, 30-40, Administrator, 1 year in current role)

Well-being is working in a safe environment without bullying, work-life balance, acknowledged for what you're doing while you're paid for what you're doing well and letting you have other opportunities. (Female, 30-40, Administrator, 9 years in current role)

Some participants also touched on features of human connection and spending time together as being contributors to well-being, recognising the cultural importance of this for Māori. The view that that well-being is enhanced through social aspects and connection with people was not limited by demographic features as the view was expressed by male and female participants who identified as, Pākehā, Indian and Māori.

To be well and have hauora, you have to be well internally. You can't just be well, physically. It has to be about that connection and simply spending time with other Māori. (Female, 50-60, Administrator, 3 years in current role)

Well-being is connecting with people. (Male, 30-40, Manager, 2 years in current role)

In contrast, one participant voiced strong scepticism regarding the organisation's ability to facilitate well-being. Others felt the same, feeling the aim to increase well-being may overshadow the need to address serious organisational problems.

That's at a surface level and masking nasty stuff that's going on in the background. (Male, 30-40, Manager, 3 years in current role)

There are different types of well-being, physical and mental. In the workplace, it means being treated reasonably, fair terms and conditions and parity with your peers. If you're being bullied, your well-being is going to be poor. (Male, 30-40, Manager, 2 years in current role)

The majority of participants saw workplace bullying as a direct threat to employee well-being due to the stress it causes and strongly feel that a healthy work environment encompasses supportive management structures to prevent bullying. Some participants shared personal stories about being bullied or of witnessing bullying. For one, stress caused by bullying had impacted her mental health, causing anxiety and lost sleep. Most participants felt the organisation did not deal effectively with bullying, leaving individuals to tackle it themselves. Some felt it was too risky to disclose incidents of bullying, personal problems, or mental health issues to managers who may not respond supportively.

There could be repercussions, facilitation to exit. (Male, 30-40, Manager, 1 year in current role)

I couldn't take a day off because of mental health issues because that's not how New Zealand is. Mental health issues other than depression are not okay, not recognised and still hugely stigmatised. (Female, 30-40, Administrator, 9 years in current role)

Because I was very surprised it had not come up in that bullying report. We did say it, but they weren't able to name anyone. But people are too scared to name names. (Female, 40-50, Administrator, 15 years current role)

For one participant, colleagues had attempted to help her address problems with bullying. She also employed personal coping strategies:

They try to stand up for people and say, "when you see her, walk the other way". It's like the bully at school. How are you supposed to get on with life? My new year's resolution was to be braver and stand up to them. (Female, 40-50, Administrator, 15 years in current role)

For one participant, witnessing bullying was a main driver for joining the union because he believed the union could assist with future problems and prioritise well-being more so than the employer.

The union prioritise well-being more so than the institution. I feel reassured that if there was a need for support, it would be forthcoming. (Male, 30-40, Manager, 1 year in current role)

On the other hand, two participants had sought assistance from HR to deal with bullying with satisfactory results. For one participant, HR staff and the Manager were pleased she had raised the issue. She said,

I guess the university commended me for doing something, it's just going through the process to help you to feel better about it. (Female, 30-40, Administrator, 1 year in current role)

Another participant had utilised HR's Respect Programme, also with pleasing results. The effect of the process on the participant are revealed in the participant's story.

I've found the Respect Programme useful. That's been supportive for well-being of staff. We have the option to use the EAP service, so that's a positive aspect. (Male, 30-40, Manager, 1 year in current role)

In sum, participants identified aspects of physical health and safety and an absence of bullying as necessary for well-being. Problems with bullying and the perceived lack of managerial support in response to bullying was felt to impact well-being negatively, overshadowing aims to improve well-being. In response, some participants had engaged coping strategies that included avoiding bullies and joining the union. One participant had engaged with the HR department to address bullying complaints with a satisfactory outcome while others did not approach HR. This suggests participants were not aware of the available support, or they lacked the courage to disclose bullying.

#### **4.2.3 Well-being initiatives**

All participants were aware of the services available to support their physical fitness and mental health such as access to the on-campus gym and funded counselling available through the EAP programme. One participant spoke highly of a manual handling workshop that offered training on the safe lifting of heavy objects for those in physically demanding roles. Because the workshop was tailored and targeted to the needs of her specific role, it made her feel valued and contributed to her sense of morale:

I thought the manual handling thing was fantastic. I definitely would put that in the well-being category. As well as being incredibly practical, it felt like our manager saying, "I actually care about your well-being". It was a great morale boost. (Female, 40-50, Senior Librarian, 8 years in current role).

Another participant found a workshop on empathy to be of value because there had been communication problems between staff in the organisation. For example:

There was an empathising workshop. I'm very cynical about these things, but I enjoyed that, and I thought it was worthwhile. (Male, 30-40, Manager, 3 years in current role)

These examples demonstrate that when well-being initiatives are targeted to staff specific needs, they are received positively. On the other hand, other participants expressed cynicism about the purpose, intent,

and usefulness of some of the well-being initiatives they had been offered. These included team-building events and one-off well-being workshops such as mindfulness sessions. Some participants believed they fill a need for the organisation, particularly HR, rather than meeting employee needs. One participant felt the organisation's attempt to promote well-being to be trend following rather than addressing genuine staff needs, while another expressed that such workshops lack human connection.

I drank tea and made a tower out of Lego for well-being. It can only do so much. We come to pretending and happiness is about productivity, it doesn't capture the human stuff. (Male, 30-40, Manager, 3 years in current role)

I don't see how this is going to improve my well-being when there are serious issues that are yet to be resolved. We're told to drink tea for our problems. I'd rather they focus on high-level issues. (Male, 30-40, Manager, 2 years in current role)

I'm sceptical of that within the work environment. There was an external facilitator who came, and found it risible actually, laughable. (Female, 50-60, Librarian, 12 years in current role)

The quotes above demonstrate that for some participants, well-being workshops elicit a sense of irony and scepticism within the context of the existence of broader institutional problems, such as bullying, that was discussed in the previous Section 4.2.2. Another participant raised the problem of frequent organisational restructuring that she believes is harmful to well-being and is not helped by well-being workshops.

I wanted to scream and say if you want people to come in feeling happy, don't put them under constant threat of losing their job. (Female, 50-60, Senior Librarian, 8 years in current role)

In summary, this sub-theme has described participants' views regarding the well-being initiatives participated in. Although some felt these types of activities positively contribute to their well-being at work, most held negative views regarding well-being initiatives. Interviewees generally felt cynical and suspicious about the intent, with a few exceptions. Some do see value in well-being initiatives but only when they serve a useful purpose. Some participants felt the organisation failed to address serious institutional problems around bullying which they say is a higher priority than wellbeing initiatives. Interestingly, the significant majority of interviewees did not raise the union's role in conversations about well-being initiatives, which suggests that the union may not be involved in these matters.

#### **4.2.4 Hauora**

For some, the Māori philosophical approach to well-being, hauora, where te ao Māori practices and Tikanga are embedded in daily life, is explicitly more valuable than well-being workshops offered by the institution. Tikanga practices such as powhiri (Māori welcoming ceremony), noho marae (overnight marae stay) and karakia (Māori prayer) were identified as being more well-being enhancing than institutional workshops. One participant describes.

For Māori, well-being wouldn't be done like that. Having a conversation with a kaumātua is worth 20 million well-being workshops. That re-rejuvenation of Wairau is far more effective. That must achieve well-being. There are few organisations with that much Māori focus. (Female, 50-60, Administrator, 3 years in current role)

However, she felt that some management staff did not value Tikanga activities as they do not enhance applications for promotion. The union, on the other hand, was noted for embedding and valuing cultural knowledge and Tikanga with more sincerity than the organisation.

