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Thema: Burnout and Engagement: The importance of organizational and positive emotional factors

There is ample evidence that the prevalence of psychosocial occupational risks (i.e. burnout, workplace violence secondary traumatic stress) is rather high. During the last two decades, burnout has received increased attention and has been recognised as an important occupational problem. In relation to Burnout, our group is researching about three main topics: Evaluation of burnout in specific professions, analysis of importance of organizational and positive emotional factors, and engagement.

First, our team has worked in the development and the factorial validation of the specific assessments of burnout in different professionals (i.e. nurses, teachers, psychologists and physicians). The questionnaires comprise several scales focused on the evaluation of the most relevant variables in the burnout process within these professions. By the different studies, the internal structure of questionnaires were analysed as well as the reliability and the structural interdependence of their different scales in the different assessments.

Second, our group is investigating the importance of personal and organizational factors in the burnout process, as well as the role of positive emotional factors (hardy personality, optimism, self-esteem and emotional competence) as negative predictors of burnout and their consequences. The results confirmed the influence of organizational and personal variables in the explanation of these processes. More specifically, work stress could be classified as important cause of burnout. In addition, positive emotional factors were found as inductors in coping strategies, decreasing the probability of experiencing burnout.

Third, we are interested in engagement. Historically, empirical approaches into the well being at work have traditionally been from a pathological perspective, usually from a model of lacks (burnout, strain, stress). However, in the last years, the researchers focused on studies towards a positive occupational psychology. Our study examined the relationship between engagement, professional expectations, hardy personality and subjective well-being. Engagement, reinforcement expectation and hardy personality played a role in the prediction of positive affect. Nevertheless, only engagement was a significant predictor of negative affect. On the other hand, engagement, reinforcement expectation, and control (hardy personality components), were found to be significant predictors of affect balance.

In conclusion, our own view is that a comprehensive model of burnout would include both individual and organizational factors (Garrosa, 2005; Maslach, 1982; Moreno, Garrosa and González, 2000; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). According to this view, the same perspective must guide the development of future prevention and intervention programs. In addition, the studies about engagement have provided a first step toward an understanding how to promote well-being at workplace.