Wellbeing of female employees:
What workplaces attract women?

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Abstract

Purpose: Previous research has highlighted that employee wellbeing in the workplace is closely linked to equity, achievement, and interactions. However, gender inequality in employment opportunities, work-life imbalance, the gender pay gap, and the existence of the *glass ceiling* are workplace realities and generate failures that can reduce women's wellbeing. Based on the theories of organisational justice, affective events, and transactional stress, this research attempts to identify the initiatives or actions that can act as true levers to promote equality and to contribute to the creation of inclusive and attractive workplaces for female employees.

Design/methodology: This study was carried out using the Delphi method. The panel consisted of a group of Spanish experts from the academic and professional fields who had close relationships with the topic of research.

Findings: Parity objectives and flexibility measures are actions that can be effective in achieving gender equality in companies. Factors related to equitable, fair, and non-discriminatory treatment are the main determinants of female wellbeing in the workplace. The quality of female employment and having leaders capable of creating inclusive environments increases the attractiveness of organisations for women.

Originality/value: This research yields interesting findings on the responsibility and role of companies in fulfilling the demands of female employees and in making women fall in love with the workplace.

Keywords: Female employees, Wellbeing, Attractive workplaces, Gender equality, Working conditions, Delphi method

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1. Introduction

In recent years, organisations have intensified their interest in encouraging improved wellbeing for their employees and making their workplaces more charming. Previous research has emphasised that the factors that contribute to positive experiences in the workplace are related to a pleasant work environment, conciliation, professional development opportunities, and relationships with bosses, among others (Anitha, 2014; Juniper, White & Bellamy, 2009; Warr, 2003). Accordingly, The Great Place to Work Institute maintains that the best companies to work for are those that offer fair, ethical, inclusive, and healthy working conditions and environments. Specifically, Sirota and Klein (2013) point out that there are three key factors for employees to feel enthusiastic in their workplaces: equity, achievement, and interactions.

However, gender inequality in employment opportunities, work-life imbalance, the gender pay gap, and the existence of the *glass ceiling* are workplace realities and generate failures that can reduce women's satisfaction and wellbeing. What women really love in their workplaces is related to working conditions and gender equality in terms of daily work experiences, career development, and promotion possibilities (McKinsey, 2021). In a similar vein, Milhouse (2005) has revealed that lack of work-life balance and high levels of job dissatisfaction caused by work-related dimensions, including pay, promotion, feeling of being accepted, equity, and equality, are the main conditions that hinder women's happiness in the workplace.

More and more companies have placed on their agenda awareness and sensitisation initiatives, conciliation and equality promotion strategies, and diversity and inclusion policies aimed at empowering women and giving greater visibility to female talent. However, women continue to have lower job expectations and are generally more likely than men to request full-time leave or temporary reductions in working hours, or refuse training programmes outside work hours, overtime, or the possibility of geographical mobility due to the difficulty of reconciling work commitments with family and housework (OECD, 2014; The World Bank, 2019). These disadvantages contribute to the gender pay gap: once all of the compensable factors such as experience, industry, and job level are accounted for, a woman doing the same job as a man, with the exact same qualifications as a man, is still paid 2% less (Payscale, 2021). There are also imbalances in female representation in the workforce, even more pronounced in leadership positions. In 2021, women hold only 29% of senior management positions worldwide, and 13% of companies have no women in leadership positions (Grant Thornton, 2020; McKinsey, 2021).

The slow progress towards equality contrasts with the rapid increase in women's educational levels and experience, leading to criticism that female talent remains unrecognised, and is undervalued and underutilised (Beaupre, 2022; Knowles & Mainiero, 2021; Tatli, Vassilopoulou & Özbilgin, 2013). Therefore, creating a truly egalitarian and inclusive culture is essential to value female talent, reenchant, and make workplaces attractive for women. Based on behavioural theories of individuals, groups and organizations —affective events (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Lazarus, 1991; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), transactional stress (Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and organisational justice (Colquitt, 2001; Greenberg, 1990)—the objective of this research is to investigate which practices act as the most effective levers to advance equality and create fairer and more equitable workplaces that attract and retain female talent. This study was carried out by applying the Delphi method —which is recommended in areas of knowledge that do not have sufficient empirical evidence or development (Landeta, 2006)— which involved forming a group of Spanish experts from the academic and professional fields who had close relationships with the topic of research.

Until now, there are numerous publications with an informative and divulgative character mainly based on statistics or surveys of female employees (e.g., Women Peace and Security Index Report prepared by the Georgetown Institute, reports of the European Institute for Gender Equality; the report *Women at work: A global perspective* from Deloitte or the Global Gender Gap Report published by the World Economic Forum). To the author's knowledge, this research is the first to use the Delphi methodology to explore the state of the issue and it seeks to confirm, discuss and complement previous findings. It represents a theoretical opportunity for research because much of the previous literature focuses mainly on studying and quantifying the levels of well-being, satisfaction or job stress of women and, in some cases, comparing them with those of their male

counterparts(Bender, Donohue & Heywood, 2005; Clark, 1997; Hendrix, Spencer & Gibson, 1994; Qian & Fan, 2019), while this study is directed towards different aspects that have not previously been addressed in depth, such as, for example, the effectiveness of certain policies and initiatives, trust or mistrust towards gender quotas or the responsibility that must be assumed in the face of existing challenges.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. The second section compiles the useful theories to support this research. The third section details the materials, procedure, and method used in the study. The fourth section shows the results obtained after applying the Delphi method to a group of female experts. The discussion is presented in the fifth section and, finally, the conclusions and implications are presented.