With the broad ethnic and cultural diversity of the institution's staff and students and the many ways culture shapes well-being, other participants also expressed that institutional responsiveness to their cultural needs is central to their well-being. This sub-theme emerged during conversations in response to the research question 'What are workers' understandings and experiences of well-being within an employment relations framework?' Some participants described that cultural respect and responsiveness, and whānau-friendly institutional practices contributed to their feeling valued, enhancing their sense of well-being.

Well-being is reflected in the makeup of the institution in terms of the ethnicities of its staff members because well-being for different people, for different cultures, means different things. (Female, 40-50, Director, 5 years in current role)

The embedding of Māori values and Tikanga in daily university life, was considered as well-being enhancing for participants who do not identify as Māori. The Marae and the Māori community were defined holistically as providing a place of safety and human connection. For them, Māoritanga contributes to their own unique cultural needs, despite identifying differently. They described feeling a sense of belonging and welcoming, and appreciated the ability to express their own cultural identity through sharing kai and open expressions of concern for whānau:

When breaking bread with Māori, morning teas, coffee with people, that was real, that was genuine well-being, I felt connected and safe. Those are all the best well-being things. (Male, 30-40, Manager, 3 years in current role)

When I attend anything in the Marae, I feel more relaxed and happier, because it builds well-being into everything it does. It's about welcoming you, making you feel special and safe and nurtured. (Female, 40-50, Director, 5 years in current role)

It's about connection and spending time with other Māori, whether it's a Kaumātua or other colleagues that you can talk about things. It doesn't have to be about work; it could just be about being, about karakia. It can be about refreshing your inner self, in a way that's unique to Māori, would be more beneficial. (Female, 50-60, Administrator, 3 years in current role)

Not all participants felt their cultural needs were being appropriately met. Some considered Pakeha and European culture to be overly dominant, overshadowing other cultures. One participant felt that family

values are not as embedded in the workplace in NZ as in her home country of the Philippines, wishing her employers would check in on the well-being of her young family more regularly. Another participant defined well-being as centring around extended family which the institution, does not support well.

Your employer should ask you, are you ok? Are you coping? (Female, 30-40, Administrator, 1 year in current role)

Why isn't this explored by HR, especially if you've got migrants working here. There's never any talk about being in an extended family, and how that may affect work. What are the pressures on you as an employee? (Female, 40-50, Director, 5 years in current role)

One participant felt a disconnect between the safe space of the marae and Māori community compared to the approach to cultural inclusion at the department level. For Māori, there is a high cultural expectation to prioritise activities that contribute to iwi and whānau, such as work in the Marae, Kohanga Reo, and performing powhiri. This participant describes these activities as being essential for her well-being but believes they are undervalued and not well understood by the institution.

It's not part of your job, but because you're Māori you do it. When you apply for professional development, you're told it's not relevant and you enjoy too many hui. (Female, 50-60, Administrator, 3 years in current role)

The union of which some participants are members, is founded on Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles. For one, this approach establishes and maintains a whānau relationship between the members and aligns with the collectivist worldview of Māori.

Our particular union has a cultural understanding, and a CEO who is Māori. We have a real Māori contingent to achieve well-being. There are very few organisations with that much Māori focus. (Female, 50-60, Administrator, 3 years in current role)

In summary, this sub-theme has described how many participants, regardless of personal identity, viewed cultural inclusivity and whānaungatanga as being beneficial to staff well-being, giving them a sense of belonging. On the other hand, other participants felt the university upholds Eurocentric values, thus failing to recognise the importance of cultural and family duties for some ethnic communities. Finally, the union was noted for its committed to Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles as whānaungatanga is central to its mission, contributing to a sense of pride for its members.

#### **4.2.5 Job security**

Several participants noted that the organisation undertakes regular change management reviews, resulting in job loss, reducing staffing levels and increasing the workload of remaining employees. One participant described being decentralised and recentralised within a short timeframe, causing uncertainty, stress, and increased workload in the department.

Redundancies have left two people to do the workload of what previously was four and the workload is just unmanageable. (Female, 50-60, Administrator, 3 years in current role)

Reduced staffing following redundancies is described as increasing workloads for remaining staff, negatively impacting well-being by reducing work life balance.

I should be able to manage my workload and maintain a work life balance. (Female, 40-50, Librarian, 12 years in current role)

One felt the organisation tries to reduce provisions gained through collective bargaining, causing stress about job security. Another participant believed a sense of insecurity drives undesirable behaviours that contributes to larger organisational cultural problems:

The problems you get in large organisations is when people don't feel secure and have to compete. (Female, 40-50, Librarian, 12 years in current role)

The threat of restructuring is always there. If they just gave people secure jobs, paid them sufficiently, gave them agency, and empowered them to sort things out for themselves, they could walk away and leave us to it. (Female, 50-60, Senior Librarian, 8 years in current role).

Restructuring is used by the institution in place of effective performance management, the impact of which keeps problematic staff employed contributing to poor workplace culture.

They should fire more people. It's not good for well-being to have non-performance and bad behaviour go without consequences because it signals that this is tolerated. This is part of the culture, and this is how we do things. It's so undermining. (Male, 30-40, Manager, 3 years in current role)

Threats to job security have a detrimental impact on employees' motivation at work, as some participants described feeling worried about possible further changes that could cause more work intensification. The repeated restructuring was also regarded as a sign of poor management by some participants, who believe it is used to deal with troublesome employees instead of effective performance management.

Those who have experienced work intensification due to redundancies expressed frustration towards managers who make restructuring decisions, considering the knock-on effect for remaining staff.

We need a temp because the workload is just unmanageable. I remember getting a 0.5 fixed-term agreement made permanent with the support of a union representative. (Female, 50-60, Administrator, 3 years in current role)

This sub-theme related to job-security has described how a sense of job insecurity arises for participants from repeated exposure to organisational reviews. Reduced staff numbers are believed to cause increased workloads for remaining staff and the threat of managerial reviews causes them to worry about future

changes. Stress caused by departmental reviews diminishes participants' positive experience of the workplace. Although the union must be consulted on organisational changes affecting members and will respond accordingly, participants did not acknowledge the union's role during restructuring processes.

### **4.3 Enabling organisational environment**

This theme emerged in response to the second and third research questions 'What are the roles of the union, employer and individual regarding employee well-being?' and 'How do workers assess the effectiveness of well-being initiatives offered by employers?'. Participants' descriptions of their experiences and understandings of the workplace factors they believed contribute to well-being are outlined in the sub-themes 4.1.1 to 4.1.6. They viewed these elements as occurring within an enabling organisational environment incorporating a positive organisational culture and supportive management structures.

For participants, a positive organisational culture of care and support that acknowledges the role of the home life and family and good workplace relationships, were described as significant contributors to positive well-being. The maintenance of a positive culture was seen as a shared responsibility between colleagues, management, and the broader organisation was described by the following participants.

Well-being means a culture of caring. Making sure people are okay and helping them, supporting them, not just work-wise. (Female, 30-40, Administrator, 9 years in current role)

I think it's just basic human moral responsibility of the employer to check out how the employees are doing as a whole. (Female, 30-40, Administrator, 1 year in current role)

The organisation has a responsibility to ensure staff well-being. (Male, 30-40, Manager, 3 years in current role)

One participant expected the HR department to play a significant role in ensuring workplace safety, however, she did not feel they were achieving this expectation:

So surely, people and culture are about ensuring the workplace is safe, the workplace is an attractive place to work, where staff are supported. (Female, 50-60, Administrator, 3 years in current role)

#### **4.3.1 Supportive management**

An organisational structure that supports staff is seen as desirable and procedures to deal with problems are expected. Further to this point, staff should feel empowered to raise issues with managers as they arise and staff should be supported, checked in on, and provided training and support.

