

Bretones, F. D. & Jáimez, M. J. (2011). **Organizaciones saludables: más allá de la prevención de riesgos laborales** [Healthy organizations: beyond occupational risk prevention]. In S. Garay & S. Vázquez (coord.). *El trabajo en diferentes grupos poblacionales* (pp. 165-190). Monterrey, Mexico: Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León.

HEALTHY ORGANIZATIONS: BEYOND OCCUPATIONAL RISK PREVENTION

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Introduction

Studies on organizational health have, since their beginning, focused on topics related to the lack of results and work-related stress. The field of occupational risk prevention has not been unconnected to that negative view. Despite the major advances it has experienced during the last years with the incorporation of psychosocial risks, many studies keep focusing on a classic view of prevention without considering occupational health as a much wider concept oriented towards the improvement of workers' health and well-being. Recently, this fact has led to the development of new approaches that focus more on the concept of health than on that of accident.

Therefore, with our study we intend to make a review of the emergent world of Healthy Organizations. We will develop a conceptual model that leads to the improvement of workers' health at the workplace, starting from the importance of beginning with empowerment strategies that promote employee participation, autonomy and control in the organization, produce greater organizational engagement and commitment and, in turn, make easier the implementation of healthy practices. Thus, we will prevent workers from suffering from any illness as well as promote workers' well-being and health. All this will result in good organizational health characterized by low rates of absenteeism and intention to quit, and good work climate as well as high productivity.

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What is a healthy organization?

We can define healthy organization as that organization which establishes working processes that promote and maintain a full state of physical, mental and social well-being for its employees while having high efficacy and job performance. The organizational structure and its functioning have significant repercussion for workers' health and well-being and eventually for organizational efficacy (Wilson, Dejoy, Vandenberg, Richardson & McGrath, 2004). In the organizational field we can find healthy organizations characterized by employees with high well-being and performance, as well as good financial health (Arnet & Blomkvist, 2007), or toxic or ill organizations characterized by terrible and unhealthy work organization and high levels of absenteeism and turnover which cause economic and production losses for the organization. Now then, what are the organizational practices that would make an organization achieve the status of healthy?

There is no list of specific practices that can be used as a vaccine for all types of organization. However, most researches have focused on studying the large categories of organizational practices that have been proved to have good results for workers' health and well-being and for organizational efficacy. Thus, Grawitch, Gottschalk and Munz (2006) established five sets of practices to achieve a healthy organization:

- Work-life balance
- Employee growth and development
- Health and safety
- Employee recognition
- Employee participation and involvement

Nevertheless, out of all of them, Grawitch, Trares and Kohler (2007) point to employee participation as a set of higher order practices in comparison with the others. This means that in order to create a healthy workplace it is necessary to get all

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employees actively involved in the participation and configuration of organizational practices (Grawitch, Ledford, Ballard & Baber, 2009).

Therefore, employee participation and involvement in the organization becomes a basic element to create a healthy organization. Among these practices, one of the most well-known is organizational empowerment, which arises from the idea that organizational efficacy increases when power and control are shared (Keller & Dansereau, 1995).

Participation and empowerment

Empowerment can be characterized as a set of practices which aim at encouraging employees to think by themselves about the job requirements (Thorlakson & Murray, 1996) and qualifying them to make problem-solving decisions autonomously (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Jha & Nair, 2008; Heejung Ro & Po-Ju Chen; 2011). Therefore, empowerment involves learning to take the initiative and facing challenges at work creatively (Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997, Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian & Wilk, 2004; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Moreover, they can be applied universally through all organizations effectively (Lashey, 1999). However, when it is studied within the organizational field, experts have considered two types of empowerment: structural and psychological.

Structural empowerment refers to the set of activities and practices carried out by the organization and its management in order to give decision-making power to employees as well as greater freedom of action (Chênevert & Tremblay, 2009). In this case, the organization is sure that employees receive information, have knowledge and skills to contribute to the achievement of goals, have power to make key decisions and are rewarded according to the outcomes (Chen & Chen, 2008). This view is the most rooted in practice.

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Nevertheless, we believe that implementing some practices is not enough; there must be also an adjustment between those structures designed by the top managers of the organization and employees (Wilson et. al, 2004). This adjustment is represented by the second type of empowerment that authors call *psychological* and which refers to the employee's reaction to structural empowerment conditions (Laschinger, Finegan & Shamian, 2001).

