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Perception of Healthy Organizational Practices of Workers in the Chilean Educational Sector and Impact on Their Levels of Engagement and Burnout

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Abstract: Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, teaching was considered one of the most stressful occupations, one that could provoke burnout in workers. Continuing to provide educational services despite the pandemic and the new methodologies was a challenge for teachers that demonstrated their engagement in their work. This research, from the model of healthy and resilient organizations (HERO), aimed to assess the perception of healthy organizational practices (HOP) of teachers of an educational institution during the years 2020 and 2021 and the impact they have on their levels of engagement and burnout. Through the application of three instruments, 154 responses were obtained. The data were analyzed through correlations and mean comparisons. The main results show that in 2020, the correlations between HOP with engagement and burnout were positive and negative, respectively, as expected. In 2021, the perception of HOP decreased, as did teacher engagement, while burnout increased. In conclusion, the findings suggest that HOP can become a sustainable human resource management tool that promotes teachers' mental health, even in challenging times.

Keywords: healthy organizational practices; engagement; burnout; COVID-19; educational sector



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1. Introduction

The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic has generated disruptions to human routines. The uncertainty experienced is one of the main reasons for this [1], along with the mandatory quarantines and confinements that must be experienced [2], social isolation [3], and the fear of being infected [4].

In the labor and organizational field, Salanova [5] points out that in the face of an overwhelming event such as COVID-19, there are organizations that will not be able to adapt and consequently will disappear. In contrast, others will be able to survive, facing the changes proactively and even managing to grow with the crisis. In previous studies, the author refers to these as “healthy organizations”, which, before the pandemic, understood that generating a positive work environment with good labor relations would lead to better results for the organization and its workers [6]. Other research, such as that of Donaldson et al. [7], exposes engagement as a positive variable and burnout as a negative variable of the workers' emotional state, pointing out that these may be the product of the perception of healthy organizational practices developed by the institution.

The relationship of good practices with the well-being of workers has been studied since the emergence of positive organizational psychology, which is defined by [8] as “the scientific study of the optimal functioning of the health of individuals and groups in

organizations, as well as the effective management of psychosocial well-being at work and the development of organizations”.

Different studies [9–12] have shown, with various variables to represent the well-being of workers, that the mere perception by them of the existence of planned and systematic organizational practices causes them to feel a sense of well-being.

Thus, Ref. [13] found in a group of teachers that the positive organizational practices developed by educational establishments influence their perception of well-being at work.

In this regard, Ref. [14] states that the development of good practices causes the organization to be seen as a good place to work, increasing its reputation and good image, which will have an impact on results.

On the other hand, and from the perspective of sustainable human resource management, Ref. [15] point out that although organizational practices are recognized as the key to motivate employee behavior and are responsible for the sustainability and competitive advantage of a company, they also express that they could have the opposite effect if workers do not recognize them or do not value them as a contribution to their development and well-being.

From the HERO model (Healthy and Resilient Organizations; Ref. [6], the development of planned and systematic practices by the organization for the benefit of workers is an imperative for the company to be considered healthy. From here arises the name “Healthy Organizational Practices” (HOP), which are work–life balance, mobbing prevention, career development and skills development, occupational health, perceived equity and organizational justice, organizational communication and information, and corporate social responsibility [16]. This model, due to its support and compatibility, will be the basis of our research [17]

Healthy work practices can contribute to the achievement of sustainable employability, which according to Van der Klink et al. [18] (p. 74) implies providing workers with “the necessary conditions that enable them to make a valuable contribution through their work, now and in the future while safeguarding their health and well-being”.

As for engagement, this is a positive motivational state composed of the dimensions vigor, dedication, and absorption [19], which is related to the way in which workers approach and face work, so it is not precisely a consequence of it. As Ref. [20] argue, the type of unfolded management can have different effects on people and also on their state of engagement.

In a review of various research studies, Ref. [21] state that workers with higher engagement tend to be more proactive and have greater learning and more creative behavior. Along the same lines, Ref. [22] point out that workers with higher engagement are more empowered. The authors also argue that these people are expected to be more prone to change in turbulent times and crises.

Burnout syndrome is a construct composed of the dimensions: emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and low personal fulfillment [19,23], so it can be understood that its consequences go beyond work. It occurs more frequently in workers who must spend a large amount of time in relation to people as customers or users of a service provided by an organization [23].

Ref. [24] examined the relationship between burnout and objective team performance and found an inverse relationship between the variables.