When problems and stresses arise, the processes are in place to sort it out. People who are more senior should use that power to address those issues. (Female, 50-60, Senior Librarian, 8 years in current role)

Support should be built-in, daily, and constant and consistent. Why employ us to do a job and then let us flounder? (Female, 50-60, Administrator, 3 years in current role)

Views regarding the organisational culture of the university varied. While one participant saw the culture as inherently flawed due to bullying and harassment problems described in Section 4.2.2, another thought the hierarchical structure of the organisation should better allow for upwards progression. A perceived lack of support systems and performance management were believed to be a problem with the organisational culture.

There's lots of things wrong with the culture. (Male, 30-40, Manager, 2 years in current role)

It's short-sighted. Everything is about the next 12 months of funding. When you have a structure based on positions of hierarchy, then you should have the opportunity for the person to move ahead. (Female, 40-50, Director, 5 years in current role)

They should fire more people. It's not good for well-being to have non-performance and bad behaviour go without consequences because it signals this is tolerated. This is part of the culture; this is how we do things. It's so undermining. (Male, 30-40, Manager, 3 years in current role)

#### **4.3.2 Workplace relationships**

Collegial relationships were highly valued by participants who expressed that supportive workplace relationships enhance their work lives and help to buffer against the negative impacts of bullying and work intensification, as discussed in sub-themes 4.2.2 and 4.2.5. On the other hand, participants were less trustful of their colleagues from other departments, senior management, and central authority figures but there were few reasons given for these feelings. It is worth noting that the organisation had been the subject of recent public scrutiny regarding a negative work culture, which may have influenced their views.

What if we had good employers who put people first and supported them in their roles to do their jobs effectively? We wouldn't need a union. (Female, 50-60, Administrator, 3 years in current role)

Sometimes you and your little team are well, but the organisation is not well. (Female, 30-40, Administrator, 1 year in current role)

The people you work with are a huge determinant of well-being, then it doesn't matter what else is going on. (Male, 30-40, Manager, 3 years in current role)

Despite the perceived divide between academic and professional staff, one participant had felt supported by the encouragement given to her by academic staff and HR staff.

Even though there's a divide, there's a support, and a camaraderie. HR are checking in, very supportive. (Female, 30-40, Administrator, 1 year in current role)

The institution as a whole might need work. On the smaller level, maybe it's doing okay. But on a larger scale, I think it needs improvement. (Female, 30-40, Administrator, 1 year in current role)

Personal characteristics of co-workers, such as having a pleasant attitude and being a team player, were seen to contribute to a positive work environment.

It should be someone who is quite upbeat and not down on every minor issue. Solution-focused, includes everyone in the room and is looking for opportunities for the wider group to succeed, rather than just an individual. (Male, 30-40, Manager, 2 years in current role)

While positive descriptions of interpersonal relationships were dominant, one participant described a poor relationship with a colleague as being a primary cause for stress, and unhappiness causing him to exit the job.

I did everything possible to make the situation I was in work and to make it work but when I felt that I had run out of options, I prioritised my own well-being. (Male, 30-40, Manager, 3 years in current role)

This sub-theme outlined participants' views that organisational culture and supportive management are essential for their positive work experiences and well-being. Interviewees expressed the expectation for there to be in place effective processes for managers to address problems as they arise. To summarise this finding, participants believed the work environment plays a crucial role in employee well-being due to management's power over decisions that impact individuals' work experiences. Supportive work relationships with close colleagues are integral to participants positive experiences of work, with some crediting positive collegial relationships with mitigating negative factors.

#### **4.4 The role of the union**

The third theme is related to the role of the union and participants' views regarding the impact that unions have on their experiences of well-being and also responds to the second research question 'What are the roles of the union, employer and individual regarding employee well-being?' Participants generally believed that the provisions of the CEA benefit employee well-being, recognising a link to improved working conditions and well-being regardless of membership status. Annual negotiated wage rises were appreciated for helping meet the cost of living, while penal rates compensated those with unusual working hours. The following quotes demonstrate participants' recognition of the role of the union.

A lot of those terms and conditions are helpful for people's well-being. (Male, 30-40, Manager, 2 years in current role)

I think that I can pay my rent, I can meet my costs for food. Yes, that's number one. (Female, 40-50, Librarian, 12 years in current role)

In terms of well-being, the unions are able to hold the university to account to follow through on the promises that they made in the collective agreements. (Male, 30-40, Manager, 2 years in current role)

There was some frustration expressed by a small number of participants about what they saw as the unfair practice of passing on of CEA provisions to non-union-members, particularly pay increases. Those participants recognised that members work towards those provisions, while non-union members do not.

During the negotiations, they say that non-union members get it as well. Do they think that the university gives you a pay rise out of the goodness of their heart, because they love you? No, it's only because we've negotiated it. (Female, 50-60, Administrator, 3 years in current role)

Unions face challenges within the membership and from outside forces that can impact their effectiveness. One participant sees the organisation as a threat to the employment conditions that she relies on. Another participant, though recognising the challenges unions face, believes unions, on the whole, remain effective.

Management have been slowly chipping away at conditions, overtime, and penal rates. (Female, 40-50, Librarian, 12 years in current role)

Unions are very constrained legally and by the mindset of the majority of its membership, which has just been bludgeoned into a state of nervous submission. In some ways, people are willing to accept so little. Unions do a pretty good job given the forces that are raging against them. (Female, 40-50, Director, 5 years in current role)

One participant understood the union's role in achieving favourable benefits through collective bargaining, though he chose not to join due to the cost. Other participants had different reasons for not joining the union. One participant who is employed under an individual agreement chooses not to join because she thinks the union lacks power despite being a former and long-term union member.

I can't see the direct benefit to me, but I can't say that there is not a benefit for others. (Male, 30-40, Manager, 2 years in current role)

I'm on an IEC that doesn't encourage union participation. I think the union has not been effective for members as they get overridden by the policies that exists in the HR system. (Female, 40-50, Director, 5 years in current role)

In summary, regardless of membership status, the significant majority of participants linked collectivism to favourable work conditions that they associated with workplace well-being. Participants attributed annual pay increases, penal rates, and professional development funds as achievements for the union, as discussed in Section 4.1.1.

A small proportion of union members expressed frustration about the practice of passing on, where the employer gives the CEA provisions to non-union members. Participants recognised this practice as unfair

and believed it has an undermining effect on the union. Despite recognising the benefits of the union and being appreciative of the provisions of the CEA, some participants have chosen not to join. They cited costs as a factor and fear of prejudice from management that they believed could negatively impact them.

#### **4.5 Summary**

This Chapter has presented the findings as follows. Sections 4.2.1 to 4.2.5 responded to the first research question: ‘What are workers’ understandings and experiences of well-being in the workplace within an employment relations framework?’ These sections described participants views regarding what well-being in the workplace meant to them, as described in sub-themes. In the sub-themes, participants identified career progression as an important aspect of overall job satisfaction and identified physical health and safety as an important aspect of employee well-being with workplace bullying identified as posing a threat to well-being. Participants also expressed an appreciation for the inclusion of Tikanga Māori in daily university life, but also desired wider cultural recognition. The last sub-theme described the view that threats to job security also threaten well-being at work.

