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# Exploring job satisfaction in fitness franchises: a study from a human talent perspective

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## Abstract

This qualitative study investigates job satisfaction and its impact on the performance of human talent in fitness club franchises in Mexico, based on six semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in October 2023. The research highlights that internal communication is the primary factor influencing job satisfaction, followed by interpersonal relationships and organisational climate. These findings imply that enhancing internal communication and fostering healthy interpersonal relationships can significantly improve employee well-being and job performance. The study aims to understand job satisfaction from the human talent perspective, focusing on the factors that affect their satisfaction and performance. The insights gained can inform strategies to improve work life quality and industry efficiency in Mexico, serving as a benchmark for future research and a strategic tool for human resource management in similar organisations.

**Keywords** Job Satisfaction, Fitness Club Franchises, Human Talent

## Introduction

The success of fitness club franchises in Mexico relies on several critical factors, including advanced technology, high-quality facilities, and, crucially, highly trained and satisfied human talent [1]. Attention to human talent, grounded in ethical, scientific, and human principles, goes beyond technical aspects to foster deep satisfaction among both franchise staff and clients [2, 3].

Job satisfaction in Mexican fitness franchises involves a complex interaction between human talent and

customers [4]. As defined by [5], job satisfaction is inherently linked to the interaction between individuals and their work environment. This 'emotional dance' affects both staff performance perceptions and customer experiences within their daily fitness routines [6]. The satisfaction level of human talent reflects individual well-being and serves as a crucial indicator of service quality and effectiveness [7]. However, assessments often prioritise client perceptions, overlooking the significant efforts of staff in maintaining service excellence.

Research highlights the importance of service quality for both customer and staff satisfaction in fitness franchises [8]. Conversely, other studies indicate rising dissatisfaction among fitness professionals due to a lack of recognition, autonomy, and task overload [9]. Internationally, job dissatisfaction has increased due to worsening working conditions and higher workloads, with the World Health Organization (WHO) warning of negative

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impacts, including demotivation and decreased service quality [10].

In Mexico, labour policies have significantly influenced the fitness industry. Specifically, a lack of human talent planning and labour reforms have led franchises to focus on welfare, often neglecting their responsibility to preserve the health and well-being of their staff [11]. According to INEGI's MOPRADEF, in 2021, 39.6% of Mexico's adult population reported being physically active, with a notable increase in those using private facilities [12]. These statistics underscore the relevance of physical activity in the Mexican adult population.

Furthermore, the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasise the urgent need to address human talent well-being [13]. Job dissatisfaction extends beyond the workplace, leading to burnout, chronic stress, and mental health issues [14]. Addressing this phenomenon is therefore a moral duty and a social investment in creating a healthier and more productive work environment [15].

### Research objectives

This study aims to explore job satisfaction in fitness franchises in Mexico, focusing on the following objectives:

- Understand human talent perceptions and their impact on performance.
- Analyse factors influencing job satisfaction.
- Provide insights to improve work life quality and industry efficiency in Mexico.

This relationship has been evidenced in previous studies showing that job satisfaction is significantly related to higher employee performance [16].

### Research questions

- What factors influence job satisfaction in this environment?
- How are professional development opportunities and working conditions linked to job satisfaction?
- What challenges or improvements can enhance job satisfaction?

This research serves as a benchmark for future studies and a strategic tool for human resource management by offering a holistic perspective. Despite extensive literature on job satisfaction, this study uniquely focuses on an international fitness club franchise, providing valuable insights into a specialised context. The re-engineering of human resource strategies, including high-performance work practices, is essential for maintaining employee

efficiency and well-being during and after the pandemic [17].

## Theoretical framework

### Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is fundamental to organisational psychology and human resource management [18]. It refers to the degree of contentment, well-being, and gratification that employees experience in their workplace [19], encompassing various aspects such as interactions with colleagues and superiors, working conditions, career development opportunities, remuneration, and job security [14].

Understanding job satisfaction is crucial as it directly impacts multiple organisational aspects [1]. Satisfied employees are more productive, committed, and loyal to the company [20]. Additionally, job satisfaction can influence the quality of an organisation's products or services [21], making it a critical factor for a company's success and effectiveness [22].

Measuring job satisfaction is essential in human resource research and management. Methods include surveys and questionnaires to obtain quantitative data on aspects such as work environment, interpersonal relationships, and working conditions [23]. In-depth interviews and direct observations capture subjective dimensions like employees' emotions and personal experiences [24, 25]. Combining these approaches allows researchers to gain a comprehensive and contextualised understanding of job satisfaction, crucial for addressing its complexity and effects on employee well-being and organisational performance [26].

Several authors, such as [27] and [28], have highlighted the importance of researching and addressing job satisfaction across different contexts and sectors, as the needs and expectations of employees can vary widely. In the context of fitness club franchises in Mexico, it is essential to consider industry-specific factors, such as the constant demand for specialised services and the importance of maintaining a healthy and motivating work environment [29].

There is also growing international awareness of the relationship between job satisfaction, strengthening institutions, and the broader economy [9]. Satisfied employees are more likely to contribute positively to economic productivity and social well-being [30]. This connection has increased interest in understanding and improving job satisfaction to strengthen institutions and promote sustainable economic development [18]. Therefore, job satisfaction is a central concept in the workplace, encompassing employee well-being and satisfaction. Its study is essential as it influences productivity, talent retention, and service quality. Moreover,

its role in improving institutions and the economy is recognised.

### **Job satisfaction in fitness club franchises**

The analysis of job satisfaction in fitness club franchises is of vital importance due to the unique characteristics of this sector [1]. These franchises operate in a highly competitive environment, where providing fitness and wellness services requires specialisation and faces constant demand [31].

Thus, job satisfaction plays a crucial role in customer experience, as there is a direct relationship between employee well-being and the quality of service provided [32]. Satisfied employees tend to provide a more friendly, committed and high-quality service, directly influencing customer loyalty [33].

In addition, fitness club franchises face the constant challenge of motivating and retaining their staff in a work environment often characterised by high employee turnover [34]. To maintain high service standards, human resource management plays a crucial role in implementing policies and practices that promote the satisfaction and well-being of human talent [35].

In short, job satisfaction in fitness club franchises is essential to ensure quality of service and customer loyalty in a competitive and constantly evolving industry. Understanding and managing job satisfaction in this context is critical to the success of these franchises in the fitness industry.

### **Contextualisation of job satisfaction for Mexico**

Job satisfaction, a concept studied globally, reveals a unique dimension when examined within the specific context of Mexico [36]. Several economic, cultural, and social factors significantly influence how human talent perceives and experiences job satisfaction in this country [37]. This contextualised perspective underscores the importance of analysing job satisfaction within Mexico, considering its particularities and dynamics.

One of the main factors influencing job satisfaction in Mexico is the country's economic situation, characterised by significant variations in income levels and wealth distribution across regions and sectors [38]. This economic disparity directly impacts how employees value their employment and the working conditions they experience. Additionally, Mexico's rich and diverse culture plays a crucial role; values such as the importance of family, community, and personal relationships are fundamental. Loyalty to the company and solidarity among colleagues are highly valued, significantly influencing job satisfaction perceptions [39].

Moreover, Mexico grapples with distinct labour challenges, such as the prevalence of informal employment, high turnover rates in certain sectors, and the need to balance economic competitiveness with improved working conditions [40]. These challenges offer fertile ground for research aimed at enhancing job satisfaction within the country. Previous studies in Mexico have laid a solid foundation for understanding the intricate dynamics of job satisfaction. For instance, research by [39] has identified numerous factors that influence job satisfaction in Mexican firms that adopt work arrangements like telework. These factors encompass job responsibilities, company-provided training, relationships with supervisors, and workplace environmental conditions.

A recent study by [41] further elucidates job satisfaction in Mexico, demonstrating that human resource development, organisational culture, and leadership style significantly impact employee satisfaction. These factors function both independently and interactively, shaping employees' perceptions of their job satisfaction. This complexity underscores that job satisfaction arises from the dynamic interplay of multiple elements rather than a single factor. Consequently, an effective strategy to enhance job satisfaction must adopt a holistic approach, encompassing both individual and organisational aspects, to address the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon.