2. Wellbeing of Female Employees: Theoretical framework

Wellbeing can refer to mental, psychological, or emotional aspects of workers and previous literature has tried to identify and combine in different models the factors that can contribute to it to a greater or lesser degree (Danna & Griffin, 1999; Fisher, 2014; Schulte & Vainio, 2010; Sirota & Klein, 2013; Stansfeld, Shipley, Head, Fuhrer & Kivimaki, 2013). For example, Danna and Griffin (1999) suggest that wellbeing is affected by three general sets of antecedent factors: work setting, personality traits, and occupational stress. Schulte and Vainio (2010) point out that workforce well-being depends on 6 factors: workplace factors, environmental factors, occupational hazards, health, host and demographic factors, and socioeconomic status. Work characteristics —e.g., decision latitude, work demands, work social support, control, work pace or conflicting demands— and personal social support are the main determinants according to Stansfeld et al. (2013). Sirota and Klein (2013) emphasize that equity —fair salary, safe working conditions, respectful and dignified treatment, and equal employment opportunities—, achievement —meaning of the work and an inspiring organisational purpose— and interactions —relationships with teammates— are the factors that can condition the work experiences and the enthusiasm of the employees.

Previous literature has also shown that there are certain differences in the way men and women behave, perceive and value their experiences in the workplace (Bender et al., 2005; Clark, 1997; Qian & Fan, 2019). Part of these differences can be explained by traditional gender roles, the gendered division of labor and occupational gender segregation, which have favored discriminatory and unethical practices, and significant gender inequities in women's treatment and interactions, employment opportunities, career development, or promotion (Eagly & Stefen, 1984; Eagly & Wood, 2011). On the one hand, the theory of organisational justice (Colquitt, 2001; Greenberg, 1990) posits that organisations should have effective procedures in place to ensure appropriate behaviour towards members and it explains why employees' perceptions of organisational justice are likely to affect their wellbeing and job satisfaction (Cropanzano & Li, 2006). Different research have shown that high levels of organisational justice (in its two dimensions; that is, procedural and distributive justice) positively affect workers' wellbeing and job satisfaction, revealing gender differences in preferences and orientations towards the different dimensions (Caleo, 2016; Clay-Warner, Culatta & James, 2013; Choi, 2011; Lee & Farh, 1999; Simpson & Kaminski, 2007).

The wellbeing of employees can also be affected by the affective experiences they have at work. Affective Events Theory (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Lazarus, 1991; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) proposes that organisational events are proximal causes of affective reactions and work environment features predispose the occurrence of certain types of affect-producing events, which may then lead to positive or negative emotions. Basch and Fisher (1998) developed event-emotion matrices, which specify the types of work events that occur and the particular positive and negative emotions most likely to be caused by those events. While events classified as receiving recognition, goal achievement, involvement in challenges, planning, decision making or problem-solving, and goal progress and organisational reputation, among others, stimulate positive feelings (e.g., pleasure, happiness, enthusiasm, relief, optimism, power or affection), two event categories —acts of colleagues and acts of management— are the main events that cause negative emotions (frustration, disappointment, annoyance, anger, unhappiness, sadness, disgust and hurt). In addition, socially undesirable and illegitimate behaviours or events by organisations or colleagues that lead to negative events can activate negative emotions and become work stressors (Van Katwyk, Fox, Spector & Kelloway, 2000). Apart from the adverse effects that stress at work generates on

employee productivity, absenteeism and worker turnover, work stressors represent a risk or potential threat to the wellbeing of employees, according to the transactional stress theory (Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Gender roles and prescriptive gender stereotypes once again explain some of the gender differences found in the perceived severity and frequency of occurrence of individual stressor events (Cocchiara & Bell, 2009; Hendrix et al., 1994; Richardsen, Traavik & Burke, 2016; Spielberger & Reheiser, 1994) and in the results of stress in the face of negative emotions and 'dirty' workplace politics (Webster, Adams, Maranto & Beehr, 2018).

Summarizing, events related to inequalities in employment opportunities, the pay-gap or the existence of a *glass ceiling*, which go against the principles of organisational justice, would more likely trigger negative emotions and high levels of stress. According to affective event theory and transactional stress theory, it can significantly reduce the wellbeing of female employees.

3. Materials and method

With the aim of reaching consensus and prioritising initiatives or actions that can act as true levers to promote equality and contribute to the creation of enchanting and inclusive workplaces for female employees, this research applied the Delphi method. This qualitative scientific method is a systematic and iterative process aimed at obtaining the opinions and consensus of a group of experts (Gordon, 1994; Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Landeta, 2006; Turoff & Linstone, 2002). The application of this structured and prospective method has proven to be useful in the field of social sciences, being especially suitable in complex, dynamic, ambiguous areas of knowledge with little previous empirical evidence (Grime & Wright, 2016; Landeta, 2002; Ortega, 2008).

First, after defining the problem and identifying the objective, a questionnaire was designed. The theories of organisational justice, affective events, and occupational stress informed the design of the questionnaire. It was made up of three blocks of questions (see Appendix I) and included different types of questions: 5-point Likert-type, dichotomous, weighting, and open questions.