Ref. [25] conducted an analysis of engagement and burnout as a continuum representing the extremes of workers’ emotional states. They are categorical in pointing out that both variables influence people’s functioning and therefore their performance and organizational results.

Ref. [26] conducted a one-year longitudinal investigation, finding that job autonomy, learning opportunities, social support, and performance feedback as good management practices are positively related to two dimensions of engagement: vigor and dedication, and are negatively related to the burnout dimension of cynicism.

Before the pandemic, teaching was considered to be one of the most stressful occupations [27]. Studies such as those by Jackson et al. [28] indicate that the teaching profession

could generate a higher proclivity to experiencing health problems, limiting the personal performance of teaching workers, resulting in a decrease in positive results for all parties involved, which in this case would be the students, the educational establishment, and the caregivers responsible for the students, among others [29].

On 16 March 2020, Chile decreed the suspension of face-to-face classes at the national level, initiating a period of distance education for the 3.8 million students that make up the Chilean school system, which implied, among other things, the implementation of digital platforms and technological tools in 2020, which was deepened in 2021 with the need to teach classes in a hybrid way (MI-NEDUC, 2021). This implied a higher degree of teleworking in 2020, which decreased in 2021.

Therefore, this is a relevant issue for any organization's success; thus, educational entities are not left out of this reality.

In this context emerges the urge to analyze the perception of healthy organizational practices (HOP) of teachers of an educational institution in the region of Ñuble-Chile during the years 2020 and 2021 and the impact that they have on levels of engagement and burnout in order to assist in the development of their new institutional, educational project (PEI) in times of pandemic that aims to achieve sustainable employability.

The objective of the research was to analyze whether the practices generated and delivered by the organization affect the mental health of people, for which the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1. *The perception of healthy organizational practices is positively related to employee engagement and negatively related to burnout.*

Hypothesis 2. *The perception of healthy organizational practices and the levels of employee engagement and burnout show significant differences according to the year of application of the instruments.*

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Procedure and Participants

This study is quantitative and non-probabilistic. Information was obtained through 3 self-administered surveys with closed-ended questions to measure healthy organizational practices, engagement, and burnout, separately, in the years 2020 and 2021 in the same educational establishment. The questionnaires were generated in Google Forms and were distributed to workers through an access link sent to their respective institutional e-mails in both years during the month of June. They were answered online, freely, autonomously, and voluntarily by the workers, after contact with the educational establishment.

The non-probabilistic and non-random convenience sampling technique was used, resulting in 70 responses from workers of a Chilean educational establishment (out of a population of 90) who responded to the surveys in 2020, of which, 82.9% were women and 17.1% were men, and 4.3% were under 24 years of age, 38.6% were between 24 and 30 years, 38.6% were between 31 and 39 years, 11.4% were between 40 and 49 years, and 7.1% were between 50 and 59 years.

For the year 2021, there was an increase in the number of workers hired at the establishment, in order to better meet the educational needs; therefore, the population was 111 teachers, and 84 responses were obtained, with 84.5% being women and 15.5% men; moreover, 34.5% were under 24 years of age, 46.4% were between 24 and 30 years of age, 17.9% were between 31 and 39 years of age, and 1.2% were between 40 and 49 years of age.

2.2. Instruments

The instruments used are detailed below for each of the relevant variables considered:

2.2.1. Healthy Organizational Practices (HOP)

The HERO Model [16] practices were used with the 10 statements employed by Acosta et al. [9]. Additionally, the following item was incorporated: “Your organization has delivered (generated) practices and the conditions to perform your work during the pandemic”. For a better analysis, the 10 statements proposed by the HERO model, plus the one added by the pandemic context, constituted jointly as a proper variable (HOP) obtained from the average of the responses of the 11 statements.

The statements were answered with a Likert-type scale from 0 to 6 points, where 0 = never; 1 = a few times a year; 2 = once a month or less; 3 = few times a month; 4 = once a week; 5 = a few times a week; 6 = every day.

The internal consistency of this group of statements was adequate for this study ($\alpha_{HOP} = 0.88$).

2.2.2. Engagement

The assessment was conducted with the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) [30], an instrument that allows for the reporting of a total score and three dimensions described below.

- Vigor, characterized by high levels of energy and mental stamina (6 items, e.g., When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work);
- Dedication, referring to being strongly involved in work (5 items, e.g., I am enthusiastic about my work); and
- Absorption is characterized by the person concentrating and enjoying the activity while working (6 items, e.g., I am happy when I am absorbed in my work).