The second main theme in Section 4.3, 'Enabling organisational environment,' correlates to the second research question in this study' which asks 'What are the roles of the union, employer and individual regarding employee well-being?'. Participants described well-being as occurring within an enabling organisational environment. The value placed on workplace relationships emerged as a sub-theme and describes participants reliance on collegial relationships to mitigate the harmful impact of negative workplace aspects. The final theme 'the role of the union' in Section 4.4 has also responded to the second main research question "what are the roles of the union, employer and individual regarding employee well-being?"

The third research question ‘How do workers assess the effectiveness of well-being initiatives offered by employers?’ is addressed in the next section under sub-theme 4.2.3 ‘well-being initiatives’ in which the majority of participants described a degree of scepticism regarding the intentions and effectiveness of well-being initiatives offered by the employer. These key findings will be discussed in Chapter 5 in relationship to extant scholarship and their implications for policy, practice.

## **5 Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the analysis from the interviews with the participants of this study to expand on how they define and understand well-being in the workplace and to understand the roles of the parties to the employment relationship. This chapter is divided into seven sections. Section 5.2 gives an overview of the study. Section 5.3 aligns with the sub-themes in the findings in response to the first research question, “What are worker’s understandings and experiences of well-being in the workplace”. Each sub-theme represents a definition of workplace well-being given by participants. The sub-themes are 5.3.1 career progression and job satisfaction, 5.3.2 physical and psychological health and safety, and 5.3.3 well-being initiatives. This sub-theme responds to the third research question which asks, “How do workers assess the effectiveness of well-being initiatives offered by employers”. Section 5.3.5 discusses the finding related to the Māori concept of Hauora, and Section 5.3.5 describes the sub-theme relating to job security.

Section 5.4 discusses the findings in response to the second research question, “What are the roles of the union, employer, and individual regarding employee well-being. This section develops the idea that the well-being factors described by participants, occur within an enabling organisational environment. Finally, Section 5.5 also responds to the first research question by discussing participants’ views regarding how the union impacts on participant understandings of well-being.

### **5.2 Overview of the study**

This study arose from a personal interest and involvement as an executive member of a union and being employed in a university. The study was therefore informed by the privileged positioning as an insider. This research aimed to explore the understandings and perceptions of work related well-being from the point of view of professional staff employed in a New Zealand university and to explore the roles of the parties to the employment relationship, to include the employee, employer, and the union. Participants did not need to be union members as all participants held knowledge of and exposure of unionisation. Most participants were employed under the terms of a CEA, benefitting from Collective Bargaining, and thus it was not anticipated for membership status to make a difference in participant accounts. The research sits within the context of a rich employment relations environment, in which trade unions in New Zealand have a rich history, but have experienced a significant decline, in part due to neo-liberal policy reforms in New Zealand, following the global trend of the 1990s. Passing on of conditions to non-members and persistent ideological resistance to unions also play a part.

The qualitative research design is based on the interpretive philosophical paradigm. Following one pilot interview to test the research questions, 10 participants were interviewed, face to face, in a semi-

structured format. Participants were recruited using a purposive snowball technique. The study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic which proved challenging at times when it was not possible to meet in person, however, online video calls were utilised and, there was no discernable impact of the pandemic on the research outcomes.

### **5.3 Summary of understandings of well-being**

This section discusses the primary findings that were presented in Section Chapter 4.2 in which five sub-themes emerged in response to the first research question” What are workers’ understandings and experiences of well-being in the workplace?”.

#### **5.3.1 Career progression and job satisfaction**

As Page and Vella-Brodrick (2009) have pointed out, employee well-being research has tended to focus on aspects of job satisfaction. Therefore, it was not unexpected for participants to describe having opportunities for career progression as being related to their sense of job satisfaction. Bryson et al (2015) describes job satisfaction as arising from a pleasurable assessment of elements of the job in which a perceived value is achieved through the work environment and opportunities for career development is a factor of job quality contributing to wellbeing. Further, literature finds that recognition, and promotion to be useful predictors of job satisfaction Macky and Boxall (2009).

For many participants however, this need was not met. The perception that advancement is not as easily achieved as for their academic colleagues is a source of frustration for professional staff who believe the cause is due to organisational barriers. Although academics and professional staff are employed under separate CEAs with different expectations and conditions, participants of this study had pointed out that they too were highly qualified and experienced, with the concentration of participants holding senior roles. The frustration lies with being stuck at a level without a clear pathway to progress within the university.

Interestingly, participants attributed the lack of opportunities for progression to the way in which the organisation is run along with decisions of management which is in line with the view of scholars that employers are largely responsible for workplace practices and decision-making (Bryson et al., 2015; Laroche, 2016). Despite expressing their feelings of frustration, participants did not wish to exit the workplace, nor did they seek assistance from the union or the organisation to resolve the situation, though it is possible the union could take a more active role during CEA negotiations to address this need. Collective bargaining has the potential to improve working conditions (Hagedorn et al., 2016), and employees of the university are primarily employed under the terms of a CEA which entitles them to time

and allowances for professional development. However, these provisions were not seen to lead to genuine opportunities for career advancement.

There was one exception to the group, whereby a participant had actively lobbied the employer via the union for increased further education provisions, demonstrating that unions can effect favourable change. As a result, this action has improved the career prospects for those who chose to train at a higher level and thus progress. On the whole, participants had not voiced dissatisfaction regarding the perceived lack of career progression with either the union or management, which may indicate low levels of union engagement, or lack of awareness for unions to positively influence the work environment. Traditionally unions have responded to the needs of disadvantaged members, however, Haynes et al. (2007) recommends unions respond to the aspirations of modern employees in areas such as career development, both to preserve membership and rejuvenate participation.

### **5.3.2 Physical and psychological health and safety**

Worldwide, unions have contributed to improved pay, conditions and health by having a say in health and safety policy (Reynolds & Brady, 2012; Wallace, 1987). Therefore, it is unsurprising to find that participants identified a healthy and safe work environment as being a significant element of workplace well-being. Participants recognised the benefits available to them from employer provided gym and counselling access as discussed in Sections 4.1.4-1.4. Health promotion provisions are in line with international trends for organisations who are concerned with improving employees' well-being, which are known to enhance productivity, reduce stress, and combat absenteeism (Cooper & Barton, 2016).

However, following the recognition of employer provided well-being provisions, participants raised the issue of bullying between co-workers, which they described as threatening to their own and others' mental health and job security. Although it could be argued that heightened awareness of bullying was due to media scrutiny, participants believed the organisation enabled a bullying culture from a lack of effective response to the problem, to the detriment of employee well-being. This also confirms the findings of Bryson et al. (2015), that employees perceived employers to be largely responsible for the work environment and workplace culture.

Some participants had employed personal coping strategies to deal with bullying in response to what was seen as a lack of organisational support, with participants also fearing that disclosure could result in job loss. For one participant, this fear of reprisals had led him to join the union to offset this risk. This is consistent with union belonging motives described in the dissatisfaction-threat-theory, in which the primary reason for joining is to ward off future problems (Haynes et al., 2007). Respondents generally did not trust the organisation to effectively deal with bullying despite there being the potential for the organisation to do so. Cooper-Thomas et al. (2013) identifies that organisations can significantly reduce

bullying through effective anti-bullying actions to reduce the harmful impacts. There is also a role for the union to play in protecting employees from the harmful effects of bullying.

It is interesting to note that most participants had not approached the union for help, despite the potential for them to respond to member distress through advocacy or by contributing to the development of health and safety policy (Reynolds & Brady, 2012; Wallace, 1987). Perceptions of union performance are a driver for union joining behaviour in NZ (Haynes et al., 2007) and again, as identified previously in Section 5.3.1, it is possible that members lack the awareness of the potential for the union to influence positive change in organisational matters.