Second, the selection of the panel of experts was carried out by contacting female professionals who, due to their knowledge and experience, had a close relationship with the research question and could contribute a relevant perspective to the research. Specifically, 26 businesswomen, professionals, and academic women were invited via email to participate in the study. In selecting the number of invitees, possible refusals to participate and dropouts during the development of the method were considered. The invitation included presentation of the research team, the objectives of the research, and the conditions of participation (guarantee of anonymity, response times, etc.). The final panel was made up of 20 women: 8 businesswoman or managers who are part of Professional Women's Nekwork in Spain and who have decision-making in the strategies and policies in their companies (40%), 7 professional in human resources departments (35%), and 5 women professor and/or researarchers from different Spanish universities with extensive research experience in the field of business and gender (25%). This distribution guaranteed the heterogeneity and significance of the composition of the group of experts. Table 1 reveals the competence coefficients of experts based on the information that the experts themselves showed about the degree of knowledge and argumentation they had based on their training and experience (from 0 to 10 points). The competence coefficient was calculated as the average of the knowledge coefficient plus the argumentation coefficient (see, for example, Barroso Osuna & Cabero Almenara, 2013); a 'high' competence rating was assigned when the coefficient was equal to or greater than nine.

ID	Profile	Knowledge Coefficient	Argumentation Coefficient	Competence Coefficient	Competence Rating
1	Manager	7	8,5	7,75	Medium
2	Academic	8.5	8	8.25	Medium
3	HR professional	7	7.5	7.25	Medium
4	Manager	7	8	7.5	Medium
5	Academic	9.5	9	9.25	High
6	HR professional	7	8.5	7.75	Medium
7	Manager	8.5	8	8.25	Medium
8	Manager	9	9.5	9.25	High

ID	Profile	Knowledge Coefficient	Argumentation Coefficient	Competence Coefficient	Competence Rating
9	HR professional	7	8.5	7.75	Medium
10	HR professional	7	8	7.5	Medium
11	Academic	8.5	8	8.25	Medium
12	Academic	9	8	8.5	Medium
13	Manager	8.5	9.5	9	High
14	HR professional	8	8.5	8.25	Medium
15	Manager	8	9.5	8.75	Medium
16	HR professional	7	8.5	7.75	Medium
17	Academic	8	9	8.5	Medium
18	HR professional	7.5	8.5	8	Medium
19	Manager	8	9.5	8.75	Medium
20	Manager	8.5	10	9.25	High

Table 1. Competence coefficients of experts

In the third stage, between March and June 2021, the exchange of information with the group of experts took place in two rounds. The questionnaire was provided to the experts to complete and after receiving the questionnaires duly completed in the first round, the data were tabulated and analysed. Specifically, means, frequency distribution, and standard deviations were identified and then interpreted and evaluated. This quantitative analysis was enriched with the qualitative analysis of all the observations and contributions provided by the experts. In the second round, the experts received the questionnaire again with modifications (see Appendix II) accompanied by their responses and the results of the analysis from the previous round. This feedback encouraged reevaluation and the development of arguments for those members whose responses showed greater dispersion. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data from the second round resulted in a greater convergence of opinions and the delimitation of the consensus opinion.

4. Results

4. 1. Round 1

The first round resulted in convergence and consensus for some questions, while others showed great dispersion, as Table 2 shows.

Question	M [SD]	Frecuency
I. **Current status and measures for gender equality in companies**		
The current state of equality in companies	2.15 [0.366]	(1) Effective equality will soon be achieved =0 (2) There are still obstacles to achieving real equality in the short or medium term =17 (3) Real equality will not be achieved in the near future =3
Measures that so far have contributed most to promoting equality in companies	2.7 [0.801]	(1) Government: quotas =1 (2) Equality Plans =7 (3) Social movements =9 (4) Companies =3
Legislation based on gender quotas	1.55 [0.51]	(1) Yes =9 (2) No =11
More effective measures to pursue equality and equity in the workplace	(1) Sensitization and awareness days =3.65 [1.27] (2) Objectives and commitments =1.9 [0.91] (3) Flexibility measures =2.05 [1.23] (4) Diversity programs =3.35 [1.14] (5) Mandatory gender quotas =3.6 [1.57]	

Question	M [SD]	Frecuency
II. **Workplaces that can 'charm' women: Conditioning factors and initiatives**		
Determinants of the wellbeing of female employees in the workplace	(1) Training opportunities =3.8 [1.38] (2) Inclusive culture =4.1 [1.07] (3) Flexibility and conciliation =3.75 [1.37] (4) Opportunities for promotion =4.15 [1.31] (5) Elimination of the wage gap =4.4 [0.88]	
Measures that increase the attractativeness of a company for women	(1) Work-life balance and co-responsibility measures =2.3 [1.26] (2) Quality in female employment =2.0 [1.21] (3) Initiatives for the development and promotion =2.6 [1.14] (4) Measures to prevent workplace harassment =3.65 [1.35] (5) Health and well-being plans =4.0 [1.21]	
III. **Future prospects: The best workplaces for women**		
Difficulties or challenges in making workplaces attractive to women	(1) Persistence of gender-biased business attitudes =2.2 [1.47] (2) Barriers that women put on themselves =3.35 [1.6] (3) Publicity and non-conviction =3.25 [1.25] (4) Lack of transparency =2.55 [1.05] (5) Underrepresentation of women in leadership positions =3.3 [1.45]	
Impact on organisations of having women 'delighted'	(1) Retention of female talent =4.25 [0.97] (2) More productivity and job satisfaction =4.35 [0.87] (3) Reduction of absenteeism and turnover =3.45 [1.23] (4) Improvement of the corporate image =3.45 [1.22] (5) Social progress of women =3.7 [1.52]	