All items were answered on a Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always).

The internal consistency of this group of statements for this study was adequate ($\alpha_{Engagement} = 0.92$).

2.2.3. Burnout

The Maslach Burnout Inventory General Survey (MBI-GS) [23], adapted to the Spanish population by Moreno-Jiménez et al. [31] and having been used in Chilean samples reporting adequate reliability [32], was used. This scale comprises 15 items to measure the level of burnout on a frequency scale from 0 (never) to 6 (every day) points. Altogether, it provides an overall burnout score, although it is usually analyzed according to the three classic dimensions reported in the literature:

- Emotional exhaustion, which is manifested by the presence of feelings of weakness and exhaustion in the face of work demands (5 items, e.g., I am emotionally exhausted by my job);
- Cynicism, referring to a negative, insensitive, or excessively apathetic response to various aspects of the job (4 items, e.g., I have lost interest in my job since I started in this position); and
- Professional inefficacy, referring to a declining sense of self-efficacy and achievement at work, which is heightened by a lack of resources (6 negative items, e.g., In my opinion, I am good at my job).

The internal consistency of this group of statements for this study was adequate ($\alpha_{Engagement} = 0.92$).

The statistical analyses were carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

To analyze the distribution of the data, we used the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, with Lilliefors adequacy, obtaining a *p*-value greater than the significance level of the study; therefore, we assumed a normal distribution of the data.

A correlation analysis between the variables was carried out using Pearson’s coefficient to answer the study hypotheses. The means were compared using Student’s *t*-test, reporting the corresponding effect sizes. Correlations were interpreted as large ($r = 0.50$), medium

($r = 0.30$), and small ($r = 0.10$), and effect sizes as large ($d = 0.8$), medium ($d = 0.5$), and small ($d = 0.2$), as proposed by Sink and Mvududu [33].

3. Results

First, the correlations between the different variables under study for the two years are shown, followed by comparisons of the variable means according to the year of response (2020 and 2021).

As shown in Table 1, in 2020, the healthy organizational practices (HOP), except for career development, were positively and significantly related to engagement. Regarding the dimensions of engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption), they also found a positive and significant relationship with the HOPs, except for work–life balance and career development with the three dimensions and skills development with the dimension of dedication.

Table 1. Correlations between the variables under study for the year 2020.

	Engagement	Vigor	Dedication	Absorption	Burnout	Exhaustion	Inefficiency	Cynicism
Reconciliation	0.246 *	0.219	0.194	0.217	−0.343 **	−0.274 *	−0.316 **	−0.138
Mobbing prevention	0.339 **	0.335 **	0.274 *	0.268 *	−0.286 *	−0.181	−0.282 *	−0.183
Skill development	0.314 **	0.336 **	0.216	0.246 *	−0.294 *	−0.310 *	−0.152	−0.140
Career development	0.207	0.206	0.121	0.188	−0.175	−0.125	−0.169	−0.084
Well-being	0.522 **	0.459 **	0.371 **	0.484 **	−0.205	−0.152	−0.237	−0.036
Quality of life	0.522 **	0.459 **	0.371 **	0.484 **	−0.205	−0.152	−0.237	−0.036
Equity	0.365 **	0.378 **	0.252 *	0.301 *	−0.306 *	−0.292 *	−0.262 *	−0.051
Information	0.486 **	0.501 **	0.357 **	0.384 **	−0.092	−0.061	−0.087	−0.057
Communication	0.583 **	0.508 **	0.461 **	0.527 **	−0.209	−0.091	−0.289 *	−0.091
CSR	0.529 **	0.475 **	0.424 **	0.462 **	−0.175	−0.127	−0.186	−0.060
Pandemic assistance	0.519 **	0.490 **	0.404 **	0.459 **	−0.143	−0.177	−0.093	0.024

** Correlation was significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral). * Correlation was significant at the 0.05 level (bilateral). Source: Self-elaboration.

The results appeared different when looking at the correlations between healthy organizational practices with burnout and its dimensions. The correlations that were negative and significant were reconciliation with burnout and the burnout and ineffectiveness dimensions; the mobbing prevention with burnout and the ineffectiveness dimension; skills development with burnout and the exhaustion dimension; and equity with burnout and the exhaustion and the ineffectiveness dimensions.

Regarding the results for the year 2021, as shown in Table 2, the correlations drastically changed compared to those obtained in 2020. Only the practices of well-being, quality of life, and pandemic assistance attained positive and significant correlations with engagement and its dimensions.