### **5.3.3 Well-being initiatives**

With a few exceptions, participants generally did not see value in participating in organisational well-being related activities, with most feeling sceptical about the intentions behind them. The sense of scepticism in this study appears to have arisen from the awareness of the presence of deeper institutional problems. Literature suggests there may be a divide between the perception of the employer regarding the intentions of well-being workshops and the employee's perception. To illustrate, Dailey et al. (2018) finds that critics of well-being initiatives may view them as a form of managerial control. Spence (2015) advises that receptivity to well-being programmes is improved when an organisation is committed to systemic change, meaning that organisations might contribute better to improved employee well-being outcomes by addressing the underlying causes of work-related stress. Along similar lines, Caperchione et al. advises organisations should commit to improving human relations as a pathway to well-being (2016).

In contrast to the negative views held about well-being initiatives, participants expressed appreciation for access to free fitness classes, as well as the EAP, recognising the potential benefits to personal physical and mental health. This confirms the findings by Dailey (2018) that employees will engage in well-being initiatives when they recognise effective well-being programmes for reducing risks to health and improving overall quality of life. When employees recognise wellness initiatives as effective, they feel they are valued and cared for by the organisation (Dailey et al., 2018). This is indeed the sentiment that was expressed by participants in this study.

However, it is essential to the success of well-being initiatives to build trust relationships between staff and management Byrnes et al. (2020) and therefore, Spence (2015) advises employers should be upfront about the goals of well-being exercises. Byrnes et al. (2020) advises that this is achieved through open communication. There was one exception to the main group which reflects these findings, whereby one participant described a deep appreciation for a workshop which she viewed as serving a specific need that would increase her safety in the workplace and hence made her feel valued by her manager by helping to prevent harm.

#### **5.3.4 Hauora**

As outlined in the findings, in Section 4.2.4, participants believed it to be important for cultural recognition and inclusivity to be built into the organisation as they saw cultural appreciation as a significant contributor to work-related well-being. However, this topic was not reviewed in the literature, and therefore, academic sources in this discussion are additional.

Many participants, irrespective of personal ethnic identity, asserted that well-being occurs within a holistically, human connected environment, a concept that aligns with the Māori concepts of Hauora, whānaungatanga, tikanga and whānau. For Māori and non-Māori alike, the integration of Tikanga and Māoritanga into daily university life offers well-being benefits which participants reported as transcending beyond the Māori community to all employees, including Tauwiwi (non-Māori). For some, despite being non-Māori, involvement with the Māori community offered a deep sense of belonging which enhanced their social interaction and offered a safe space.

According to Brougham and Haar (2013), work-family and family-work enrichment is related to workplace-cultural-satisfaction. Māori are a collectivist people and those from collectivist societies see themselves as operating in a network of social relationships, including families (Hook, 2007). Cultural ideas and values play a role in the family-work interface (Spector et al., 2007) which also aligns with the Māori views of whānau and whānaungatanga (Brougham et al., 2013). Haar and Brougham (2013) propose that job and well-being outcomes could benefit from greater understanding and promotion of cultural differences by employers.

Indeed, cultural, religious, and family responsibilities featured significantly in the lives of some interviewees, and they felt strongly there should be wider cultural recognition in the workplace. Some participants had expressed that the workplace could improve cultural inclusivity by encouraging flexible working hours to allow for more family, work integration and by celebrating a more diverse range of cultural events such as a greater range of religious holidays. This finding concurs with Shore et al. (2011) who suggest that culturally inclusive workplaces offer a sense of belongingness which improves well-being for the benefit of both employees and employers.

The union was acknowledged by some participants for its commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles, with whānaungatanga being central to its mission which is highly valued by participants and especially so by Māori members. In this regard then, there is potential for the union to have a greater influence over the work environment to achieve this aim and again and therefore, it is in the interests of workers and unions to engage with members to respond to modern worker aspirations (Haynes et al., 2007).

### 5.3.5 Job security

Job security is an established and important aspect of overall job satisfaction and, in turn, is a key element of overall well-being (Alfonso & Andres, 2000). This sub-theme relating to job-security arose from participant stories about frequent exposure to organisational restructuring and reviews. Most participants had been exposed to restructure at some point in their work lives, including within the university, and they agreed that it has a negative impact on experiences of work and therefore well-being. Firstly, restructuring was described as causing stress, especially for those impacted by redundancy, but also for others in the affected area. Secondly, frequent exposure to restructuring creates a sense of unease for remaining employees who fear future restructuring may impact them. Fear of job loss is a significant cause of stress which arises from worry about lost income, especially for those with family and financial responsibilities. Lastly, job losses caused by redundancies also reduces staff numbers, causing work intensity for those who remain in the role.

Blanchflower (2020) had noted that job security has improved over time due to union protections from arbitrary dismissal, and Reynolds and Buffel (2020) had described unions as contributing indirectly to employee health due to increasing job security. Even in light of improvements to job security over time, fear of job loss remains and, according to the findings from this study affirms the claim by Selenko et al. (2017) who explains that the fear and apprehension of job loss is particularly harmful, as it lowers well-being and job performance.

Although employers must consult with unions when proposing staff changes that impact their members, the union's traditional role has traditionally been a responsive one, and this is recognised by participants who did not identify the union as being able to influence the institution's practices. Participants stories portrayed a sense of powerlessness by both employees and the union compared to the employer who has the power to make decisions. On the other hand, one participant had identified the union as being particularly effective at responding to specific threats to provisions under the CEA. It is possible then that reduced union power has arisen in the context of union decline and with ideological opposition to unions (Levi, 2003; Radcliff, 2005). It is also possible that participants voicing their dissatisfaction with decisions by management is actually brought about by the enabling of voice, thus demonstrating the effect of the dissatisfaction paradox (Guest & Conway, 2004). If this is the case, then this may be a demonstration of union effectiveness.

Union belonging theory describes the security model as workers joining unions as a protective mechanism from arbitrary dismissal (Flavin & Shufeldt, 2016). Guest & Conway (2004) noted that while workers expect unions to deliver fairer outcomes between employees and management, union pressure increases organisational commitment to employee obligations. Potential remains for unions to manage the

expectations of members more proactively in regard to increasing job security or protecting members from the stress caused by the fear of job loss.

#### **5.4 Enabling organisational culture**

Enabling organisational culture is the second main theme that emerged in response to the first and second research questions that asked, “what are workers’ understandings and experiences of well-being in the workplace within the employment relations framework?; and “what are the roles of the union, employer, and individual regarding employee well-being?”. This theme relates to how participants viewed the workplace factors described in the sub-themes as occurring within an enabling work environment and were presented in terms of either positively or negatively contributing to experiences of workplace well-being. A positive organisational culture and supportive management was regarded as essential for good experiences at work and, therefore, well-being. For example, being recognised by the employer and having opportunities for career progression are predictors of job-satisfaction (Macky & Boxall, 2009), outlined in Section 4.2.1 and discussed in Section 5.3.1 Participants felt they lacked career opportunities and meaning this element of job satisfaction was not satisfied and therefore, their well-being related to work was partially reduced. Participants attributed the lack of career opportunities to managerial practices and decisions. However, they did not look to the union to bring about change or acknowledge the role of either the union and its members or the organisation for setting in place the terms of the CEA.