Table 2. First round results: Means, standard deviations and/or frequency distribution

Specifically, in the first block of questions, the panel of experts reached a broad consensus regarding the current state of gender equality at the Spanish business level. Specifically, 85% of the sample (17 respondents) stated that despite some progress, there were still obstacles to achieving real equality in the workplace in the short or medium term. The remaining 15% were somewhat less optimistic, believing that real and effective equality of opportunities in the workplace would take many years to accomplish. None of the experts opted for responses that pointed out the absence of inequality or the achievement of real equality in the very short term.

Regarding the measures that have contributed the most to promoting equality in the business environment in Spain so far, there was a disparate result. Specifically, nine experts (45%) agreed that the most effective measure was the work by social movements and professional networks of women that promote equal opportunities in the workplace. Seven experts (35%) indicated the application of equality plans as the most favourable measure (despite the fact that many companies already had such plans, the new Royal Decree-Law 6/2019 of March 1 requires companies with more than 50 workers to negotiate and apply these plans). Three experts (15%) pointed out that the initiatives created from corporate social responsibility and launched by the companies themselves were those that have contributed the most to progress. Finally, one of the respondents (5%) stated that the most effective measure had been the imposition of gender quotas to increase the presence of women in certain hierarchical positions. The observations made in relation to this question were along the same line: the real changes in favour of equality do not arise through imposition.

The disparate result obtained in the previous question highlights the gap in opinions regarding gender quotas. Eleven experts (55%) were against laws that compel companies to apply gender quotas, imposing sanctions in case of non-compliance. The most used arguments to justify their responses were: 1) sanctions do not contribute to cultural change; 2) quotas can generate negative effects if certain positions are filled by female candidates who 'adjust' worse or are less capable than their male counterparts, and may lead to reverse discrimination; and 3) this type of legislation detracts from and demeans the contribution and worth of women who really deserve to

occupy positions of responsibility and leadership. On the contrary, the remaining nine experts were in favour of quotas, although most of them agreed that the change must necessarily occur in the culture of the organisations. Finally, it should be noted in this question that there were significant differences by group: HR professionals were most in favour of quotas.

Finally, the first block of questions included an enquiry about the most effective measures to pursue equality and equity in the workplace. In this case, there was a consensus, and all responses showed a low standard deviation. Specifically, most experts positioned the parity objectives (i.e., the creation of objectives and commitments to achieve parity in the selection processes, the remuneration policy, maternity and paternity leave, etc.) and the flexibility measures (i.e., those that promote work organisation and the reconciliation of personal, family, and professional life) as the most effective and second most effective measures, respectively. The vast majority of experts also ranked diversity programmes for senior management (linking their pay to gender equality objectives) as the third most effective measure. Gender quotas and awareness-raising sessions to eliminate gender biases in the workplace were the measures that received the lowest scores. Regarding the determination of parity objectives and commitments, it is recommended that such objectives and procedures should be audited and verified by external professionals in order to guarantee compliance. Awareness-raising events are very useful at an early age when values are not yet well defined. Their impact is useful to maintain beliefs but not to produce a change of mentality or business culture.

In the second block of questions regarding organisations that could 'charm' women, the main determinants of the wellbeing of female employees in the workplace were asked. The elimination of the persistent wage gap (factor related to equitable, fair, and non-discriminatory treatment) was the response that achieved the highest score —some experts pointed out the need for executive management to make a real commitment to non-discriminatory policies and act as prescribers. The next most relevant factors pointed out by the experts were the same opportunities for access, professional development, and promotion and non-existence of the *glass ceiling*, followed by an inclusive culture and a healthier work environment. The lowest score is obtained by the factors linked to work flexibility and family reconciliation: some experts indicated that some companies pay a lot of attention to 'family friendly' policies but do not consider options for female employees who are not mothers or have not yet formed a family.

Regarding the question about the attractiveness of a company in the eyes of a woman, the results showed that the quality of female employment (equitable treatment, fair remuneration, job security, etc.) was the measure marked as the most important. Conciliation and co-responsibility (e.g., flextime and flexplace policies, options to reduce working hours or extend maternity/paternity leave, etc.) and the initiatives for the development and promotion of female talent were the second and third most important measures. With the lowest scores are the measures to prevent workplace harassment based on sex and sanctioning policies against sexist practices, followed by the occupational health and wellness plans (e.g., nutrition programmes, coaching on mental health or psychosocial wellbeing, programmes to promote physical activity, services of rehabilitation or physiotherapy, etc.) that can contribute to improving the organisational climate and increasing the attractiveness of the employer companies in the eyes of all employees, not just women. The small variation found when ordering and scoring the measures may have been, as some experts pointed out, due to the personal situation of each expert woman at each moment.

Panelists were also asked about other initiatives that could make women fall in love with their workplaces. The most repeated initiatives were related to paying greater attention to pre-onboarding processes (e.g., writing job offers without discriminatory biases, requesting blind curriculums vitae, and establishing the same questions during the selection stage), unbiased career plans for women, publicity and transparency in the promotion and remuneration policies according to merit, and the need to individually assess the reality of each woman according to her personal circumstances (e.g., whether she was a mother or not). Interestingly, the need to correct the behaviour of some female bosses that slow down the professional development of other women —known as queen bee syndrome (Baykal, Soyalp & Yesil, 2020; Harvey, 2018)— was also revealed.

