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ORIGINAL

SPORTS CENTRE WORKERS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP, ENGAGEMENT AND STRESS

TRABAJADORES DE CENTROS DEPORTIVOS PERCEPCIÓN DE LIDERAZGO, ENGAGEMENT Y ESTRÉS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to determine the influence of leadership, engagement and perceived stress on workers in fitness centres. Conducting a quantitative, descriptive cross-sectional study. The sample consisted of 106 workers, with an average age of 35 years (35.2 ± 8.5). The instruments used were, Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-6S) to measure the type of leadership; the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) to know the level of engagement and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) to know the perception of stress. Variables, t-Student, ANOVA and Pearson (r) linear correlation and multiple linear regression are compared and correlated. The main results highlight that the

level of perceived stress is higher in permanent workers (20.97) and women (21.54). In conclusion, a higher level of engagement translates into a lower level of perceived stress.

KEYWORDS: Leadership, Engagement, Stress, Fitness.

RESUMEN

El objetivo del estudio fue determinar la influencia del liderazgo, *engagement* y estrés percibido en trabajadores de centros deportivos fitness. Realizando un estudio cuantitativo, descriptivo de corte transversal. La muestra compuesta por 106 trabajadores, con una edad media de 35 años (35.2 ± 8.5). Los instrumentos utilizados fueron, *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-6S)* para medir el tipo de liderazgo; la *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)* para saber el nivel de *engagement* y *Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)*, para conocer la percepción del estrés. Se comparan y correlacionan variables, t-Student, ANOVA y correlación lineal de Pearson (r) y regresión lineal múltiple. Los principales resultados resaltan que el nivel de estrés percibido es mayor en trabajadores fijos (20.97) y mujeres (21.54). A modo de conclusión indicar que un mayor nivel de *engagement* se traduce en un menor nivel de estrés percibido.

PALABRAS CLAVES: Liderazgo, Engagement, Estrés, Fitness.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the interest in sports and the practice of healthy physical activities in fitness and wellness sports centres has increased, generating adherence, as well as physical, psychological and social well-being (Reverter & Barbany, 2007; Zaragoza, 1994). With the exponential growth of this sector, evidenced by the extraordinary rate at which new fitness centres have been opening, many centres have begun to offer similar services and activity packages. However, in spite of the similarities in services, some fitness centres succeed, while others fail. The present study seeks to identify what guarantees the success of these centres from the standpoint of human resources.

The resource and capacity theory (RCT) seeks to establish a link between companies' capabilities, evident in their internal resources, and their performance in relation to their competitors (Barney, 1991). Pertusa-Ortega, Molina-Azorín & Claver-Cortés (2010) noted the limited role that resource-based theory had in studies on the relationship between strategy and performance obtained by companies. Therefore, it is necessary to atomise the elements or attributes that directly affect organisations in order for them to succeed and last. Stadler (2007) determined these attributes to be: leveraging existing resources and capabilities and polling new ones; diversifying business portfolios if the organisation already has an accredited business; learning from mistakes and ensuring they are not repeated; and refraining from making radical changes.

Gómez-Tafalla (2013) explained that the increased demand for physical activities necessitated an increase in more specialised and effectively trained personnel. Thus, in the fitness field, human resources were key to the advancement of organisations (Sánchez & Herrera, 2016). The management of human resources is therefore considered a valuable strategic pillar for achieving greater competitiveness (Marín & Placencia, 2017; Mora, 2008). In the case of fitness centres, employees help to maintain a users' service satisfaction, and users' experiences are an effective indicator of the quality of the service obtained (García, Sheriff, & Molina, 2020).

However, for successful service provision, it is essential that employees feel motivated or engaged, with low levels of stress in a suitable working environment (Salazar, Guerrero, Machado & Cañedo, 2009). To this end, leadership abilities to influence a group to achieve certain goals is paramount (Martínez-Moreno, Morales & Ibáñez, 2016).