In the second sub-theme outlined in Section 4.2.2 and discussed in Section 5.3.2, participants appreciated employer provided fitness and the EAP recognising the positive impact on wellness. In contrast to this positive impact of employer practice, participants viewed workplace bullying as a significant threat to their workplace well-being, and again viewed the employer for setting the environment that enables bullying. One participant presented the idea that poor staff behaviour may be caused by constant threats to job security, which is discussed in the sub theme related to job security in Section 5.3.4. Although it is possible for organisations to significantly reduce bullying by enacting effective anti-bullying programmes, (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2013), participants did recognise the potential for management to enact any such programme. It is also interesting to note they did not expect the union to act, despite there being potential to do so.

Interviewees primarily placed responsibility for the work environment on the employer and held expectations for management to address problems as they arise. Participants held recognition for the impact of the work environment to affect the well-being of employees. Again, these findings concur with Warr (2011), who suggests that employers are largely responsible for setting the characteristics of the job that impact employees. This is most obviously expressed in participants’ desire for a positive career outlook, supportive supervision, realistic demands of the job such as manageable workload, work-life balance, and having a safe work environment, free from bullying. These findings also align with (Bryson

et al., 2015) who suggests that management are largely responsible for managerial practices and decision making that impact employees.

While participants acknowledged the union's role in obtaining favourable working conditions, the majority of participants instead looked to the organisation to provide a supportive work environment.

Collegial relationships were also described as a significant contributor to well-being due to social connections and sense of fulfilment the workplace can enable (Ministry of Business Innovation & Employment, 2019). However, participants to an extent viewed their work friendships as a support mechanism to mitigate the negative effects of bullying in light of ineffective management. They also utilised work friends to help with increased workload caused by staff cuts. One participant believed a lack of performance management undermines the university's overall culture due to negative behaviours such as bullying that have been able to thrive as discussed in Section 5.2.2, while another believed it was due to stress caused by fear of job loss.

While most participants had experienced supportive collegial relationships it was acknowledged that poor work relationships can pose a risk to well-being, by causing feelings of stress and unhappiness.

Participants described a culture of care and support as being essential for positive work experiences, seeing it as a shared responsibility between colleagues, management, and the wider organisation.

While participants expected the university to have in place procedures to deal with problems, to maximise effective management, they also believed the organisational culture should empower staff to raise issues as they arise. One participant had clear ideas about how management could support staff for the benefit of well-being, by regularly checking in on work progress and providing training and support.

## **5.5 The role of the union**

Research has linked unions to increasing job dissatisfaction by enabling employees to voice their displeasure, and management may be concerned that unions encourage members to perceive role conflict and therefore raise job stress (Davis, 2013; Freeman & Medoff, 1984). Macky and Boxall (2009). did not find any link between union membership to increased overall job satisfaction. However, Davis (2013) advises that unions can improve job satisfaction by altering the work environment in a positive way and therefore, may have potential to advocate for members such as seeking career progression.

It appears that there is a disconnect between employee recognition of the benefits available to them from unionisation. In light of participants' accounts of a problematic culture in the organisation, union members have not sought the assistance of the union, and it does not appear to be a factor motivating non-members to join. It is possible that participants either lack awareness of the potential for unions to help

with institutional problems, or do not believe the union have the power required to affect change. of socialisation and solidarity through the mechanisms of the union, (Flavin & Shufeldt, 2016).

It is not surprising that respondents were aware of the union's presence, given the long history of unionisation in the tertiary education sector and that participants employed under the CEA acknowledged the direct benefits of union membership. However, this recognition was largely limited to the impact of union-won wage rises over other possible benefits that have been identified in the literature, such as enhanced holiday entitlements, family-friendly policies, dispute resolution services, increased health and safety and reduced turnover. Furthermore, there was minimal recognition by participants for the potential for unions to affect change in regard to the workplace aspects that they described as negative such as lack of opportunities for career progression and fear of job loss.

Participants strongly felt that having opportunities for career progression is a significant feature of overall job satisfaction, and therefore work-related well-being. However, while the role of the union in achieving training allowances and time for professional development was acknowledged, participants felt that organisational barriers prevent them from moving to roles with higher responsibility and pay. This is an interesting finding because it suggests there is potential for unions to affect more change in this area and aligns with Haynes et al. (2007) suggestion that unions should focus more on career development in order to adapt to the contemporary workplace.

As described in sub-theme 4.2.4 'Hauora', some participants described gaining a sense of connection via involvement with the Māori community and experiences with Tikanga enabled through the workplace. Although the employer and Māori community itself is largely responsible for setting the environment for Tikanga to thrive, the union was also acknowledged for its commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles, with whānaungatanga being central to its mission which for some members is invaluable. On the other hand, some participants felt there was more that could be done to meet the needs of the wider staff community, especially in recognition of religion and family needs.

Flavin and Shufeldt (2016) had identified job security as being one of four ways that unions can contribute to well-being. Although, job security has increased over time and collective voice can protect from arbitrary dismissal (Blanchflower & Bryson, 2020), some participants described a sense of fear of job loss due to frequent exposure to organisational restructuring while employed in the university. The work intensification that results as a consequence of reduced staff numbers was also described as a source of stress. Fear of job loss according to Selenko (2017) potentially diminishes health, while improved job security is known to increase health (Reynolds & Buffel, 2020).

Union belonging theories describe New Zealand workers joining unions as instrumental collectivists, meaning they join for the benefits afforded by membership (2007). In a context of union decline, it is possible that reduced union power has impacted employee's sense of job security. Therefore, in order to continue to offer workers protection and benefits, union revitalisation is important.

A small proportion of participants expressed frustration about the passing on of provisions that have been achieved through collective negotiation, which they viewed as undermining the work of unions. Passing on collectively bargained provisions is considered by some to reduce capacity to attract new members and, therefore, obtain effective outcomes, whether or not that is the employee's objective (Barnes, 2005). It is possible that in addition to declining unionisation, passing on practices have also reduced union achievements and, therefore power.

In line with the literature, some participants while recognising the beneficial outcomes of union activity, had chosen not to join the union due to the costs outweighing the benefits or fearing negative repercussions from management. This finding supports the claim from Furåker & Bengtsson (2013) that some workers choose not to join unions despite understanding the protective benefits.

The purpose of this theme was to describe the union's role concerning work experiences perceived to impact well-being. Unions were recognised for their role in securing wage increases and were recognised for honouring the Treaty of Waitangi and committing to whānaungatanga (relating to others). However, there was less awareness of the union's role in other areas of concern to participants. Despite receiving training incentives under the CEA, participants felt frustrated at a lack of career advancement opportunities, which, although attributed to the organisation's role by participants, suggests there is potential for the union to affect change in this area. Many participants reported feeling frustrated about provisions of collective bargaining being passed on to non-members, which they feel undermines union power. Finally, participants described the experience of organisational reviews as stressful and contributed to the fear of losing their jobs.

## **5.6 Summary of discussion and study contributions**

In the previous chapter, the thematised findings following interviews with 10 participants were presented. This chapter has analysed and discussed the findings relative to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and has addressed the research objectives outlined in Section 1.3. The first research aim was to explore the understandings and experiences of well-being in the workplace within an employment relations framework. The emergent themes have described a range of workplace aspects that participants describe as being reliant on an enabling organisational environment. This finding links to the second research objective, to understand the roles of the parties to the employment relationship. It was found that participants predominantly attribute the organisational culture to the responsibility of the employer rather

than the union or the employees. While the union was appreciated for having achieved some favourable terms and conditions in the CEA, participants did not explicitly link these provisions with contributing to their work-related well-being. Instead, participants viewed the work environment as being the main contributor to their work-related well-being, and primarily viewed the employer as responsible for providing the setting that enables the contributors to work-related well-being. Another significant finding was that well-being initiatives offered by the employer are not, on the whole, well received, particularly when there are perceived institutional problems. However, well-being initiatives are perceived more favourably when they serve a specific need or purpose and when trust relationships are established between staff and management.