The third block of questions aimed to determine future prospects in relation to the best workplaces. First, the experts were asked about the main difficulties or challenges in making workplaces attractive for women. The persistence of sexist business attitudes and obsolete cultures was pointed out by 90% of the experts as the greatest obstacle, followed by the lack of transparency and a discrepancy between what it is said and what it is done. A broad consensus was also reached on the other difficulties presented, which obtained lower but similar scores. Placement of diversity and corporate welfare issues on agendas more as a form of publicity and image than by conviction, the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions and the scarcity of role models, and the barriers that women put on themselves regarding insecurity and underestimation of female talent, were also issues identified as holding back the charm of workplaces for women. Again, the small variation in the order and score of the responses can be explained by the work experiences of each expert and the differences that may appear by the type of sector (i.e., masculinised or feminised) and occupation.

Finally, the experts were asked to assess the impact of having the female employees 'delighted'. The increase in the global productivity of the company, together with the retention capacity of female talent, were the benefits most underscored by 85% of the panellists. With an average of 3.7 points, contribution to the professional and social progress of women was ranked as the third most relevant benefit. Reduction in absenteeism and female turnover and the improvement of the corporate image were benefits less and equally scored.

The quantitative and qualitative analysis carried out in this first round revealed a broad consensus on issues related to: 1) the current state of gender equality; 2) the measures that can be more effective to achieve gender equality in companies; 3) the main determinants of female wellbeing in the workplace; 4) initiatives that increase the attractiveness of organisations for women; 5) the challenges that organisations must face in order to make their female employees 'fall in love' with them; and 6) the benefits that companies can enjoy by having women 'delighted'. However, a high dispersion was found in opinions about the measures and agents responsible for promoting gender equality in companies, as well as in the evaluation and impact of gender quotas. The disagreements expressed, together with the answers obtained from the open questions and the observations noted by the experts, led to the reformulation of some questions and the modification of the questionnaire that was used in the second round.

4. 2. Round 2

The results obtained in the second round are shown in Table 3.

Question	M [SD]	Frecuency
I. Gender equality in companies		
Agents responsible for promoting equality so far	1.7 [0.8]	(1) Society =10 (2) Companies =4 (3) Government =6
Agents responsible for promoting equality in the future	(1) Society =2.45 [0.68] (2) Companies =1.6 [0.75] (3) Government =1.95 [0.82]	
Usefulness of gender quotas	1.65 [0.49]	(1) Quotas as an initial measure =7 (2) No quotas =13
Government's most useful measure	1.95 [0.76]	(1) Economic sanctions =6 (2) Economic incentives =9 (3) None =5
II. Best places to work		
Most valued actions to choose an employer	(1) Fair on-boarding processes =2.75 [0.64] (2) Public promotion/remuneration policies=1.9 0.63] (3) Leaders and inclusive environments =1.35 [0.49]	
Ideal remuneration package	(1) Financialcompensation =57.37 [20.3] (2) Non-financialcompensation =42.63 [19.8]	

Table 3. Second round results: Means, standard deviations and/or frequency distribution

In relation to the first block of questions on gender equality in companies, the second questionnaire included a question to clarify who has been largely responsible for the progress in this area. Specifically, the questionnaire asked which agents —society (especially women through social movements, professional networks, etc.), companies (based on their own initiatives created by CSR), or government authorities (through legislation in favour of the application of equality plans, recommendations to increase the presence of women in certain positions, etc.)— and in what proportions have contributed to promoting equality in the business environment in Spain. Consistent with the responses found in the first round, but reaching greater agreement, the experts noted that the greatest contribution had come from the claims of society, followed by government measures and, finally, by companies' initiatives.

With the intention of establishing differences between past and future responsibility, the following question was asked: "Which agent should assume greater responsibility in the future?". In this case, the group of experts also showed a high consensus, pointing out that companies should take greater responsibility than society. That is, employers should involve decision-making managers more fully, and they should assume a more relevant role in promoting equality. Additionally, government authorities should regulate the legal framework to facilitate changes in values and culture. This would make it easier for society to be impregnated with these changes, progressively becoming more just and egalitarian. In short, from now on it would be necessary to reverse the levels of commitment that the different agents have previously assumed and make companies become primarily responsible for the change.

In the second round, the question regarding gender quotas was reformulated to check the confidence in quotas as an effective measure. Given the widespread idea that real changes in favour of equality do not arise through imposition, the establishment of quotas by the government (with sanctions for non-compliance) was questioned by most experts —in a greater proportion by the academic subgroup. However, 35% of those who were against quotas pointed out that, given the inaction of the companies, they could serve as a 'start-up' measure to direct equality, though they should not be maintained over time. The reformulation of the question allowed a greater consensus. Accordingly, in a subsequent question about the possible consequences (positive or negative) of government measures on equal treatment and opportunities, a greater number of experts considered incentives more effective than sanctions.