### **Methodology**

To conduct this research, a qualitative approach with a phenomenological perspective was adopted to analyse job satisfaction factors in a fitness club franchise in Mexico. The study sample comprised six team members in various roles within the franchise, including six coaches, two front desk professionals, and one unit leader. Despite efforts to engage more participants, only six individuals could be interviewed in-depth, which required multiple attempts over several days in October 2023 at the franchise's premises.

The participants included one front desk professional and five-unit trainers, providing diverse perspectives and enriching the understanding of job satisfaction factors within the fitness franchise. This diversity allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the motivations behind job satisfaction in this context. The group consisted of two women and four men, aged between 25 and 29, reflecting some generational diversity and a predominance of men, hinting at possible gender trends within the workforce.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, addressing thirteen key aspects ranging from the work environment to suggestions for improvement. Each interview lasted approximately 35 to 45 minutes, facilitating an in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions and experiences regarding their job

satisfaction. The semi-structured interviews consisted of three stages: collecting sociodemographic information, posing introductory questions to ease participants into the discussion, and asking 17 key questions aimed at extracting detailed insights. Examples of these key questions included: "How do you get along with your colleagues and bosses? (Why?)" "Do you feel valued or appreciated? (Why?)" and "Do you have any ideas or suggestions to make your job at the gym more satisfying?"

During the interviews, an atmosphere conducive to free and detailed expression was meticulously fostered. The interview structure was flexibly adapted, allowing for adjustments based on the flow of conversation and the participants' willingness to share their insights. Emphasising a strong ethical foundation and strict confidentiality assured participants that their responses would remain anonymous, thereby encouraging honest and confident expressions. In several instances, participants provided concise answers, often limited to simple "yes" or "no" responses. To enrich these explanations and extract more detailed information, follow-up questions were immediately employed.

The collected information was analysed using ATLAS.ti 23 software, enabling coding and exploration of interview contents. The transcripts of the six interviews were imported into the software, where they underwent thorough analysis and categorisation. This study followed a specific unit of analysis for creating codes, examining the sentences in participants' responses. This methodological approach aligns with the research process proposed by [42] in 2019, based on Grounded Theory's three steps: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Importantly, the coding process was conducted inductively, meaning that codes and categories were derived directly from the data, allowing for a more objective analysis based on participants' responses.

## Findings

After the data was entered into ATLAS.ti 23, the coding process for the interview segments began. Initially, 327 individual codes were identified. To streamline the organisation and interpretation of the data, ten primary codes were selected to serve as main categories. These categories were then used to classify and structure the related codes. Table 1 provides a detailed breakdown of the number of codes assigned to each primary category.

These categories represent the thematic organisation derived from the interviews, formed after generating and assigning codes to the interview contents. Emerging inductively, these categories reflect recurring themes in the collected data. The broadest category, "Work-Life

**Table 1** Categories

Categories created	Codes
Work-Life Balance	13
Work-related stress	10
Internal Communication	7
Motivation	6
Professional Development	6
Compensation and Benefits	6
Interpersonal Relations	5
Work Environment	5
Tasks and Responsibilities	5
Experience and perceived job satisfaction	4
<b>Total:</b>	<b>67</b>

Source: Own elaboration, with information from ATLAS.ti.

Balance", encompassed the majority of codes, indicating its prominence in participants' discussions, followed by "Work Stress." Conversely, "Job Experience and Perceived Job Satisfaction" had the fewest codes, suggesting this theme was less recurrent in the interviews. The following sections will analyse these categories in detail, providing a deeper understanding of the findings.

### Work-life balance

The first segment explored in this analysis refers to the "Work-life Balance" of human talent, revealed through the codes summarised in Table 2 within the same category. A prominent finding in this category emerged in response to the question, "How do you balance your personal life with your work at the gym?" In this context, one of the interviewees shared her experience by stating, "It is a daily effort; I organise my thoughts and focus on my work, leaving personal concerns aside. Sometimes occupational therapy and immersion in work support me in achieving this balance". In addition, it is essential to note that the support of a mental health professional has played a significant role in her search for work-life balance.

Furthermore, the relationship between work-family conflict and job satisfaction has been widely studied. Recent studies, such as [43], have shown that supervisor support can significantly moderate this conflict, improving employee job satisfaction.

Our analysis of human talent revealed a multitude of influential factors, such as work-life balance, time management, workplace conflict, flexibility, self-evaluation, professionalism, self-improvement, self-confidence, socialisation outside of work, mindfulness, reflection, autonomy, and occupational therapy. These factors align with previous research by [44] and [45], as well as the short questionnaire developed by [46], which incorporates most of these categories.

**Table 2** Category code: "Work-Life Balance"

Category	Code	Coded Segments
Work-Life Balance	Work-life balance	9
	Organisation of time	5
	Conflict at work	3
	Flexibility	2
	Self-assessment	2
	Professionalism	2
	Self-improvement	2
	Self-confidence	1
	Socialisation outside work	1
	Awareness	1
	Reflection	1
	Autonomy	1
	Occupational therapy	1

Source: Own elaboration, with information from Atlas Ti.

Work-life balance emerged as particularly significant. Within the fitness club industry, many participants expressed a passion for their work activities, which helps them achieve a harmonious balance between their professional and personal lives. For instance, one participant stated: *"It does not affect my life; on the contrary. I like and am passionate about what I do."* This sentiment echoes findings by [47], which highlight that work can significantly impact personal life, especially when it infringes upon free time. Such interference can disrupt the balance between work and personal life, influencing overall job satisfaction.

Moreover, [48] suggests that flexible working hours enhance autonomy in schedule management, promoting a more effective work-life balance. Conversely, a lack of flexibility can hinder achieving this balance, as evidenced by employees having to leave secondary jobs due to schedule adjustments. This situation underscores the need for employers to provide flexible working hours to support their employees' work-life balance and job satisfaction. To visualise the relationships and flow of categories and codes derived from our coding analysis, a semantic map was created. This map, based on each participant's input during the interviews, graphically represents the interconnectedness and dynamics of the data (Fig. 1).

### Job stress

In the analysis of work-related stress, research was conducted to characterise the perceptions and motivations contributing to work-related stress and the coping strategies employed by participants. Four of the six participants interviewed reported experiencing stress, while two reported not feeling stressed in their work environment. These findings are consistent with stress trends in the workplace in Mexico, where the situation is notably concerning.

According to recent studies, 60% of Mexican human talent report significant stress levels, adversely affecting their health and motivation at work. Consequently, Mexico is ranked as the country with the highest levels of work-related stress globally. Authors have noted that 63% of Mexicans have encountered stressful situations in their workplaces over the past two years.

During the interviews, various codes related to stress and the strategies used to manage it were identified. These codes are detailed in Table 3. Notable terms among the codes include "stress," "psychological therapy," "suppression of emotions," "absence of stress," "self-care," "emotional balance," "relaxation," "self-confidence," "sociability," "concentration," "reflection," and "difficulties at work".

In work-related stress, the human talent interviewed presented significant stress levels. When addressing the question, "Do you feel that your daily work generates stress?" most participants answered in the affirmative. A representative example is the participant who shared: *"Yes, I feel stress. There are times when we interact with vulgar people, and although we have to keep a friendly attitude, sometimes absorbing the bad mood and negativity of users affects us"*. In terms of strategies used to cope with work-related stress, some mentioned seeking psychological support to address this specific aspect. Others pointed out that they do not take interactions with users personally and seek to suppress their emotions as an alternative to avoid stress.