There are several models about psychological empowerment (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Menon, 1999, 2001) although it may be the model developed by Professor Gretchen Spreitzer (1995) the one which has had greater repercussions.

Spreitzer (1995) starts from the concept of empowerment developed by Thomas & Velthouse (1990) assuming that it is made up of four basic cognitions: impact, competence, meaning and self-determination. *Impact* refers to the intensity with which an individual may influence the strategy, management or operational results of work (Ashforth, 1989). *Competence* refers to the extent to which an individual can perform the activities required by the task with sufficient skills when he/she tries. *Meaning* represents the value of a goal or purpose, estimated in relation to the individual's ideas or standards (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990) including a feeling between the requirements of a job role and beliefs, values and behaviours (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Finally, *self-determination* is the individual's sensation of possessing the choice in the initiative and regulation of actions (Deci, Connell y Ryan, 1989). Each of these four dimensions contributes to the general construct although the lack of one of them could make the level of psychological empowerment lower, but it would not eliminate it completely.

On the other hand, the work context is also examined as an antecedent of psychological empowerment. Thus, Spreitzer starts from a set of practices that authors such as Lawler (1986) and Kanter (1989) considered as antecedents of empowerment. These practices are those aimed at sharing information with employees of the organization as well as the reward structures.

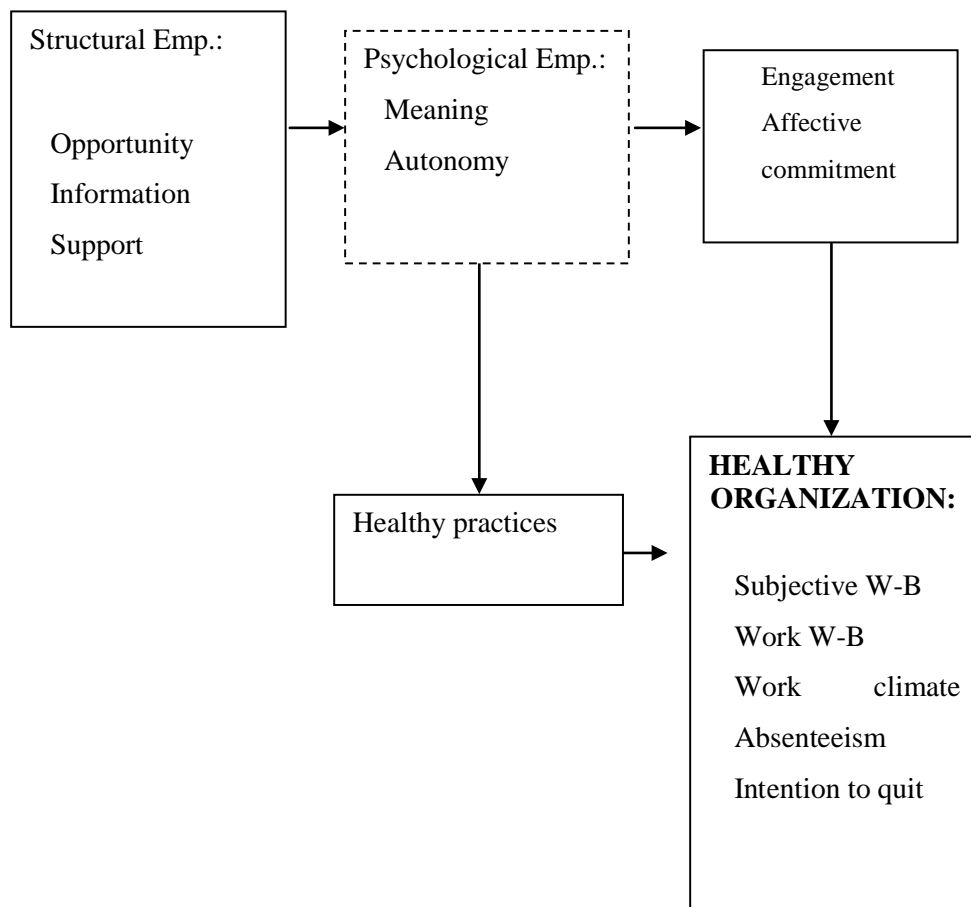
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Therefore, according to our model (See Figure 1), the beginning of the creation of a healthy organization would be on the establishment of a set of empowerment practices carried out by the management of the organization (structural empowerment) that lead employees to a cognitive state characterized by a feeling of control, competence and internalization of goals (psychological empowerment), which would facilitate the establishment of particular healthy working practices, as well as the adoption of good organizational behaviours. All this will contribute to the final establishment of a healthy organization characterized by understanding health as a strategic value of the company, not only with the objective of having a healthy and safe physical work environment, but also developing an inspiring social work environment for the people who form it so that they feel vital and energetic, establish good relationship with the organizational environment and get healthy products and services (Zwetsloot & Pot, 2004; Salanova & Schaufeli, 2009).