Regarding the second block of questions about the most attractive places to work, after consensus was reached on the items that increase attractiveness in the eyes of women and other initiatives that could make female employees fall in love, panellists were asked to order what they would prioritise when applying as candidates for a job. The results were clear: the most valued organisations were those that had leaders capable of creating inclusive environments and individually evaluating the reality of each employee according to their personal circumstances. Subsequently, the women were attracted to organisations that shared their promotion and remuneration policies publicly and in a transparent and objective manner. Fair on-boarding processes (for example, job offers without discriminatory biases, anonymous curriculums vitae, same questions during the selection stage, etc.) were positioned third.

Finally, based on the results obtained in the first round, the last question had to do with remuneration in a good place to work. On the assumption of receiving an equitable and fair salary, the experts were asked to ponder an 'ideal remuneration package' in the case of receiving an increase in their total earnings. Financial remuneration (salary, incentives, and benefits) obtained an average weight of 57.37% (minimum value 30% and maximum value 90%), while non-financial remuneration (formulas for wellbeing and emotional salary) were weighted at 42.63 % (minimum value 10% and maximum value 60%). In other words, the experts gave a slightly higher value to the financial component, although they pointed out the great importance that non-financial remuneration had for them.

As can be seen, the second round led to greater agreement on the items that previously showed great dispersion and contributed to qualifying and enriching other issues. Therefore, the use of new rounds of evaluation was rejected, and the evaluation process was concluded. Table 4 below summarises the agreements reached in the round 1 and round 2.

Questions 1 (n = 20)	Round 1: Results	Rephrased Questions 2 (n = 20)	Round 2: Results
Current state of equality in companies	Consensus		
Measures that so far have contributed most to promoting equality in companies	No consensus		
		Agents responsible for promoting equality so far	Consensus
		Agents responsible for promoting equality in the future	Consensus
Legislation based on gender quotas	No consensus		
		Confidence in quotas as an effective starting measure	Consensus
		Desired consequences of government measures on equality	Consensus
More effective measures to pursue equality and equity in the workplace	Consensus		
Determinants of the wellbeing of female employees in the workplace	Consensus		
Measures that increase the attractiveness of a company for women	Consensus		
Initiatives that make female employees 'fall in love'	N/A (Open question)		
		Most valued actions to choose an employer	Consensus
		Ideal remuneration package	N/A (Open question)
Difficulties/challenges in making workplaces really attractive to women	Consensus		
Impact on organisations of having women 'delighted'	Consensus		

Table 4. Summary of responses of expert group responses

5. Discussion

From the application of the Delphi method, some findings can be discussed. Researchers such as Danna and Griffin (1999), Schulte and Vainio (2010) and Sirota and Klein (2013) have already underlined the importance of workplace factors and equity for greater employee well-being and the experts here have pointed out, also in line with the arguments offered by the theories of organizational justice and affective events in the workplace, that the wellbeing of female employees is fundamentally based on fair, equal, and non-discriminatory treatment. Previous literature has revealed that more and different stressors than men (Cocchiara & Bell, 2009; Hendrix et al., 1994; Richardsen et al., 2016), and persistent gender inequalities affect women's expectations, feelings, preferences, and behaviour in the workplace, with consequent impact on their wellbeing. Women generally report lower job expectations than men and feel less job satisfaction, especially in 'male- dominated workplaces' (Bender et al., 2005; Clark, 1997; Sloane & Williams, 2000; Qian & Fan, 2019). Regarding preferences, compared to men, women are significantly less likely to identify earnings as the most important aspect of a job; they identify social relations at work —good coworkers and a good supervisor— as a more important aspect (Clark, 1997; Konrad, Corrigall, Lieb & Ritchie Jr, 2000). Accordingly, female employees rate trust in management at their workplaces as more important than men do (Helliwell & Huang, 2011), and they value jobs that have more flexible working conditions (Fortin, 2005; Hill, Jacob, Shannon, Brennan, Blanchard, & Martinengo, 2008). These previous findings are similar to those reported in this study: the experts confirmed that financial remuneration is an essential issue but underlined the great importance of non-financial remuneration and of having leaders who promote an inclusive culture and a healthier work environment. Today many companies have different wellness

plans that they offer for the benefit of their employees (for example, nutrition programs, physical activity, physiotherapy services...). However, less attention is paid to wellbeing from an emotional perspective and advancing in terms of gender equality and opportunities isa priority issue for this purpose. In other words, activities in favour of physical wellbeing should be complemented, to a greater degree, with activities that contribute to greater emotional wellbeing of employees, in general, and women, in particular. Because providing procedures to ensure and generate appropriate behaviours and more positive emotions and reactions could bring, according to the theory of organizational justice and affective events, numerous benefits for organisations. In addition, in line with Sirota and Klein (2013), who maintain that interactions are an important factor that can condition work experiences, the emotional wellbeing of employees is here also closely linked to the behaviour of leaders: in recent years, attention has been focused on transformational, democratic, charismatic, inspirational or situational leadership styles, and a good example of this is the proliferation of literature focused on measuring the impact of such styles on followers and their attitudes (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Bhatti, Maitlo, Shaikh, Hashmi & Shaikh, 2012; Conger, Kanungo & Menon, 2000; Salas-Vallina, Simone & Fernández-Guerrero, 2020).