Therefore, the importance of addressing job stress in the context of fitness club franchises is highlighted by authors such as [49] in their work "Theories of Psychological Stress at Work." This chapter discusses various theories related to work stress, most notably the "Work Demand-Control-Support Model", which highlights the relevance of balancing work demands with control and



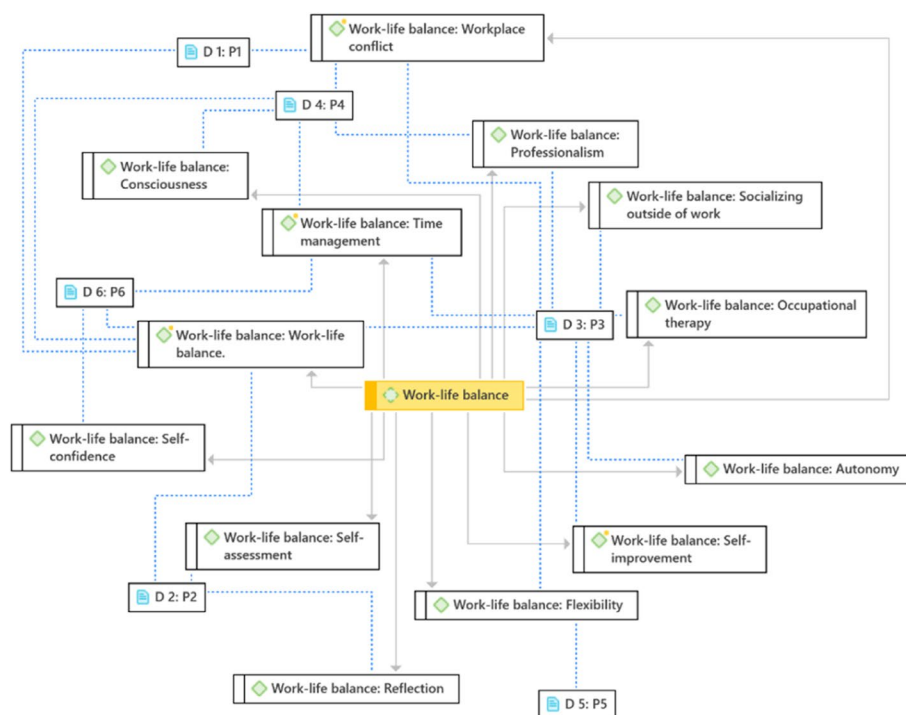


Fig. 1 Work-Life Balance category Source: ATLAS.ti 23

Table 3 Category code: "Work-related stress"

Category	Code	Coded Segments
Work-related stress	Stress	10
	Psychological therapy	3
	Emotional suppression	2
	Absence of stress	1
	Self-care	1
	Emotional balance	1
	Relaxation	1
	Self-confidence	1
	Sociability	1
	Concentration	1
	Reflection	1
	Difficulties at work	1

Source: Own elaboration, with information from Atlas Ti.

support in the work environment. Finally, a semantic map has been draw to visualise and understand the flow of the category and the codes resulting from the analysis. This map is derived from the intervention and the information provided by each participant in the interviews (Fig. 2).

Given the significance of this issue and its impact on the health and well-being of human talent, it is crucial to address work-related stress promptly. This approach aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN 2030 Agenda, which advocate for decent working

conditions and employee well-being as part of a sustainable future.

**Communication**

Effective internal communication is defined as the process of exchanging information, knowledge, and feedback between the unit leader or manager and the employees of the fitness franchise [42, 50]. This category aims to understand the impact of internal communication on the organisation’s work dynamics. Previous research has shown that effective internal communication can

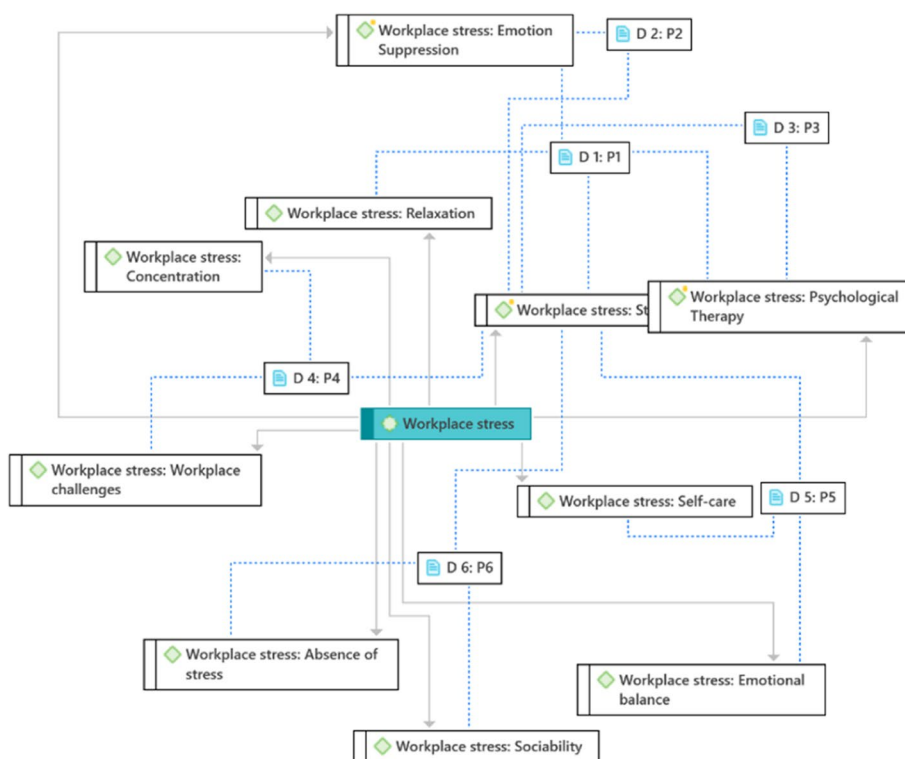


Fig. 2 Work-related stress category Source: ATLAS.ti 23

mitigate feelings of loneliness and rejection sensitivity in the workplace, thereby improving job performance and overall job satisfaction [51].

Table 4 presents the codes identified within the “Internal Communication” category. Among the codes collected, the most recurrent was “Lack of Communication”, which reflects a lack of effective communication between the leadership and the unit’s employees. On the other hand, the least mentioned code was “Good Relationship with the Leader”, suggesting that the relationship and effective communication with the leader are areas for improvement in this work context.

A representative example of this category emerged when participants were asked, “Does your boss communicate clearly and professionally about what he expects from you and provide useful feedback on your work?” One participant responded, “He does not talk to me, he does not give me feedback, he is freezing. However, I think it is a personal issue, as I notice he is more open with others”.

When asked if they knew whom to turn to in case of problems or unusual situations, one participant stated, “We can communicate with someone, but we are not sure if we will get a solution. They listen to us, and that is it.”

Table 4 Category code: “Internal Communication”

Category	Code	Coded Segments
Internal Communication	Lack of communication	27
	Lack of feedback and problem-solving	22
	Lack of support from the leader	20
	Frustration with leadership	18
	Favouritism for some elements	4
	Lack of recognition of the leader	4
	A good relationship with the leader	3

Source: Own elaboration, with information from Atlas Ti.

*If we have a serious problem with our leader, we doubt if anyone can offer us a solution”.*

This scenario reflects the perception of limited effectiveness in problem-solving within the organisation, which could influence job satisfaction and the perception of support from the company. These findings are consistent with previous research by [52] and [38], which highlight the correlation between effective internal communication and several critical aspects, such as feedback, problem-solving, and effective leadership. These factors directly influence human talent’s perception of their work environment and job satisfaction, underscoring the importance of internal communication in organisations.

Moreover, organisational climate significantly impacts employee satisfaction and overall performance. Effective internal communication is essential for maintaining a positive work environment, facilitating better relationships between employees and management, and resolving conflicts. Research [53] indicates that emotional intelligence (EI) significantly impacts employee performance and engagement through job satisfaction, acting as a mediator in these relationships. This underscores the importance of EI in fostering a supportive and productive organisational climate. Developing EI within teams can lead to improved job satisfaction and performance, highlighting the need for effective internal communication strategies.