Table 2. Correlations between the variables under study for the year 2021.

	Engagement	Vigor	Dedication	Absorption	Burnout	Exhaustion	Inefficiency	Cynicism
Reconciliation	0.037	−0.001	0.159	−0.029	0.017	0.048	0.084	−0.143
Mobbing prevention	0.081	0.025	0.085	0.119	0.200	0.209	0.076	0.046
Skills development	0.039	0.075	0.088	−0.044	−0.002	0.046	0.011	−0.092
Career development	0.049	0.066	0.011	0.052	−0.107	−0.172	0.033	−0.023
Well-being	0.887 **	0.861 **	0.790 **	0.829 **	0.166	−0.148	0.070	−0.270 *
Quality of life	0.798 **	0.786 **	0.707 **	0.737 **	0.088	−0.154	0.059	−0.305 **
Equity	−0.012	−0.054	0.058	−0.024	0.121	0.083	0.177	−0.069
Information	−0.202	−0.155	−0.243 *	−0.180	−0.883 **	−0.692 **	−0.453 **	−0.424 **
Communication	0.013	−0.013	0.039	0.016	−0.119	−0.089	−0.091	−0.024
CSR	−0.032	−0.047	0.006	−0.043	0.002	0.083	−0.042	−0.074
Pandemic assistance	0.739 **	0.720 **	0.663 **	0.685 **	0.189	−0.055	−0.547 **	−0.160

** Correlation was significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral). * Correlation was significant at the 0.05 level (bilateral). Source: Self-elaboration.

For burnout, only the information practice achieved negative and significant correlations with burnout and the dimensions of exhaustion, ineffectiveness, and cynicism. It should be stressed that the practices of well-being and quality of life obtained negative and significant correlations with the cynicism dimension, and the practice of pandemic assistance achieved a negative and significant correlation along with the inefficacy dimension.

The differences in the correlations of variables from one year to another strengthened the idea of comparing the averages of the variables according to the years of assessment, which are presented in the following tables.

As seen in Table 3, 7 out of 11 practices presented significant differences; in all cases, the perception of practices in the year 2021 appeared to be lower than that reported in the year 2020.

Table 3. Comparison of HOP averages obtained in 2020 and 2021.

	Year	M	DE	t	p	d
Reconciliation	2020	4.77	1.47	13.19	0.00	0.83
	2021	1.77	1.31			
Mobbing prevention	2020	4.71	1.79	13.53	0.00	0.74
	2021	1.30	1.32			
Skills development	2020	4.43	1.49	4.21	0.00	0.32
	2021	3.49	1.21			
Career development	2020	4.26	1.74	−0.24	0.81	
	2021	4.31	0.89			
Wellness	2020	5.10	1.14	1.24	0.21	
	2021	4.90	0.80			
Quality of life	2020	5.10	1.14	1.64	0.10	
	2021	4.85	0.76			
Equity	2020	4.61	1.47	9.48	0.00	0.60
	2021	2.57	1.19			
Information	2020	4.86	1.26	9.49	0.00	0.60
	2021	3.27	0.78			
Communication	2020	5.09	1.18	21.26	0.00	0.87
	2021	1.52	0.81			
CSR	2020	5.06	1.19	5.71	0.00	0.43
	2021	3.73	1.61			
Pandemic assistance	2020	5.10	1.21	1.35	0.17	
	2021	4.88	0.78			

Source: Self-elaboration.

The practices with a more significant effect size were conciliation and communication; those with a medium effect size were mobbing prevention, equity, and information; and those with a small effect size were skills development and corporate social responsibility.

Table 4 shows that engagement and its three dimensions showed significant differences, wherein the level reported in 2021 was lower than in 2020. The effect sizes for all differences were minor.

Regarding burnout and its dimensions, only the cynicism dimension showed no significant differences. Both burnout and the ineffectiveness dimension presented significant differences of considerable size, higher in 2021 than in 2020. The difference in burnout was in the same direction as indicated above, but with an irrelevant effect size.

Table 4. Comparison of engagement and burnout averages obtained in 2020 and 2021.