Another interesting topic of discussion is that of quotas, which are rejected as an effective long-term measure. It has been suggested that quotas should only serve as a "start-up" measure, because most experts consider them a trap and believe that changes do not occur by imposition —this view was more pronounced by the academic women's subgroup. Nevertheless, in Spain, the Code of Good Governance of Listed Companies established in 2015 the objective of achieving 30% female representation on the boards of directors by 2020, with an increase in the quota to 40% by 2022. This legislation has 'pushed' the advancement of women on boards of directors: women occupied 22.79% of the seats in 2017 and the percentage grew to 34.2% in 2021 in IBEX-35 companies (CNMV, 2022). But in this respect, it has been observed that the quotas serve more to "say that they have been met" than to contribute to real progress, because the majority of female members are independent external directors. The very low number of female executive directors on boards and the underrepresentation of women in the management committees show, in general, little attention to the internal promotion of talent and female leadership (Campos-García, 2021a). In addition to the quotas set by governments or attached public bodies, there are also many companies that, along with other inclusion and diversity policies, have determined gender quotas to promote female representation in certain hierarchical positions (Campos-García, 2021b).

Lastly, in relation to the responsibility for change, it is clear that governments, the private sector and society as a whole have a relevant role when it comes to advancing in the field of gender equality —as recognized by the 2030 Agenda regarding SDG 5. While a coordinated and joint effort is required, the main focus is on changing social attitudes through education and company actions to end inequalities in the workplace.

6. Conclusions

Previous research has highlighted that employee wellbeing is closely linked to factors of equity, and the gender imbalances that exist among treatment, training and career development, remuneration, or promotion practices are a workplace reality that can reduce women's enchantment, engagement, and productivity. This research has explored and confirmed the initiatives or actions that can act as true levers to promote equality and contribute to creating inclusive and attractive workplaces for female employees.

The application of the Delphi method has yielded four main conclusions:

1. There are still obstacles to achieving real equality in the workplace in the short or medium term. The parity objectives and the flexibility measures to promote work organisation and the reconciliation of personal, family, and professional life are the actions that can be most effective in achieving gender equality in companies.

2. Factors related to equitable, fair, and non-discriminatory treatment are the main determinants of female wellbeing in the workplace.

3. The quality of female employment and having leaders capable of creating inclusive environments and individually evaluating the reality of each employee according to their personal circumstances increases the attractiveness of organisations for women.

4. Companies should increase their degree of responsibility and adopt a much more proactive role in the challenge of eliminating sexist business attitudes and obsolete cultures in their workplaces. Thus, they could benefit from higher productivity, lower absenteeism and turnover costs, and greater attraction, retention, and use of female talent and, therefore, greater global competitiveness.

Important implications can be derived from these conclusions. At a theoretical level, this research supports many of the findings found by other researchers (Schulte & Vainio, 2010; Sirota & Klein, 2013) but also provides new evidence on the measures that may be more effective in promoting female wellbeing in workplaces and the relevant role of leaders and organizations as a whole. Regarding the practical implications, the need for directors and HR managers to consider the context and composition of the workforce to assess what initiatives are required in each workplace seems evident. In companies with a highly masculinised workforce, it may be especially relevant to pay greater attention to these initiatives in order to maximise the benefits of fully and effectively utilising all available talent (Swailes et al., 2014). Companies must also focus attention on the appointment and training of leaders capable of creating inclusive environments, applying new styles of leadership that contribute to the emotional wellbeing of employees and promoting women's development and promotion policies. Fair selection and on-boarding processes, the establishment of clear criteria and promotional objectives, as well as the elimination of obstacles and business attitudes that give rise to the *glass ceiling* are the main measures to achieve equality and the professional advancement of women. The Spanish Royal Decree-Law 6/2019 on 'Urgent measures to guarantee equal treatment and opportunities between women and men in employment and occupation' has been a step in this direction. Finally, workplace culture and organisational practices have a significant impact on the advancement of gender equality; hence, the importance of avoiding 'dirty policies' (Webster et al., 2018) and ensuring that gender goals and initiatives are a vehicle to achieve greater equality and diversity and a more inclusive and hospitable culture for women is evident. Organisations may not be completely free from undesirable behaviour, but it is possible to minimise it through prevention and training efforts within the company.

The main limitation of this research has to do mainly with the use of the technique chosen for data collection. The subjective nature of the responses and opinions expressed by the participants is highlighted, which may be conditioned by their personal and family circumstances. Therefore, from now on it could be interesting to replicate the research in order to capture differences according to the different sociodemographic variables of the experts or in different sectors of activity (taking into account, for example, the proportion of women in the total workforce or leadership positions). Another important advance would be to include men in the panel of experts in order to identify whether or not there are similarities in certain points of view and how different the positions are.

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Appendix I: Questionnaire Round 1

Block I. Current status and measures for gender equality in companies

1. Regarding the current state of equality in Spanish companies, with which statement do you agree most?

   1) The progress made in recent years is encouraging to soon achieve real and effective equality of opportunity

   2) Despite some progress, there are still obstacles to achieving real equality in the workplace in the short or medium term

   3) Real equality in business and employment will not be achieved in the near future

2. What measure do you think has contributed the most to promoting equality in companies so far? (Mark only one)

   1) Recommendation by the government to impose gender quotas on companies to increase the presence of women in certain positions —the 2007 Equality Law invites but does not oblige and does not sanction.

   2) Obligation to negotiate and apply Equality Plans in companies with more than 50 workers by Royal Decree-Law 6/2019 of March 1.

   3) Social movements and networks/professional associations of women who actively fight for equal opportunities in the workplace

   4) Initiatives launched by the companies themselves

3. Would you be in favor of laws that force companies to apply gender quotas by imposing sanctions in case of non-compliance?