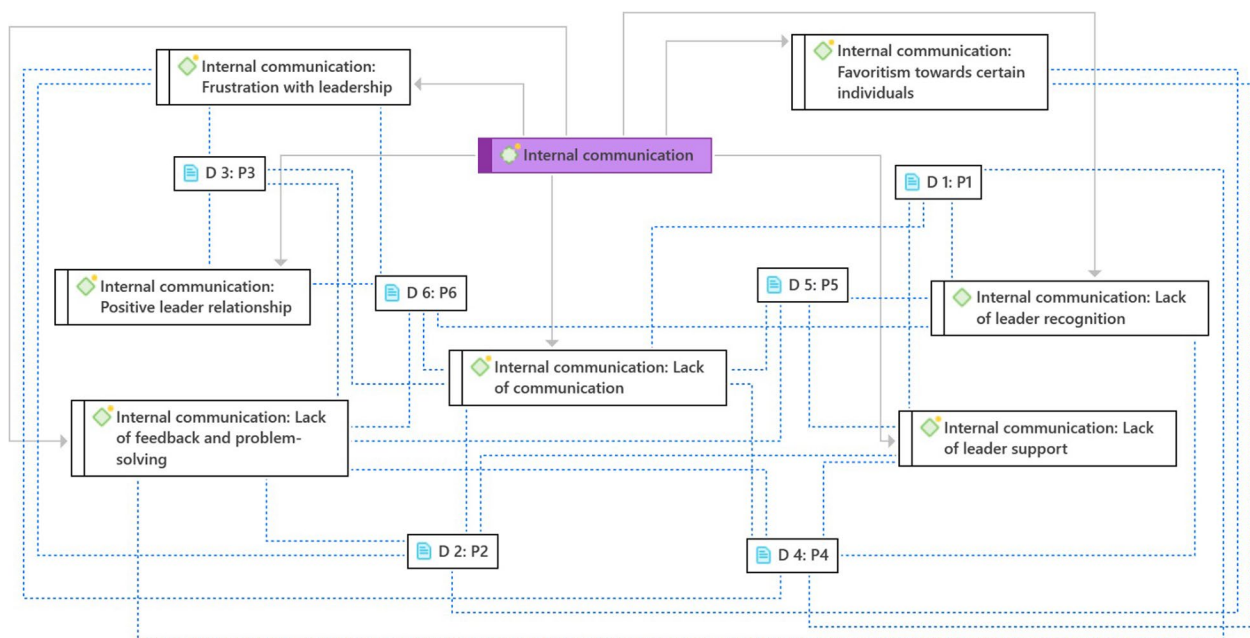
These findings also support the Communication as Management Theory, which considers internal communication a strategic tool for managing organisations. This theoretical approach views internal communication as

a means to promote the participation of human talent, improve the work climate, and strengthen organisational culture. To illustrate this, a semantic map was created, based on participant interviews, to graphically represent the interconnectedness and relationships between categories and codes derived from the authors’ coding analysis (Fig. 3).

Work motivation refers to the reasons, desires and needs that drive human talent towards achieving their goals and objectives in the work environment [54, 55]. This concept is not limited only to internal or external factors. However, it encompasses an amalgam of elements that impact the commitment, satisfaction and effort employees are willing to invest in their work [56].

Given the above, within the scope of the work motivation category, six distinct codes have been identified, detailed in Table 5: demotivation, assertive motivation, lack of leader support, lack of leader recognition, performance appraisal and self-motivation. These codes capture work motivation’s complex dynamics, as reflected in the interviews.

When human talent was asked if they felt valued or appreciated in their work environment, two participants felt a lack of value and appreciation. This perception is based on the need for a structured method to evaluate performance and the lack of recognition by their leader or manager. One interviewee *“highlighted the lack of an evaluation process, both internal and external, to track their progress”*. This response highlights the concern of employees about the lack of recognition and appreciation of their work”.



**Fig. 3** Internal Communication category



**Table 5** Category code: "Motivation"

Category	Code	Coded Segments
Motivation	Demotivation	10
	Assertive motivation	10
	Lack of support from the leader	8
	Lack of recognition of the leader	7
	Lack of performance evaluation	3
	Self-motivation	3

Source: Own elaboration, with information from Atlas Ti.

On the other hand, when it was explored whether they felt that their team whether colleagues or leader, gave them support and motivated them to improve in their work, 100% of the participants stated that they felt support and encouragement from their team. However, support from their leader was less recurrent, with only 20% of respondents agreeing that they felt this level of support. For example, one participant: *"highlighted that not all colleagues offer the necessary support and some lack support. Despite this lack of support from some peers, those with whom he has good relationships motivate him and assist him to the best of their ability"*. It underlines the relevance of team support in employee work motivation.

This aspect becomes even more relevant when we link it to the Job Demands-Resources Theory, developed by [57] in 2014, and more recent research, such as the findings of [58] in 2020. This widely recognised theory offers an insightful view of how job demands and resources can impact the motivation and, thus, job satisfaction of professionals.

In addition, the absence of an appraisal system that allows employees to measure their performance and compare themselves with their colleagues has contributed to this moderation in motivation. An objective rating system and constructive competition among staff could significantly drive increased motivation in the work environment. This finding highlights the importance

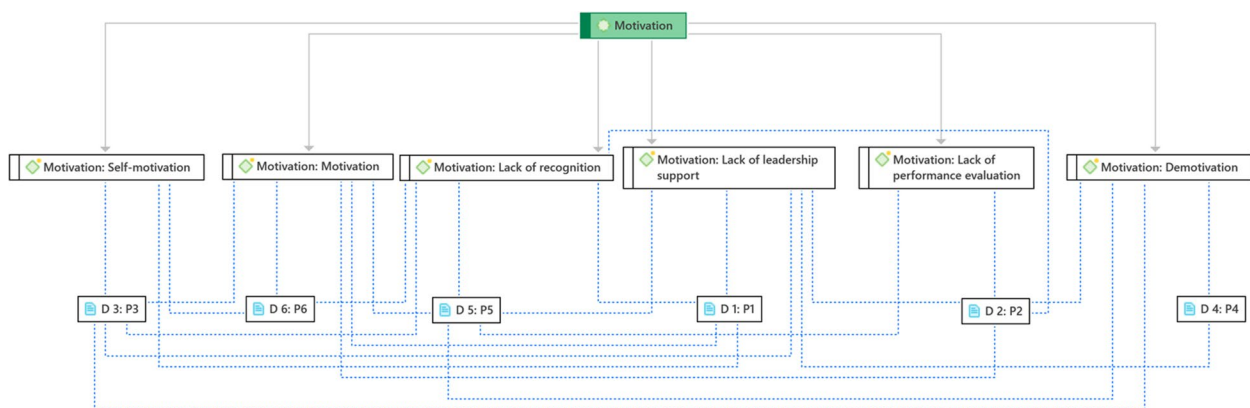
of establishing feedback and appraisal systems that empower human talent to reach their full potential and sustain motivation in the workplace. To better visualise and understand the interconnectedness of the categories and the resulting codes, a semantic map was created (Fig. 4).

**Professional development**

Professional development in the workplace can be defined as the process by which employees expand their knowledge, skills and experiences to advance their careers [59]. This expansion involves acquiring new skills and qualifications and the possibility of achieving higher levels of responsibility and leadership within the organisation.

Then, within the professional development category, several codes were identified that reflect employees' experiences and perceptions (Table 6). Among the most recurrent codes are professional growth, occasional training, and personal development, change of location, personalized service and performance appraisal. These elements play a vital role in the perception of development opportunities within the company.

When participants were queried about their perceived opportunities for growth and development within their roles, the responses were notably diverse. Five participants recognised the presence of growth opportunities



**Fig. 4** Motivation category Source: ATLAS.ti 23

**Table 6** Category code: "Professional Development"

Category	Code	Coded Segments
<b>Professional Development</b>	Professional growth	10
	Occasional training	6
	Personal development	5
	Change of location	3
	Personalised service	2
	Performance evaluation	2

Source: Own elaboration, with information from Atlas Ti.

in their current positions. However, they noted that such prospects could be enhanced if they were open to relocating, either to another city or a different unit within the same city. One participant illustrated this sentiment by mentioning, *"The possibility of connecting with other employees or changing location to access new development opportunities"*.

Furthermore, when participants were asked about the availability of training or educational opportunities to enhance their job skills, there was a general consensus that such opportunities were provided. However, these were predominantly in the form of virtual courses and training videos. One participant noted, *"That area of opportunity in our area, continuous training, is missing"*, underscoring the concern for the quality and relevance of virtual training and the need for more effective training programmes.