In addition, we believe that these organizational practices produce some healthy results increasing employees' psychological and workplace well-being, improving work climate as well as decreasing absenteeism and voluntary turnover of employees.

Figure 1. Model of healthy organization

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According to this model, psychological empowerment would act as mediator between the set of practices established by the organization with the objective of provide greater power, control and autonomy to employees (structural empowerment) and other practices aimed at improving employees' health and well-being, as well as with employee engagement and commitment. We will develop each of them below.

Engagement

Engagement is defined as a positive, full and work-related state of mind characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Román & Bakker, 2002; Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter & Taris, 2008; Simbula, Guglielmi,

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& Schaufeli, 2011). *Vigour* is characterized by high levels of energy and mental endurance (resilience) at work even in difficult situations. *Dedication* refers to being strongly involved in the own work and experiencing a feeling of signification, enthusiasm, inspiration, proud and challenge. *Absorption* refers to being completely concentrated on the own work so that time flies. According to the previous definitions, vigour and dedication are considered direct opposites of the dimensions of burnout syndrome and cynicism, respectively (Laschinger & Finegan, 2005; Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter & Taris, 2008). Unlike burned-out employees, engaged employees consider themselves able to face new demands appearing in daily work and they also show an energetic and effective connection with their jobs.

Another construct that has been analysed in order to see its similarity or difference with engagement is workaholism (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter & Taris, 2008; Schaufeli, Taris & Rehen, 2008; Schaufeli, Van Wijhe, Peeters & Taris, 2011). Thus, although one of the main characteristics of workaholics is their long workdays during which they maintain a behaviour that is to some extent obsessive and compulsive, they have little dynamism when compared to engaged employees. On the other hand, workaholics put much more effort in their jobs than that expected by the people with or for whom they work and, doing so, they forget about their off-job lives which usually become boring or lacking in personal relationships. Moreover, in general, they work so hard for an internal compulsion of necessity or unity, and not for external factors, such as economic rewards, career prospects, organizational culture or a poor romantic relationship (Schaufeli, Taris & Rehen, 2008). On the contrary, workers with high levels of vigour, dedication and absorption in their jobs do not feel guilty when they are not working and they do not work hard for a strong and irresistible internal impulse, but because they find work funny.

Thus, we can affirm that engagement is a unique concept and, therefore it has its own consequences for both the employee and the organization.

For the employee

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Researches have proved that engaged workers have better physical and psychic health (Bakker, Albrecht, Leiter, 2011; Jenaro, Flores, Orgaz, & Cruz, 2011) and less risk of becoming ill in the future (Laschinger & Finegan, 2005). There is also evidence of the positive effects of engagement in burnout processes (Pienaar & Willense, 2008; Demerouti & Mostert, Bakker, 2010; Salanova & Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2011).

However, it is possible that, in some cases, this stress situation may have negative consequences as they have greater sense of responsibility towards the outcomes of their work (Britt, Castro & Alder, 2005).

For the organization

It is obvious that, after having addressed the definition of engagement, the organizational consequences of having engaged employees will be lower levels of (voluntary and involuntary) absenteeism and productivity, and less quitting behaviours, among others.

One of the studies that analyses the relationship between engagement and absenteeism is the one made by Schaufeli, Bakker and Van Rhenen (2009), who proved that engagement can predict voluntary absenteeism and its frequency in such a way that the number of voluntary absences from work of engaged employees will be less than that of burned-out workers or workers with a lower level of engagement. On the contrary, burnout will predict a greater number of involuntary illness-related absences and that these absences will be long-term. According to the authors, this is due to the fact that involuntary absenteeism comes from work strains whereas voluntary absenteeism comes from low levels of motivation and therefore engaged employees will have lower tendency to miss work voluntarily.

Regarding the relationships with the intention to quit the company or turnover, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) establish a model formed by two psychological processes;

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energetic process and motivational process. According to the latter process, job resources are linked through the engagement with organizational outcomes, such as employees' intention to quit, in such a way that the higher the level of engagement is, the lower the employee's intention to quit the organization is.