Previous well-being research has tended to adopt quantitative surveys to measure global happiness levels in relation to certain factors. However, this study contributes to well-being research by offering an inductive, interpretative qualitative approach to explore perceptions and deep understandings related to work and employee well-being within the employment relationship. The study is set in the context of declining union coverage, thus impacting union power to influence organisational decision making. Previous research found reduced job satisfaction as a measure of well-being linked to union membership. However, it is now found that poor work conditions lead to increased union membership and union enabled worker expressions of dissatisfaction ‘voice’. Further to this, recent research, has found increased well-being associated with unionisation that increases with higher union density.

Overall the study identified a set of work and job characteristics that contribute to employee understandings of well-being with employees perceiving those as occurring within an enabling organisational environment. The study also demonstrates that there may be a lack of recognition and awareness for the potential for unions to influence change as participants did not in any significant way perceive the union as having influence over organisational decision making. Literature shows there is merit in increasing union coverage for the benefit of both employees and organisations. However, in light of ideological resistance to unionism, this may be challenging. There are few qualitative studies exploring understandings of well-being in relation to work and unionisation in a New Zealand university. Therefore, this study contributes new knowledge on the topic of well-being and trade unions in NZ. This study may contribute to policy by highlighting the benefits to well-being that extend beyond members to all of society. Furthermore, this study may contribute to organisational practice by highlighting the potential benefits of unionisation to encourage workers to membership. In addition, findings may also contribute union efforts to revitalise by recommending a strategy that responds to the modern needs of workers, while continuing to respond to worker distress.

This chapter discussed the key findings that were presented in Chapter 4 in relation to the main questions that were stated the aim of the study in Section 1.3. The findings were discussed, interpreted, and

explored, in relation to existing knowledge from the literature. The next and final chapter presents the conclusion and offers recommendations.

## **6 Conclusion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of the aims of the study in Section 6.2 and reflects on the key findings in Section 6.3. In Subsection 6.3.1, the limitations of the study are explained. Recommendations arising from the research findings and discussion are provided in Section 6.4. Finally, Section 6.6 concludes with final thoughts on the study.

### **6.2 Study overview**

This research aimed to explore the understandings of Professional staff employed in a NZ university regarding work-related well-being by exploring the roles of the employer, the employee, and the union, as the main parties to the employment relationship. The effectiveness of well-being initiatives was also explored. By thematically analysing the narratives of 10 interviewees, four important factors related to work were found as contributors to well-being. They are career progression opportunities, physical and psychological health and safety considerations, and a holistic and culturally inclusive organisational environment, closely aligned to the Māori worldview hauora. Within the context of an organisation viewed as having a dysfunctional culture that enables bullying, interviewees were not likely to respond positively to well-being initiatives. However, it was found that employees are more likely to participate in and gain satisfaction from such programmes when they serve a specific need and when the employer's intentions are communicated honestly. Participants mainly viewed the union's contribution as being limited, though participants were aware of the limits to union power in the context of declining unionisation. In line with existing research, the employer is attributed as the main contributor to the experiences of work by setting the organisational culture and controlling management decisions. The literature reviewed reveals that where unions were once found to decrease job satisfaction, they are now linked to higher well-being. In a context of declining unionism, the literature debates behaviour related to union joining and belonging which offers insight to member's expectations. However, in light of continued ideological opposition, it remains difficult to recruit and retain members. Literature also recommends that to ensure the continuing benefits of unions, that employers through their practices, and governments through policy settings should encourage union friendly policies. In order to aid efforts to revitalise, unions could adapt to address some of the modern needs of workers in a changing work environment.

### **6.3 Reflections on the study and findings**

This section reflects on the key findings of this study, identifies expected and surprising findings, and demonstrates how new knowledge has been gained. This study achieved slightly fewer participants than anticipated as recruitment began during the 2020 Covid pandemic, and two participants were lost due to

interruptions. However, rich material was gained from remaining participants, and on reflection, additional interviews may have proved difficult to analyse in the time available.

The research findings highlighted essential elements contributing to participants' experiences and understandings of work related well-being. Job satisfaction is one, and more specifically having opportunities to progress in the role is viewed as a sign of valuing and recognition by employers. It was not anticipated however to find participants feel frustrated about having high level qualifications and years of experience, while being held back from progression opportunities. It is possible that the seniority of the participants regarding their age and experience contributed to frustrations as they have unique expectations for their career development that are not being met. This dynamic leads to potential lines of inquiry regarding career pathways for those with high level qualifications and midlife career experience.

While it was expected for participants to identify physical and psychological safety as a contributor to workplace well-being, due to general knowledge about health and safety, it was not anticipated for participants to raise bullying as being a significant threat to psychological health and job security. It is possible that the organisational context at the time played a role, however this finding suggests that large organisations should address problems that could lead to bullying, and to implement effective anti-bullying programmes, while providing an organisational culture that does not enact reprisals on complainants.

There are significant benefits to employers and workers from increased well-being, but the literature in this study and participant stories highlighted that well-being initiatives are not well received when they do not serve a useful purpose. In hindsight, it is recognised that the line of questioning around well-being initiatives was posed as a main research question but during interviewing was overshadowed by responses to the first question which is reflected in the unbalanced weight given to the first question in the findings and discussion. The first research question elicited lengthy and rich descriptions related to the many elements of the work experience. While questioning about well-being initiatives was posed in an open way respondents gave very clear and succinct opinions, with little ambiguity, and conversations returned to the first research question. Participants' felt so passionately about the factors related to their well-being, that it highlighted the significant impact that work plays in people's lives.

Another surprising finding was participants' deep appreciation and need for cultural inclusivity. In particular the well-being enhancing practice of Tikanga, embedded into daily university life is valued by both Māori and non-Māori. It is possible that the enrichment offered by Tikanga is taken for granted by some, however, for many participants, Māoritanga offers a safe space and fills a cultural and familial gap. Brougham et al. (2013) points out that Tikanga practices in the workplace is an understudied topic in NZ, which presents another opportunity for further inquiry.

The study has confirmed what is known about contributions to work-place well-being, but has provided new knowledge that for some employees, the union is not at the forefront of mind when thinking about the factors that contribute to workplace well-being. However, in the context of declining unionisation, and with employer practices of passing on provisions in CEA's this may not be surprising.

### **6.3.1 Study limitations**

This study utilised a qualitative thematic analysis using a small sample group that were suitable for the scope of a master's study. The findings only reflect the participants' perspectives, and the researcher's interpretative analysis, and may not be generalised to wider populations or organisations. It is acknowledged that a larger group may have presented different views about similar experiences. The findings are also limited to the context of the university as the organisational site and the professional staff participants who were employees at a New Zealand university. It is acknowledged that the group's opinions may have been influenced by the unique organisational setting, the dynamics of specific staff identities and the tertiary education sector more widely.

The COVID-19 pandemic may have caused us to reflect on the ways we work when from March 2020 to May 2020, New Zealand entered its first lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Although it was anticipated that lockdown and working from home would impact this study, it had only a minimal effect, since most New Zealanders returned to work and life returned largely to normal after COVID-19 was eliminated for a limited period of time. COVID-19 has since emerged again in 2021 causing another lockdown, in which it was largely suppressed, but not eliminated, and is again circulating in 2022. Following the first lockdown in 2020, when participants for this study were being sought, two initial participants were made redundant due to cost-cutting in response to the lack of foreign students entering the country. Therefore, it was decided not to continue with interviewing those impacted participants so as not to burden them with additional responsibilities. It is acknowledged that rich material may have been obtained from those participants. Fieldwork was delayed by approximately two months due to the need to recruit two new participants and the difficulty in doing so without physical access to the institution. It is also acknowledged that the knowledge of redundancies in the organisation may have influenced accounts during interviews.