These insights align with the notion of providing targeted training to develop specific work-related competencies, as proposed by [60]. This approach suggests better competence indicators can be obtained by assessing successful life outcomes and the competencies that contribute to achieving them. By identifying relevant criteria, assessing communication skills, and considering both professional and personal success, a holistic and practical view of competence and skills development can

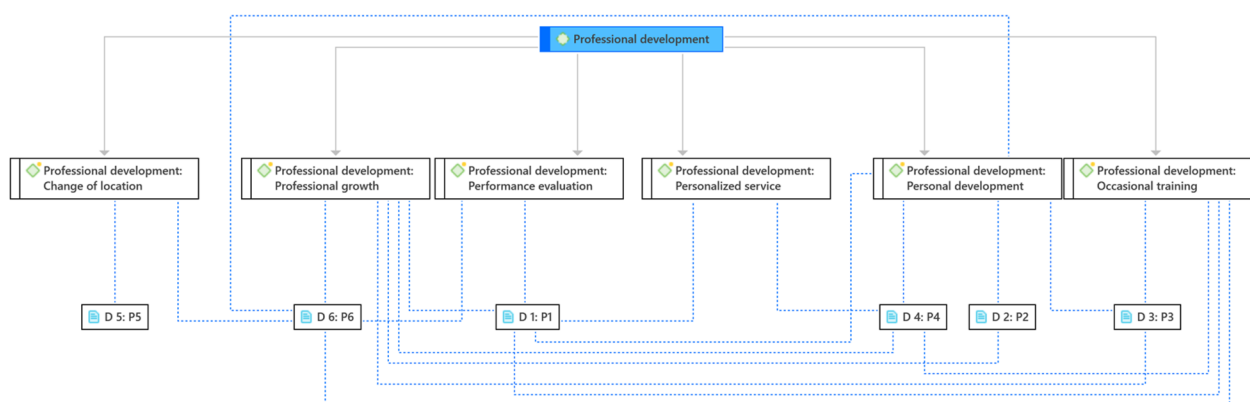
be achieved, thereby fostering general growth in both work and life. To map and visualise the relationship and flow of categories and codes effectively, a semantic map was created based on the interview data (Fig. 5).

**Compensation and benefits**

Salary compensation and benefits provided to organisational staff can be defined as the package of financial rewards and employment advantages that employees receive as part of their employment contract [61]. In this compensation category, six significant codes were identified: financial benefits, job benefits, turnover, working time, social support and quality (Table 7).

Therefore, it is essential to highlight that five interviewee's expressed satisfaction with their salary compensation. They emphasised that, given their five-hour working day, they consider their remuneration fair compared to other fitness clubs. They agreed in response to whether they were happy with their salary and benefits. For example, one participant mentioned: *"I think the salary is excellent, given the short working hours, and I have no complaints. I am satisfied in that sense"*.

In contrast, the only counter-response came from a participant who said: *"Better pay would be better. In a way, this system is designed to benefit both parties. Some may consider it unfair, but if we compare it to*



**Fig. 5** Professional development Source: ATLAS.ti 23

**Table 7** Category code: “Compensation and benefits”

Category	Code	Coded Segments
<b>Compensation and Benefits</b>	Economic benefit	6
	Employment benefits	3
	Change	2
	Working hours	2
	Social support	1
	Quality	1

Source: Own elaboration, with information from Atlas Ti.

other companies or gyms in the same sector, we come out ahead in all aspects. Although it may be 50-50 or maybe not for some people, it seems fair.”

In addition, an important finding occurred with two specific responses. One participant indicated that she was satisfied with her compensation but wanted to receive food vouchers or social support as part of her benefits. She commented, “We have a pretty good salary. However, as a franchise, we do not have food vouchers. Other units in Mexico and Monterrey offer food vouchers, which can benefit employees. Things like backpacks, thermoses, anything. We do not have that; that would be perfect.”

At this point, previous research has highlighted the importance of the geographical location in which the job is performed. It has been observed that, in Western countries, wage compensation is not considered a relevant factor influencing job satisfaction. In contrast, in developing countries, this variable is a positive and significant factor in job satisfaction, as evidenced in previous research, such as that carried out by [62]. These studies highlight how context considerably influences the perception of wage compensation and its relationship with job satisfaction.

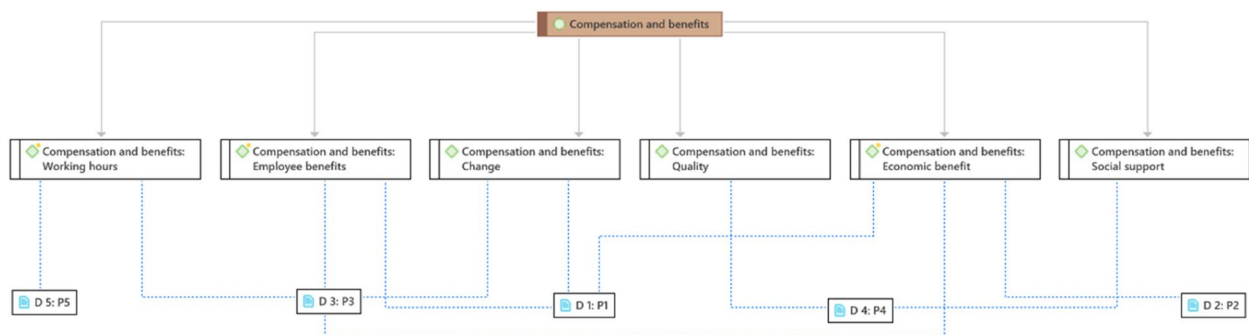
Thus, the findings of this research contribute to Herzberg’s two-factor motivation theory. This theory holds that there are hygiene factors, such as compensation, which, when absent or inadequate, can cause job

dissatisfaction [63]. On the other hand, motivational factors, such as recognition and career growth, drive job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation. The results of this study support the importance of hygiene factors, as fair wage compensation was identified as a crucial element for employee job satisfaction [62]. It underlines how adequate compensation can act as a motivating factor and contribute to employee well-being and job satisfaction in the context of this study. Finally, the authors developed a semantic map to visualise and understand the flow of categories and codes resulting from the coding analysis (Fig. 6).

**Interpersonal relations**

“Interpersonal Relationships in the Workplace” refers to the interactions and bonds between individuals in the work environment [64]. This category encompasses relationships between work colleagues, managing potential interpersonal conflicts, forming friendships in the workplace, effective team collaboration, and employees’ interaction with their leaders or superiors [65].

It is also important to note that these relationships significantly influence job satisfaction and organisational efficiency [66]. The codes associated with this category, such as “Good relationship between colleagues”, “Interpersonal conflicts”, “Friendship”, “Teamwork”, and “Relationship with the leader” (see Table 8), summaries and



**Fig. 6** Compensation and Benefits Category Source: ATLAS.ti 23

**Table 8** Category code: "Interpersonal relations"

Category	Code	Code d Segments
Interpersonal relations	A good relationship between colleagues	32
	Interpersonal conflicts	15
	Friendship	15
	Teamwork	11
	Relationship with the leader	10

Source: Own elaboration, with information from ATLAS.ti 23.

capture the essential dimensions of interpersonal relationships in the work context.