	Year	M	DE	t	p	d
Engagement	2020	5.48	0.41	3.029	0.00	0.25
	2021	5.16	0.77			
Vigor	2020	5.44	0.48	2.49	0.01	0.20
	2021	5.16	0.84			
Dedication	2020	5.70	0.36	2.22	0.02	0.18
	2021	5.47	0.80			
Absorption	2020	5.32	0.58	3.41	0.00	0.26
	2021	4.92	0.83			
Burnout	2020	1.02	0.73	−16.43	0.00	0.80
	2021	2.96	0.69			
Exhaustion	2020	1.68	1.31	−2.15	0.03	0.17
	2021	2.15	1.39			
Inefficiency	2020	0.81	0.80	−30.95	0.00	0.93
	2021	5.20	0.92			
Cynicism	2020	0.53	0.81	−0.533	0.59	
	2021	0.61	1.09			

Source: Self-elaboration.

4. Discussion

The results support the literature reviewed in this article, which states that the modification of the perception of HOP will be related to their levels of well-being. Thus, the drastic decrease in the perception of HOP from one year to the next of the workers under analysis was associated with lower levels of engagement (a variable that expresses well-being at work) and higher levels of workers' burnout (a variable that expresses discomfort at work) [7,9–12,32,34,35].

The result of the study is consistent with other studies carried out in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as that of Hu et al. [36], who reported that the low perception of support from the community and organizations had an impact on the high level of burnout of frontline nurses in two hospitals in Wuhan, and that of McNicholas et al. [37], who accounted for the high burnout of psychiatric physicians who perceived inefficient management from their organizations, the health authorities, and the government in Ireland.

Regarding the dramatic year-to-year increase in burnout among education workers shown in the results of our study, this was consistent with the work of Rodriguez et al. [38]. They found that burnout increased as the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated, impacting their work productivity and relationships with their family members.

Generally, it can be pointed out, as outlined by Acuña-Hormazabal et al. [39] in a review of research on engagement and burnout during the pandemic by COVID-19, that the present work situation experienced as a result of the pandemic is considered an adverse event that workers and organizations must face surviving, which implies, on the part of individuals, an effort to develop their resources, allowing them to continue functioning and working, as the pandemic affects them in not only their work environment but also their social and family spaces.

In this context, proposals from sustainable human resources management are relevant; in this line of thought, Cohen et al. [40] identified the development of tools, strategies, and practices that are planned and systematic over time to help incorporate a sustainability plan in the organization. It also includes creating a human resources management system that promotes the company's sustainable performance to encourage voluntary and proactive behaviors among employees in the face of sudden events that require radical changes [41].

Two main limitations that could be recognized in this research are related to the possibility of the results being influenced by other variables not studied, such as the leadership of managers and their “emotional contagion” towards their workers, as described by Pathak and Joshi [42]; the ergonomic conditions for the excellent performance of work [43]; and the psychological capital of workers (optimism, hope, resilience, and self-efficacy), as suggested by several studies [44,45].

Regardless, there is the belief that these limitations are presented as potential studies capable of being developed in the short term with the information obtained and enriching the literature on the subject.

5. Conclusions

This quantitative and non-probabilistic study analyzed the perception of teachers of a Chilean educational establishment of healthy organizational practices.

The analysis of the results showed that the first hypothesis, which stated that the relationship between the perception of healthy organizational practices (HOP) with engagement is positive and significant and with burnout is negative and significant, was partially accepted, given that the results showed the expected relationship for HOP with engagement and only for some practices with burnout in year 1. These relationships differed in year 2, wherein only 4 practices out of 11 had significant and expected correlations.

According to the year of measurement, the second hypothesis supporting the existence of differences in the perception of healthy organizational practices, engagement, and burnout of workers was accepted. These differences undoubtedly explain a large part of the differences between the correlations of the variables.

This research contributes to reaffirming the relationship between the management of an organization and its impact on its workers’ well-being (or discomfort) and provides new empirical evidence of this relationship in times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore, institutions need to develop resources and practices that facilitate the adaptation of people to the new challenges, promoting the engagement of workers and decreasing stress levels to prevent them from developing burnout syndrome.

The work of human resource management must be sustainable over time, because as we see in the research, the workers valued the practices developed by the institution, which was related to their well-being expressed in engagement, but then, as can be seen, in the second year of the measurement, there was no longer such valuation, possibly because the practices were no longer developed, and although the worker continues to be engaged, his burnout levels increase, harming firstly him as a person, secondly the institution, and thirdly its users. All this justifies the fact that institutions should have sustainable human resource management.

This means that this line of research has enormous potential in all types of organizations, particularly in educational institutions, both in Chile and in the rest of Latin America.

6. Limitations

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