However, we must note that some authors consider that such relationship depends on the employee's level of satisfaction with his/her supervisor/s (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002; Jones & Harter, 2005).

Concerning the relationships between engagement and productivity, Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter and Taris (2008) suggest four reasons why engaged employees have better organizational outcomes: (1) they often experience positive emotions such as happiness, fun and enthusiasm, (2) they have better physical and psychic health, (3) they create their own job and personal resources (such as support from colleagues) and (4) they transfer engagement to others. However, despite this, there are not many studies that analyse the relationship between engagement and productivity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Salanova, Agut and Peiró in their 2005 study propose a model through which organizational resources such as autonomy, training and technologies, and job engagement are predictors of climate in the provided service which, in turn, predicts employee performance and customer loyalty.

Therefore, we notice that engagement develops a proactive behaviour. Cant (2000) defines it as the initiative-taking by employees to improve the current circumstances or create new ones, by challenging the *status quo* instead of adapting passively to its current conditions. As a result of these behaviours, we will obtain greater employee performance, better attitude, greater feeling of control by employees, greater clarity in relation to the different tasks to be performed, etc. Moreover, employees can participate in proactive activities as part of their common behaviour to fulfil their basic job requirements with the objective of improving their results. Therefore, engagement plays a mediating role between job resources and proactive behaviour (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008), in such a way that an increase in job resources

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will cause an increase in job engagement which, in turn, is positively related to employees' proactive behaviour.

Given the consequences of engagement for the organization and employees, it seems obvious that it could play an important role in achieving a healthy organization, facilitating the creation of an inspiring, social, work environment for people where they feel vital and energetic, as well as getting healthy products and services; all these characteristics are typical of a healthy organization.

But, how can we create a work environment where employees develop a high level of engagement?

Work engagement is explained by the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demeroti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli, 2001). According to it, all occupations may have their own risk factors associated with work stress, although they can be classified into two general categories: demands (physical, social or organizational aspects of work that involve mental or physical effort and therefore, are associated with some physical and psychological costs) and job resources (physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of work that can be useful to achieve organizational goals, reduce job demands associated with physical and psychological costs, or stimulate personal growth and development). Both categories would be interrelated in such a way that job resources act as a buffer against the negative effects of job demands in burnout processes and, on the other hand, the relationship between job resources and engagement is greater when job demands are higher.

The model also mentions the existence of two different psychological processes that play a crucial role in developing work stress and motivation: the health impairment process (high job demands that can produce burnout and therefore health problems) and the motivational process (job resources have a motivating potential and can cause high levels of work engagement, low cynicism and excellent performance in employees).

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Therefore, such motivational process establishes that job resources are related to organizational outcomes, such as organizational commitment and employees' intention to quit, through engagement. In addition, job resources play the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The first case, job resources as intrinsic motivators, is based on the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which postulates that in work contexts where autonomy, competence and relationships are encouraged, well-being and intrinsic motivation increase.

The second case, job resources as extrinsic motivators, is based on the Effort-Recovery model (Meijman & Mulder, 1998), according to which in work environments where many resources are offered to encourage willingness to devote all our efforts and skills to complete the required tasks, it is probably that those tasks are done correctly and the expected objectives reached, which increases employees' extrinsic motivation.

Organizational Commitment

Another consequence of empowerment is an increase in organizational commitment. We can define this concept as a psychological state that characterizes a relationship between individual and organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). These authors suggest the multidimensional nature of commitment and the existence of three components (affective, continuance and normative).

According to Meyer and Allen, the existence of an affective component in commitment would be confirmed by other authors' previous studies. Thus, Kanter (1968) defined commitment as the individual affective and emotional attachment towards the group, thus making reference to affective commitment. Later, Buchanan (1974) also focused on that affective component. However, the greatest influence on the Meyer and Allen's concept of affective commitment comes from the studies by Mowday, Steers and Poters (1979), who defined commitment as the relative intensity with which an individual identifies with and gets involved in a particular organization. Moreover, these three authors include in the definition of commitment three important

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aspects: (a) strong acceptance of organizational goals, (b) willingness to make efforts for the benefit of the organization and (c) strong desire to remain a member of it. Some years later, Meyer and Allen (1984) named this view of commitment provided by Mowday and colleagues (1979) as *affective commitment* and formulated a very similar concept.