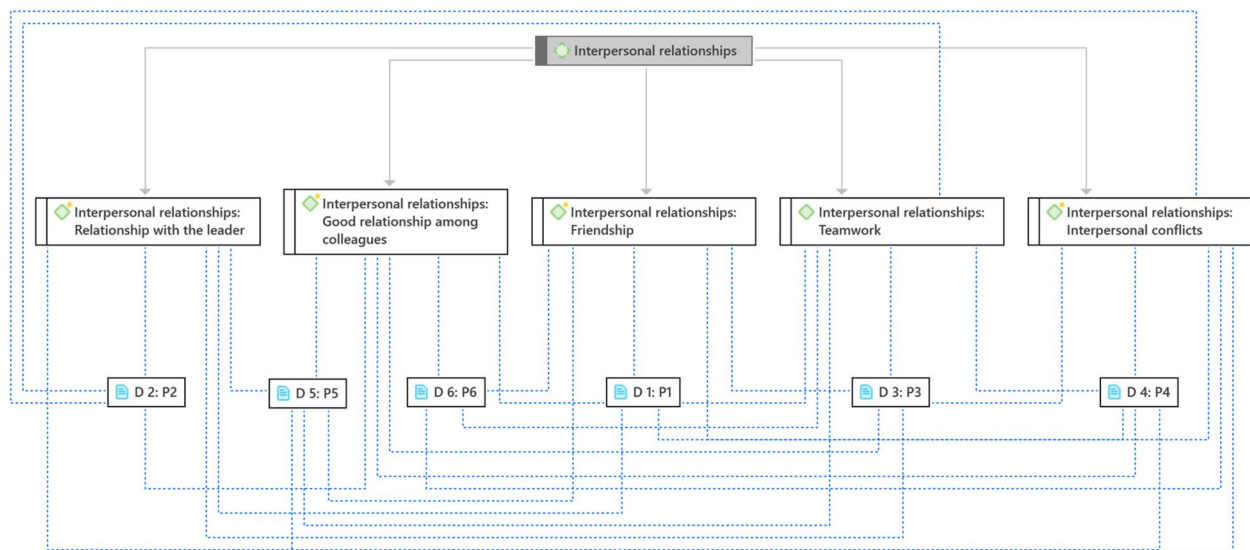
To this end, all participants expressed having positive relationships with their co-workers, although they stressed that this does not apply uniformly to all their colleagues. For example, when asked how they get along with their colleagues and superiors, one participant explained: *"I have a good relationship with my leader. I try to distinguish between being a boss and a colleague, as we have had interactions outside of work but in the work environment. Overall, I can say it is good, but to be honest, I do not get along with everyone. If you were to mention a name, I could not stand it at all. There are one or two colleagues in my work group that I do not like, and I have no interest in becoming friends with them."*

Similarly, another participant expressed the following in response to the same question: *"I try to approach my relationships with co-workers in both a professional and friendly manner to maintain a harmonious balance. However, in terms of 100% of the staff, I think I can get along*

*very well with 80%. However, with the remaining 20%, we have experienced situations that have made it difficult to establish a good professional and personal relationship"*.

Therefore, it is supported by previous research by [67], who found that friendships in the work environment significantly positively impact decision-making and motor task performance. This finding underscores the relevance of cultivating friendly relationships in the workplace, as they are significantly correlated with decision-making, as well as with job satisfaction and productivity.

Furthermore, the results obtained in this study can be related to Social Exchange Theory. This theory focuses on social interactions as an exchange process in which people seek to maximise rewards and minimise costs in their interpersonal relationships [6]. It argues that relationships are maintained when people perceive that they are gaining benefits and broken when they perceive inequalities in these exchanges [68]. Finally, we drew a semantic map to identify and visualise the flow of categories and codes resulting from the authors' coding analysis (Fig. 7).



**Fig. 7** Category Interpersonal Relationships Source: ATLAS.ti 23

### Working environment

The work environment or organisational climate in the business environment refers to the set of factors, perceptions and conditions that characterise the work atmosphere within an organization [69]. In this context, the category of “work environment” has been coded into five (Table 9): “work conflicts”, “good work environment”, “uncertainty”, “toxic work environment” and “task overload”.

To explore the work environment category, participants were asked: “How would you describe the atmosphere in the gym?” The findings revealed that five of the six participants mentioned the presence of work conflicts, primarily attributing these conflicts to leadership and personal egos among colleagues. For instance, one participant pointed to *“the leader’s preference for some employees as a source of tension in the work environment.”* Another participant expressed uncertainty, noting: *“The working environment can be improved; we can all improve it. One can interpret it as an average environment. Sometimes it is nice, and sometimes it is tense. The situation varies, depending on the circumstances.”*

A notable comment came from a participant who observed: *“Preference is only given to certain people, and that is where it falls. Now, we doubt the word of the person who is guiding us. There is a lot to be desired because some demand more from us than others, complicating the environment.”* This indicates that individuals who do not have a good relationship with the leader are often assigned more tasks. These testimonies highlight several dynamics and challenges influencing the work environment in the gym, emphasising the need to address these aspects to improve job satisfaction and productivity.

Research by [70] in 2001 supports this principle, finding that project or organisational success is inversely related to staff perceptions of personal and environmental threats. Additionally, specific organisational characteristics such as promoting free expression, encouraging questioning, participation in goal setting, innovation, and intrinsic job satisfaction were positively associated with project success. Conversely, factors such as organisational change and conflict were negatively associated with project success.

Further research on Organisational Climate Theory underscores the impact of employees’ collective perceptions of their work environment on their attitudes and behaviours. An organisational climate that fosters employee satisfaction, trust, and a perception of fairness tends to generate greater motivation and commitment among employees [21, 71, 72]. Employees who perceive their work environment as positive, fair, and satisfying are more likely to be motivated and committed to their work.

Also, organisational climate emerges as a significant factor in job satisfaction. The perception of organisational politics can be a major stressor that negatively influences work attitudes, as discussed in [73]. This study suggests that political skills and work ethics can help mitigate these negative effects, highlighting the importance of developing personal resources to manage internal politics and improve the work environment.

In summary, a work environment characterised by positive and fair perceptions can significantly contribute to the success of a project or organisation. Leadership plays a critical role in shaping, creating, and maintaining this positive work climate. Finally, a semantic map was created to visualise the relationships between the categories and codes derived from the interviews of the participants in our study (Fig. 8).

### Tasks and responsibilities

The penultimate category, “Task and responsibilities”, delves into the many facets of employees’ job responsibilities in their work environment. It is composed of several codes, including “customer service”, “responsibility”, “equal distribution of tasks”, “work”, and “contracted service” (Table 10). These codes contribute to understanding how job responsibilities impact job satisfaction and dynamics, revealing the relationship between employees’ tasks and responsibilities and their organisational experience.

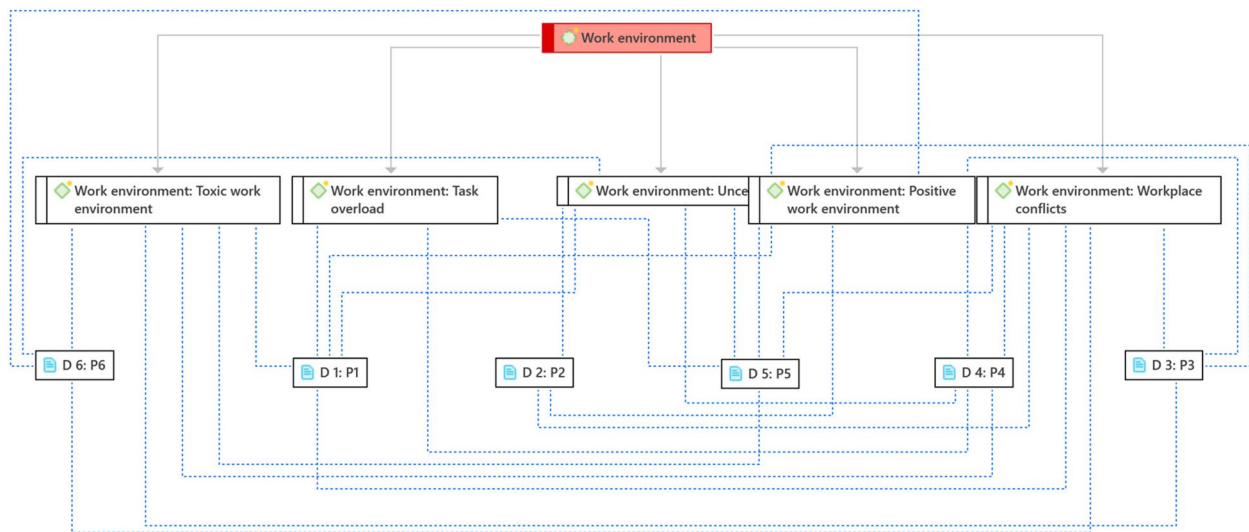
Then, the previously mentioned codes originated from the interview question: “What activities do you carry out in your job daily? In response, participants said, *“The activities I carry out in general terms ask us to do customer care. Also, to make corrections to the clients, to see if the client needs a free service offered by the company to attend the client with high satisfaction*

**Table 9** Category code: “Working environment”

Category	Code	Coded Segments
Work environment	Labour disputes	22
	Good working environment	20
	Uncertainty	19
	Toxic work environment	9
	Task overload	4

Source: Own elaboration, with information from ATLAS.ti 23.