   1) Yes

   2) No, because _____

4. Rank from 1 to 5 (1 = most important; 5 = least important) which measures do you think would be most effective in pursuing equality and fairness in the workplace:

Order	
	Sensitisation and awareness days to eliminate gender bias in the workplace
	Specification of objectives and commitments to achieve parity in selection processes, remuneration policy, maternity and paternity leave, etc.
	Flexibility measures to favor the organization of work and the reconciliation of personal, family and professional life
	Advanced diversity programs —mentoring, coaching, etc.— for senior management and linking their remuneration to gender equality objectives
	Mandatory gender quotas in certain hierarchical positions (with sanction in case of non-compliance)

Observations (if any): _____

Block II. Workplaces that can 'charm' women: Conditioning factors and initiatives

5. Rate from 1 to 5 (1 = not very important; 5 = very important) how important the following aspects are to achieving the well-being of the female collective in the workplace:

		1	2	3	4	5
1)	Training opportunities and continuous learning					
2)	Inclusive culture and pleasant work environment					
3)	Flexibility and conciliation					
4)	Opportunities for promotion and lack of *glass ceiling*					
5)	Elimination of the wage gap					

Observations (if any): _____

6. Order from 1 to 5 (1 = the most important; 5 = the least important) which initiatives or measures do you think increase the attractiveness of a company in the eyes of a woman:

Order	
	Work-life balance and co-responsibility measures [options to reduce working hours or extend maternity leave, financial aid for the birth of children, flexible hours...]
	Quality in female employment [job security, fair pay and equitable treatment]
	Initiatives for the development and promotion of female talent [a broad representation of women in positions of responsibility/leadership often leads to supportive behavior, the formation of alliances, gender awareness and a commitment to changing social structures]
	Measures to prevent workplace harassment based on sex and sanctioning policies for sexist practices
	Health and well-being plans [nutrition programs, coaching and mental health or psychosocial well-being sessions, programs to promote physical activity, rehabilitation or physiotherapy services, etc.]

Observations (if any): _____

Do you think that any other initiative not included previously could help organizations 'fall in love' with their employees?

Explain_____

Block III. Future prospects: The best workplaces for women

7. Order from 1 to 5 (1 = the most important; 5 = the least important) what do you think are the greatest difficulties or challenges that exist to make workplaces really attractive for women:

Order	
	Persistence of gender-biased business attitudes and outdated cultures
	Barriers that women themselves put on themselves (insecurity and undervaluation of female talent)
	Diversity and/or corporate well-being are issues placed on the agenda more as a form of publicity and image than by conviction
	Lack of transparency and discrepancy between what is said and what is done
	Underrepresentation of women in positions of responsibility and leadership

Observations (if any): _____

8. Rate from 1 to 5 (1 = very little; 5 = a lot) the impact you think having 'delighted' women on their staff has on companies:

		1	2	3	4	5
1)	Retention capacity of female talent					
2)	Increased productivity and overall job satisfaction					
3)	Reduction of absenteeism and female turnover					
4)	Improvement of the corporate image before all its collaborators					
5)	Contribution to the social progress of women					

Observations (if any): _____

Appendix II: Questionnaire Round 2

Block I. Gender equality in companies

1. In relation to the measures that have contributed the most to promoting equality in the business world in Spain to date, mark the answer with which you agree the most. Who do you think has been most responsible for the advance?

1) Society (especially women through social movements, professional networks, etc.).

2) The companies (based on their own initiatives created from CSR).

3) Government authorities (through legislation in favor of the application of equality plans, recommendation to increase the presence of women in certain positions, etc.).

Observations (if any): _____

2. Rank from 1 to 3 (1 = to a greater extent; 3 = to a lesser extent) which agent do you think should assume greater responsibility in promoting gender equality at the business level from now on.

Order	
	Society
	Companies
	Governmentalauthorities

Observations (if any): _____

3. Regarding gender quotas, approximately half of the panel of experts has disagreed. Most of those who have advocated it have underlined its usefulness mainly as a 'starter' measure, which can subsequently contribute to culture change in organizations. Based on these results, which statement do you agree with the most?

1) Quotas, as an initial measure, can be useful to direct equality and the possibilities of promotion of women.

2) I do not trust that quotas are a useful measure to promote equality or promotion or as an initial measure.

Observations (if any): _____

4. In relation to government measures to guarantee equal treatment and opportunities for men and women, what consequence do you consider most effective?

1) Economic sanctions in case of non-compliance ['penalties']

2) Economic incentives in case of compliance ['prizes']

3) None of the above because _____

Block II. Best places to work

5. As a potential job candidate, rank from 1 to 3 (1 = most preferred; 3 = least preferred) which organizations you would prefer to apply to based on the actions they take.

Order	
	Organizations with fair on-boarding processes (e.g., job offers without discriminatory bias, anonymous resumes, same questions during the selection stage, etc.).
	Organizations that elaborate transparently and objectively and make public their promotion and remuneration policies.
	Organizations that have leaders / bosses capable of creating inclusive environments and individually assessing the reality of each employee according to their personal circumstances.

6. Assuming that you receive an equitable and fair salary, if you could decide how to receive an increase in remuneration, weight your 'ideal extra remuneration package' as a percentage (sum of percentages = 100%).

%	
	Financial compensation (salary, incentives and benefits)
	Non-financial compensation (well-being and emotional salary)
100%	TOTAL