Regarding *continuance commitment*, Meyer and Allen base on the work made by Becker (1960), who defines commitment as a tendency to remain in the organization, due to the exit costs perceived by the employee. According to this definition, the individual may want to remain part of the organization because quitting would involve a relative loss of a high salary, the benefits obtained, work security and/or loss of investment of time and effort. That is why some authors have defined this commitment as the reflection of a “cold calculation of costs and benefits” (Jaros, Jermier, Koehler, & Sincich, 1993). One aspect of this continuance commitment is the fact of depending on the organization to have a job and advance professionally (Meyer & Allen, 1984; Meyer, Allen & Smith, 1993; Carson, Carson & Bedian, 1995). This dependence is associated with investment in specific knowledge about the organization such as techniques, contacts with other people and adaptation to a culture, which are not easily transferred into other organizations (Ito & Brotheridge, 2005). One of the first instruments for measuring this type of commitment was developed by Ritzer and Trice (1969) that was later modified by Hrebiniak & Alutto (1972).

Concerning *normative commitment*, other authors (Schwartz & Tessler, 1972; Schwartz, 1973; Prestholdt, Lane & Mathews, 1987) have previously pointed out how personal rules (defined as the internalization of a moral duty) are a key explanatory element in employee behaviour. Wiener and Vardi (1980) developed a scale that measured the commitment based on that moral duty.

Nowadays, there is consensus in relation to the fact that organizational commitment is a multidimensional construct, although not all authors agree with the

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classification made by Meyer and Allen (1991). Probably, the most controversial issue is the usefulness of maintaining normative commitment as a separate variable from affective commitment, because the relationship between both components is quite strong (Ko, Price & Mueller, 1997). Nevertheless, despite this strong relationship, affective and normative commitments are proved to have different relationships with other variables, specifically with those related to the results of commitment: performance, turnover, absenteeism, etc. (Meyer et al. 1993; Cohen, 1996).

In addition, Meyer and Allen (1991) establish that it is common for the three components of commitment to approach each other, since commitment in general is a psychological state and has influence on the employees' decision about remaining in the organization or ceasing to be a member of it. However, the nature of these psychological states is different: each of them has different antecedents and different implications for behaviours within working relationships, for example turnover (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1991).

We must mention too that studies on organizational commitment put considerable emphasis on studying affective commitment. This is due to the fact that this component of commitment displays a strong and more constant relationship with desirable organizational outcomes (Arzu, 2003). However, it is also possible that this special interest in affective commitment is caused by the fact that many researches have been conducted in the individualistic North American context, where attitudes and the cost-benefit calculation, rather than rules, are essential to determine social benefit (Triandis, 1995).

On the contrary, normative commitment has little interest in research, as this type of commitment is a better predictor of results at work in collectivistic contexts where the emphasis is placed on strong social relationships and duties (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

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There are many studies that address the consequences of organizational commitment, such as intention to quit, absenteeism, performance or stress.

Organizational commitment and turnover and intention to quit. Meyer and colleagues (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch & Topolnytsky, 2002) found that the relationship between both variables is negative, being affective commitment the one that in all studies is always more intensely related to turnover and intention to quit than normative and continuance commitments. Moreover, the relationship between affective commitment and intention to quit is greater in studies conducted in North America, unlike what happens with normative and continuance commitments.

Organizational commitment and absenteeism. Several studies have proved that affective commitment is negatively related to absenteeism, in contrast to continuance and normative commitments that are positively related (Somers, 2010; Felfe & Yan, 2009; Elorza, Aritzeta, Ayestarán, 2011; Jaaron & Backhouse, 2011). On the other hand, when these relationships were analysed separating voluntary from involuntary absenteeism, it was found that affective commitment is more strongly related to voluntary absenteeism than involuntary absenteeism.

Organizational commitment and stress, work-family conflict. Some authors have suggested that affective commitment is negatively related to the presence of stress and work-family conflict (Chen & Kao, 2011; Lee, Kim & Yoon, 2011). On the contrary, continuance commitment is positively related to both variables. Regarding the relationship between normative commitment and work-family conflict, this is almost non-existent. Anyway, there is no consensus in this point; for some authors affective commitment can be a buffer against the negative impact that stressful work can have on employees' health and well-being (Begley & Czajka, 1993); other authors suggest that in stressful situations committed employees may react more negatively than less committed employees (Reilly, 1994).