**Fig. 8** Work environment category Source: ATLAS.ti 23

**Table 10** Category code: "Task and responsibilities"

Category	Code	Coded Segments
Tasks and responsibilities	Customer service and support	12
	Responsibility	11
	Unbalanced distribution of tasks	7
	Work	5
	Contracted service	4

Source: Own elaboration, with information from ATLAS.ti 23.

and they can have a quality, a service well in accordance, what they pay additionally for the personalised ones". Within this response, it is evident that employees are fully aware that customer service is part of their priority responsibilities. In addition, they highlighted the provision of a personalised service that comes at an additional cost to customers.

Finally, when asked if they were satisfied with the tasks assigned to them in their job roles, one participant responded: "Yes, I always feel satisfied with what I am asked to do. Not myself. The job is too easy. The only thing is the recognition that you do it right, or you do it wrong. When it needs to be said, this testimony again highlights the critical role of recognition in the work environment, as despite feeling satisfied with the nature of his work, the participant yearns for more consistent recognition from management, suggesting the importance of valuing and rewarding employee contributions.

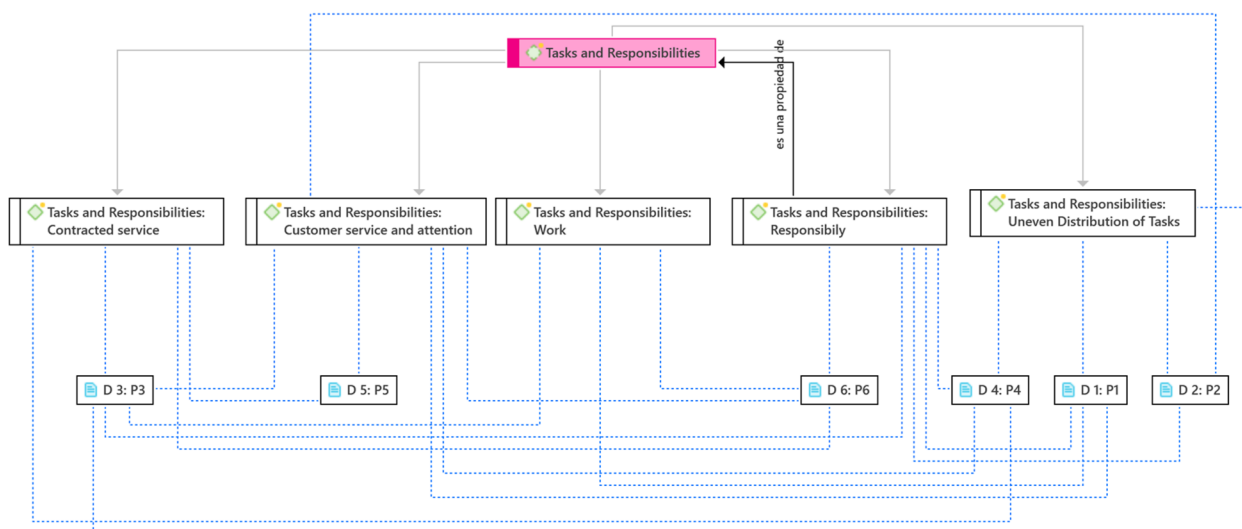
However, these findings align with Victor Vroom's Theory of Motivation and Expectancy. It is critical to note that while all participants understand their tasks and responsibilities, some express dissatisfaction due to

the perception that they are working harder than their peers and lack recognition from their leaders.

Further examination of testimonies revealed that personalised services represent a significant part of their income and are performed outside their five-hour working hours. Notably, the fitness club franchise charges employees a fee for providing one-on-one counseling, causing discomfort among staff. Despite efforts to obtain the exact fee, none of the participants disclosed this information. Consequently, these findings highlight the importance of addressing recognition and additional compensation issues to promote employee satisfaction and motivation. Finally, a semantic map has been developed to visualise the relationship between categories and codes resulting from the coding analysis based on the interviews (Fig. 9).

**Experience and perceived job satisfaction**

The final category, entitled "Experience and Perception of Job Satisfaction", has been categorised based on the following codes: "Job Satisfaction", which reflects employees' happiness and well-being at work; "Job Dissatisfaction", which denotes discomfort or



**Fig. 9** Tasks and responsibilities category Source: ATLAS.ti 23

dissatisfaction; "Social Interaction", which refers to relationships and connections between co-workers and leaders, and "Mixed Job Satisfaction", which encapsulates mixed or ambivalent feelings about work (Table 11). These codes represent crucial elements in the perception and experience of job satisfaction.

The categories mentioned above emerged from a question posed to participants: "What has been your work experience at the gym so far?" One participant responded: "So far, my work experience has been pleasant. I like this job very much. It is pretty simple. What I appreciate most is that I enjoy what I do; it is a real passion. Although we sometimes face challenges with complicated clients, we can handle everything. I am satisfied with my work." This response reflects the overall satisfaction and enthusiasm experienced by this participant in his role at the gym.

Moreover, another participant shared his perspective: "So far, my work experience here has been very satisfying. I think a lot of it is because I enjoy what I do. I could not say much more except that I love working here and am passionate. In short, my experience has been positive." This participant also expresses his satisfaction and

appreciation for his work at the gym, highlighting the importance of passion in his work experience.

However, it is noteworthy that one participant expressed a variable level of satisfaction, stating: "My work experience so far is pleasant. It is a job that I like. It is a straightforward thing. The simple fact is that I like what I do, and I am passionate about it. Although sometimes there are difficult days, some clients are complex, but nothing that cannot be handled." This employee generally appreciates his work, although he acknowledges occasional challenges and demanding clients in his work experience.

Therefore, these findings align with BF Skinner's "Reinforcement Theory," which focuses on how rewards and punishments shape human behaviour [74]. In the context of labour relations, we can observe the application of positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, punishment, and extinction. For example, the lack of recognition by leadership aligns with the concept of extinction, where a previously reinforced behaviour is no longer reinforced, resulting in decreased behaviour.

Furthermore, employees' perception of recognition is directly related to positive reinforcement, as recognition

**Table 11** Category code: "Experience and perceived job satisfaction"

Category	Code	Coded Segments
Experience and perceived job satisfaction	Job satisfaction	12
	Job dissatisfaction	11
	Social interaction	7
	Mixed job satisfaction	5

Source: Own elaboration, with information from ATLAS.ti 23.



other words, we assessed the tone or emotional disposition conveyed through the words in these interviews, gaining a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the participants' responses.

Specifically, sentiment analysis was applied to 451 paragraphs extracted from the six interviews using Artificial Intelligence. The results revealed that 253 paragraphs expressed neutral sentiments, 159 reflected negative sentiments, and 39 conveyed positive sentiments (Table 12). This approach provides a detailed understanding of the emotions and attitudes in the participants' responses, enriching our research and offering insights into their experiences and perceptions in the studied context.

This overlap with previously established categories and codes supports the validity and relevance of our sentiment analysis. It demonstrates that the emotions and attitudes identified align with the key themes and concepts explored in our study. This alignment strengthens our understanding of participants' work experiences and how they relate to satisfaction, interpersonal relationships, tasks, and responsibilities within the organisational context studied.

### Conclusions and discussions

Qualitative research on job satisfaction provides a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of individuals' experiences and perceptions within their work environment. This approach diverges from traditional quantitative methods, allowing for an in-depth exploration of interactions, motivations, frustrations, and aspirations, thus enriching our comprehension of job satisfaction dynamics [77].

A primary finding from this study underscores the significant impact of internal communication on job satisfaction. Although numerous interviewees highlighted inadequacies in communication from their leaders, some observed notable improvements. This aligns with the Communication as Management Theory, which posits internal communication as a strategic tool for

enhancing organisational management and culture [77]. Such improvements in communication are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN 2030 Agenda, particularly Goal 8, which advocates for sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, alongside full and productive employment and decent work for all.