Another consideration is that the political and ideological environment may have influenced perceptions about unions and the cultural context in NZ is also a unique factor. Much of the former literature on unionisation and well-being derives from international sources, meaning that there were few opportunities for direct comparisons with local sources.

While there are benefits to researching as an insider, I was not approaching most participants as a total stranger. Though participants were assured of their anonymity, being known, even remotely to

participants, may have influenced responses to the interviewer. Participants may also have felt obliged to speak about the union to an Executive Union member positively. A study that wholly or partly incorporates the views of those from a different organisation could overcome this problem. Lastly, an inductive thematic analysis relies on the subjective meanings ascribed to the material, based on the researcher's judgement and understandings of the social world. Just one researcher made decisions regarding coding themes and analysis. Without peer review of themes, the researcher risks incorporating biases into the interpretive process and making assumptions that may or may not exist. To overcome this problem, in future studies, an associate investigator could be included in order to offer an alternative view during the analysis process. Furthermore, a mixed methods study that incorporates a quantitative survey that is not as vulnerable to personal subjective interpretation and biases could offer strength to the findings.

In future studies, the limitations that arise from a small sample size could be addressed by interviewing a slightly larger sample in order to extrapolate deeper themes. To expand the findings beyond the context of a university setting and to address limitations caused by insider research, an alternative industry sample from a unionised sector could also be taken. Finally, literature regarding well-being is mainly quantitative and qualitative approaches are recommended to compliment quantitative studies. This study was approached entirely qualitatively and therefore, a mixed methods approach could overcome the limitations of qualitative methods and provide strong support for the findings while complimenting existing quantitative studies.

Despite the above limitations, the research contributes to knowledge about employee perceptions about work-related well-being concepts and interventions and the parties' role in the employment relationship, particularly unions.

#### **6.4 Recommendations for key stakeholders**

Among the factors identified by participants as being necessary for work-related well-being, a significant finding was the need for opportunities for career progression. Participants believed there to be organisational barriers preventing career progression, especially when compared to academic colleagues who they perceived as having a clearer pathway to promotion. This is despite the fact that the career tracks of academic and professional staff are different. Haynes et al. (2007) advised that professional growth and learning have become important workforce values to which unions should adapt. Training allowances and professional development time is included in the CEA, though unions could make employees more aware of their rights to training and development and offer union led training and learning.

Another finding was that participants viewed employer led well-being initiatives negatively due to cynicism about the employer's intention, particularly in light of the organisational problems identified. To address this problem, employers, employees, and unions could look to co-designing well-being initiatives to best serve the needs of employees. Given that employee well-being benefits employers by increasing productivity, such an approach is beneficial to all parties.

Finally, there is potential for unions to influence organisations by contributing to the development of workplace policies and practices in ways that align with employee needs and values and promote the use of employer initiatives, the EAP and HR tools for conflict resolution. A healthy workplace culture should enable employees to raise problems with managers without negative repercussions.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

The findings from this study demonstrated that employees have clear ideas about what constitutes workplace well-being. Employees also view the employer as largely responsible for setting the employment conditions and organisational environment that enable positive and negative workplace conditions and behaviours to occur. While extant scholarship in the fields of industrial relations, employment relations and organisational psychology indicate that unions are linked to increased well-being, in this study, participants' recognition of the role of the union was limited. Unionisation has the potential to enhance workers' well-being because unions are inherently communal and collectivist.

The literature suggests that governments looking to raise citizen well-being should support policies that promote unionisation as international studies have found increased well-being in unionised countries that grows with union density levels of democracy. Though it may seem a radical idea due to deep seated ideological opposition to unions, due to the fact that employee well-being also increases productivity, there could be a benefit to organisations to promote unionisation. Finally, unions looking to revitalise are recommended to keep abreast of the needs of members, particularly in changing work environments and to adapt to those needs.

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## 8 Appendices

### Appendix A Low Risk Ethics Notification



Date: 06 November 2020

Dear Kristie Hill

Re: Ethics Notification - 4000023607 - Exploring understandings of worker wellbeing and union participation

Thank you for your notification which you have assessed as Low Risk.

Your project has been recorded in our system which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

If situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your ethical analysis, please contact a Research Ethics Administrator.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

**A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:**

*"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research."*

*If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Craig Johnson, Director - Ethics, telephone 06 3569099 ext 85271, email [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz)."*

Please note, if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to complete the application form again, answering "yes" to the publication question to provide more information for one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C Johnson', on a light yellow background.

Professor Craig Johnson  
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)

## Appendix B Participant Information Sheet



MASSEY UNIVERSITY

Massey University Business School

### Worker well-being and the role of trade unions, workers, and employers

#### INFORMATION SHEET

##### Researcher(s) Introduction

*My name is Kristie Elphick, and, I am a Master of Business Studies student at Massey University.*

##### Project Description and Invitation

- You are invited to take part in this study which explores workers' views on well-being and union participation in New Zealand.*
- I want to understand how workers understand and experience concepts of well-being and the effectiveness of well-being initiatives in the tertiary education environment.*

##### Participant Identification and Recruitment

- You have been chosen for this study because you are an employee of a tertiary institute in a non-academic (Allied or Professional) role.*
- You are either a member or a non-member of a union that represents employees in tertiary education.*
- Inclusion criteria include adults who have reached the age of 18 and who speak English.*
- This study aims to recruit approximately 12 participants to be interviewed in person. This number is deemed appropriate for the scope and validity of this study.*
- Your answers are confidential and cannot be linked to your personal details.*
- The survey will take around one hour of your time.*
- Interviews will be recorded on the researcher's personal device and will be transcribed by the researcher. Documents and recordings will be kept in password-protected digital files and will be kept separate from consent forms to prevent linking of identifying information.*

##### Statement of Rights:

*You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:*

- decline to answer any particular question;*
- withdraw from the study at any time;*
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;*
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;*
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.*

- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview if you choose to be interviewed.
- completion and return of the participant consent form constitutes consent. You have the right to decline to answer any particular question.

### **Project Contacts**

Primary Researcher Kristie Elphick. [Kristie.elphick@gmail.com](mailto:Kristie.elphick@gmail.com)  
0272536031

#### *Supervisors:*

Dr Damian Ruth  
+64 (06) 356 9099 ext. 84946  
[D.W.Ruth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:D.W.Ruth@massey.ac.nz)

Professor Jane Parker  
+64 (09) 414 0800 ext. 43393  
[J.Parker@massey.ac.nz](mailto:J.Parker@massey.ac.nz)

*Invite participants to contact the researcher(s) and/or supervisor(s) if they have any questions about the project.*

### **Compulsory Statements**

#### **1. MUHEC APPLICATIONS**

**The following statement is compulsory and MUST be included:**

#### **Committee Approval Statement**

*Select the appropriate statement:*

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application **4000023607**. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x 43347, email [humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz).

## Appendix C Participant Consent Form Individual



**MASSEY UNIVERSITY**

**Massey University Business School**

### **Worker well-being and the role of trade unions, workers, and employers**

#### **PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL**

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

1. I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded. (if applicable include this statement)
2. I agree/do not agree to the interview being image recorded. (if applicable include this statement)
3. I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me. (if applicable include this statement)
4. I wish/do not wish to have data placed in an official archive. (if applicable include this statement)
5. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

#### **Declaration by Participant:**

I \_\_\_\_\_ [print full name] hereby consent to take part in this study.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_