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As we can see, affective commitment is proved to have greater relationship with positive organizational consequences. This is easy to imagine since they do it because they want and not because they feel obligated to remain in the organization and make efforts (normative commitment) or because not doing so supposes higher costs and therefore they have to remain (continuance commitment). Thus, we consider that the fact of having employees who firmly believe in the organizational goals and values and accept them, are willing to make considerable efforts for the benefit of the organization and, basically, wish to remain a member of it (affective commitment) will facilitate the achievement of a healthy organization (Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulain, 1974).

Healthy organizations

The correct management of the aforescribed variables (empowerment, engagement and commitment) will entail the birth of healthy organizations for employees and the organization, not only in relation to the prevention of associated occupational risks but also, from a wider perspective, to the development of physically, mentally and socially healthy work environments.

The consequences for workers of these healthy organizations are, for example, an increase in well-being, the improvement of work climate and a decrease in absenteeism and turnover rates. We will deal with each of them briefly.

Well-being

The concept of well-being is quite complex and refers to a set of impressions and feelings about an individual's life. This concept has a multidimensional nature, so the same person may have different well-being states (psychological, workplace, material, marital) and each of them is evaluated independently in the same person (Bretones & González, 2011).

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In this chapter, we will focus exclusively on the workplace dimension of well-being, which would be associated with working conditions, task performance, belonging to the organization as well as the achievement of professional objectives and goals (Martínez, 2004).

Work climate

Another of the consequences of empowerment is the improvement of work climate. This refers to the employees' collective perception about their organization in relation to different organizational dimensions (Koys & DeCotiis, 1991; Moran & Volkwein, 1992; Bretones & Mañas, 2008). Anyway, it has been with organizational commitment where greater and more stable positive relationships have been found, so organizational climate is positive when the level of commitment is high (Fink, 1992; Iverson, McLeod & Erwin, 1995; Mañas, González-Romá, & Peiró, 1999; Glisson & James, 2002; Parker, Baltes, Young & Huff, 2003; McMurray, Scott & Pace, 2004).

Work absenteeism and turnover

One of the most important or interest-arising topics for Human Resources experts and managers is analysing escape behaviours, such as employees' work absenteeism and turnover, as in both cases the negative effects are quite pernicious (Levin & Kleiner, 1992).

Absenteeism and turnover are two concepts that have historically maintain some conceptual relationship although in recent years there are more differences that separate them than bonds that link them (Bretones & González, 2009).

A broad definition of absenteeism would be the total absence of an individual from his/her workplace within working days and hours. However, turnover would be the indefinite cessation of belonging of an individual in relation to the organization he/she was linked with.

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The relationship between these two variables with other organizational variables has shown that absenteeism rates decrease when employee participation increases. Thus, Hamer, Landau & Stern (1981) studied the case of an enterprise whose ownership has passed to employees. After observing the levels of absenteeism before and after being self-managed by employees, they found that with self-management the levels of absenteeism had decreased. On the other hand, Ross and Zandler (1979) found that autonomy, task importance and fair evaluation had influence not so much on quitting behaviours but rather on the individual's desire to continue in the organization (organizational commitment).

Concerning the relationship with commitment, Matthieu and Zajac (1990) found a negative relationship between turnover and employee commitment. Moreover, this fact can be observed regardless of other cultural variables. Thus, Abrams and Ando (1998), in their comparative study between British and Japanese organizations, observed that in both samples of employees, those most identified with the organization showed lower intention to quit.

To sum up, studies prove that empowerment, commitment and engagement have a significant and negative relationship with these two escape behaviours of employees.

Conclusions

As a conclusion, in this chapter we intend to propose a model of healthy organization, in a broad sense, that would entail the implementation of some tools by the management of the enterprise in order to allow employees to access the necessary information and resources and to count on superiors and colleagues' support as well as training and development opportunities.

Access to all these aspects would bring employees more formal and informal power (structural empowerment). If the implementation of such tools is done correctly,

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employees will develop their work under the certainty that they are competent, that their work is important for the organization, that with their work they can influence organizational outcomes and that they have more autonomy to act (psychological empowerment). This accommodation between structural and psychological empowerment will lead employees to develop a positive and full state of mind towards their job that causes high levels of energy and mental endurance and makes them feel strongly involved at work and fully concentrated on and happily absorbed in different tasks. In addition, this will also make them accept the organizational goals, develop willingness to make efforts for the benefit of the organization and a strong desire to remain a member of it (affective commitment).

On the other hand, that accommodation between structural empowerment and psychological empowerment will facilitate that the practices established by the organization aimed at improving employees' health and well-being have greater success.

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