Moreover, the organisational climate emerged as a critical factor influencing job satisfaction. While the majority of participants rated the environment as fair, there was a consensus on the need for improvement, especially in leadership management. This finding is in concordance with Organisational Climate Theory, which emphasises the significant role of collective perceptions in shaping attitudes and behaviours within an organisation, thereby promoting employee satisfaction, trust, and fairness [71]. This supports SDG 8 by underlining the necessity of a positive work environment to foster decent working conditions.

Furthermore, the study highlighted the importance of interpersonal relationships, with participants stressing their relevance to job satisfaction and expressing concerns about managing these relationships within the franchise. This insight aligns with Social Exchange Theory, which underscores the pivotal role of reciprocal social interactions in enhancing motivation and commitment [68]. Cultivating strong interpersonal relationships at work supports SDG 8 by fostering a collaborative and respectful work culture, essential for sustainable economic growth.

The findings also indicate that work ethic and political skill can buffer the negative effects of perceived organisational politics on job attitudes. Effective management of interpersonal relationships is crucial for maintaining a positive work environment and enhancing employee commitment [33]. This further emphasises the role of strong interpersonal relationships in job satisfaction, aligning with the need to foster a supportive work culture.

Additionally, effective time management and conflict resolution are fundamental to achieving a work-life

**Table 12** Sentiment analysis of paragraphs with AI

Sense of feeling	Number of Paragraphs Obtained
Neutrals	253
Negatives	159
Positives	39
<b>Total, Paragraphs Analysed</b>	<b>451</b>
Source: Own elaboration, with information from Atlas Ti.	



balance in Mexican fitness franchises. Addressing work-related stress and providing emotional support are vital for prioritising employees' well-being, which aligns with SDG 3, aiming to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Furthermore, motivation, both positive and negative, was found to significantly influence job satisfaction, with a notable emphasis on the role of leadership in fostering motivation and providing support. Professional development and growth opportunities were also highlighted, with participants valuing face-to-face training and personal development initiatives. These findings underscore the necessity for continuous skills improvement and career advancement, aligning with SDG 4, which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities.

Compensation and benefits were also crucial factors, with participants appreciating financial and employment benefits but suggesting improvements in working hours. Fair compensation directly impacts financial well-being and job satisfaction, contributing to employee retention. This aligns with SDG 10, which aims to reduce inequality within and among countries by ensuring fair wages and benefits.

In summary, this research aimed to understand how employees in Mexican fitness franchises perceive their job satisfaction and its impact on performance. The findings highlight the essential roles of internal communication, leadership, and the work environment. Enhancing these areas can significantly boost job satisfaction and performance.

Aligning these insights with the UN 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) demonstrates how improving job satisfaction supports global sustainability objectives. This study underscores the critical connection between workplace well-being and broader social goals, emphasising the importance of strategic management practices in fostering a supportive and productive work environment.

.Notes: No experimental tests were carried out with humans in this article. The research subjects consented to the use of their information.

### **Practical implications**

The findings from this research offer several practical implications for improving job satisfaction within fitness club franchises in Mexico.

First, enhancing internal communication is essential. Improving communication from leaders and ensuring transparency in decision-making processes can foster trust and mutual respect, which significantly enhances

job satisfaction. Employees need regular feedback and clear information about their roles and organisational changes to feel valued and engaged [47].

Second, leadership training is crucial. Providing training focused on empathy, communication, and team building can address issues of ineffective leadership and improve overall employee motivation and support. Effective leaders can create a more supportive and motivating work environment, crucial for maintaining high levels of job satisfaction.

Third, offering career development opportunities is vital. Establishing clear career pathways and providing regular training and development programs help employees feel valued and invested in the organisation. This approach not only improves job satisfaction but also contributes to higher retention rates and a more skilled workforce.

Fourth, promoting work-life balance is important. Implementing flexible work schedules and allowing employees to take time off as needed supports their overall well-being, leading to higher productivity and engagement. A healthy work-life balance ensures that employees are not overwhelmed and can maintain their personal lives alongside their professional responsibilities.

Fifth, addressing compensation and recognition is necessary. Regularly reviewing compensation packages to ensure they reflect employees' contributions and market standards can address financial dissatisfaction. Additionally, recognising and appreciating employees' efforts, both formally and informally, can boost morale and motivation.

Sixth, improving the work environment is critical. Promoting a culture of fairness and inclusivity where all employees feel valued and respected can reduce conflicts and enhance job satisfaction. Implementing policies that encourage ethical behaviour and teamwork can help cultivate a positive work atmosphere.

Lastly, utilising AI for continuous improvement can be highly effective. Using AI tools for regular employee feedback and sentiment analysis can provide ongoing insights into job satisfaction. This real-time data can help organisations proactively address issues and continuously improve the work environment.

In summary, these practical steps enhancing communication, improving leadership, offering career development opportunities, promoting work-life balance, addressing compensation and recognition, improving the work environment, and utilising AI—can significantly enhance job satisfaction, motivation, and productivity within fitness club franchises in Mexico, benefiting both employees and the organisation.



## Limitations and directions for future research

### Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size is relatively small, consisting of only six participants from a single fitness club franchise in Mexico. This limited sample size may not fully capture the diversity of experiences and perspectives across the entire industry. Consequently, the findings may not be generalisable to all fitness club franchises in Mexico or other countries.

Secondly, the study relies on qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews. While this approach provides in-depth insights into participants' experiences and perceptions, it may be subject to biases such as social desirability bias, where participants provide responses, they believe are expected rather than their true feelings. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the study makes it difficult to quantify the extent of the issues identified or compare them statistically across different groups.

Thirdly, the research focuses primarily on the perspectives of employees, with less emphasis on the views of management or customers. This narrow focus may overlook important factors influencing job satisfaction, such as organisational policies, customer interactions, and market conditions.

### Directions for future research

Future research should address these limitations by adopting a more comprehensive approach. Firstly, expanding the sample size and including participants from multiple fitness club franchises across different regions of Mexico would provide a more representative and generalisable understanding of job satisfaction in this industry. Including a broader demographic range and varying levels of employment within the sample could also offer deeper insights.

Secondly, incorporating quantitative methods alongside qualitative approaches could help quantify the prevalence of identified issues and enable statistical comparisons. Surveys or questionnaires could be used to collect data from a larger number of participants, providing a more robust analysis of job satisfaction factors.

Thirdly, future research should consider the perspectives of management and customers to gain a more holistic view of job satisfaction. Understanding the challenges and expectations from multiple stakeholders can provide a more comprehensive framework for improving job satisfaction.

Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking changes in job satisfaction over time would be valuable. These studies could assess the long-term impact of implemented improvements and identify evolving trends and new challenges in the industry.

Finally, exploring the impact of cultural and economic factors unique to Mexico on job satisfaction could provide valuable context-specific insights. Comparative studies between different countries or regions within Mexico could also highlight how varying socio-economic conditions influence job satisfaction.

### Authors' contributions

Conceptualization, M.A.S.A.; methodology, E.G.V.; software, M.A.S.A and E.G.V.; validation, M.R.B.C.; formal analysis, M.A.S.A and E.G.V.; investigation, M.A.S.A, E.G.V., M.R.B.C. and R.R.R.; interviews: M.R.B.C and R.R.R.; resources, M.R.B.C. and R.R.R.; data curation, E.G.V. and M.A.S.A.; writing—original draft preparation, M.A.S.A.; writing—review and editing, E.G.V. and R.R.R.; visualization, E.G.V. and M.R.B.C.; supervision, E.G.V. and R.R.R.; project administration, E.G.V. and R.R.R.; funding acquisition, R.R.R. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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### Availability of data and materials

Data is provided in the manuscript, If you need the complete interviews, please request us.

### Declarations

#### Ethics approval and consent to participate

This study adhered to the ethical guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and national laws. It received ethical approval from the ethics committees of the Autonomous University of Tamaulipas and CETYS University, along with sampling permission from the fitness franchise. Participants were informed about the research regulations and the code of ethics of the Autonomous University of Tamaulipas, approved in session No. 314. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, who had the right to withdraw at any time. Measures were taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the information.

#### Consent for publication

Not applicable, as no identifiable information is included in this manuscript.

#### Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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