Leadership has been a topic of interest for many researchers and has been considered one of the most important management skills (Jijón-Lynch, & Fierro, 2016). There are different types of leadership that can influence the success of companies in the fitness sector, including transformational leadership, transactional leadership and passive-evasive leadership, or laissez-faire leadership (Choque, Mejía, Vasquez & Machaca, 2014). Transformational leadership involves establishing amicable relationships between leaders and workers, which generates greater employee satisfaction, motivation and commitment to work. Lower level of stress has also been associated with higher performance, which allows employees to move past their own interests and towards the interests of the organisation (Alava et al., 2016; Alvarez, Castillo, Molina-García, & Balague, 2016; Arango, 2017; Hermosilla, Amutio, Da Costa, & Páez, 2016). Transactional leadership establishes a link between the leader and the workers through an exchange of promises, where the leader offers incentives in exchange for loyalty and effort at work (Choque et al., 2014; Hermosilla et al., 2016; Martínez-Moreno et al., 2016). Passive-evasive leadership, also referred to as laissez-faire leadership, is characterised by the leader's lack of commitment to his or her organisation. This leader is an inactive person who avoids decision-making and responsible oversight within the organisation and evades all responsibility without setting clear goals (Choque et al., 2014). Transformational leadership appears to have the most benefits to individuals and teams, because it entails a greater degree of communication, improvement of interpersonal relationships, satisfaction, commitment and motivation in job performance (Jijon-Lynch & Fierro, 2016; Pourbarkhordari, Hua, Zhou, & Pourkarimi, 2016).

In recent years the psychological study of work and organisations has focused its objectives on the development of the capacities and strengths of individuals, groups and work teams to achieve optimal functioning, especially in times of economic and social crisis (Salanova, Llorens, Cifre, & Martínez, 2012; Salanova, Martínez, & Llorens, 2005; Seligman & Csiksentmihalyi, 2000). This view led to the study and development of tools to evaluate the level of motivation of workers or engagement. It is defined as a positive

psychological state where the individual enjoys or finds satisfaction in the activity that he or she performs such that he or she is likely to repeat it. In the workplace context, it includes the following dimensions: vigour, dedication and job absorption (Arango, 2017; Rodríguez-Montalbán, Martínez-Lugo & Sánchez-Cardona, 2014; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Vigour is a high level of energy and mental resilience in overcoming potential difficulties or obstacles that may arise during work. Dedication is the strong involvement of the individual in his or her work, which, in turn, generates meaning through feelings of inspiration, enthusiasm, pride and challenge. Finally, absorption implies a welfare state in which the worker is so immersed and focused on his or her work that he or she does not feel the passage of time and finds it difficult to abandon the activity that he or she is carrying out (Hernández-Vargas, Llorens-Gumbau, Rodríguez-Sánchez & Dickinson-Bannack, 2016). Labour engagement is the conceptual antithesis of work stress, which can lead to burnout syndrome when over-applied (Cortés-Cediel & Gil, 2018; Muller, Pérez, & Ramírez, 2013; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003). Companies with enthusiastic employees achieve better organisational results due to better performance, greater commitment and better service climates (Hernández-Vargas et al., 2016).

Another aspect that affects organisations is the stress that work can produce for employees. Robbins & Judge (2013) defined stress as "a dynamic condition in which an individual face an opportunity, demand, or resource related to what he or she wants and whose outcome is perceived both uncertain and important" (p. 595). The integrative model of stress, is the most accepted, suggesting that the origin or perception of stress depends both on external events or demands and on the individual's appreciation of these demands and the resources that he or she possesses, allowing him or her to face them (Vega, Gómez, Gálvez, & Rodríguez, 2017). Luceño, Martín, Rubio and Díaz (2004) claimed that stress was the second most common disorder that affected the health of workers, preceded by diseases of musculoskeletal origin, which were in fact potentially caused by work stress. The impact on the company is explained by an increase in direct and indirect costs (low, lower performance and productivity, ...), which stops entering due to the situation in which the worker is located (Esteras, Chorot and Sandín, 2014; Luceño et al., 2004; Ramon, 2017).

Leadership, along with *engagement* and stress, are important topics of interest to many researchers and have been extensively studied in the workplace, particularly in health care and teaching (Esteras et al., 2014). However, there are no studies known to the authors that have addressed the perceived types of leadership, engagement or stress in work personnel of sports centres or premium fitness centres. According to Martínez-Lemos & González-Sastre (2016) taxonomy. The present study's objectives were the following: 1) Identify the sociodemographic characteristics of sports centre or premium centre workers. 2) Determine the type of leadership of the workers' superiors, perceived by the workers. 3) Identify the levels of engagement and perceived stress of the workers. 4) Investigate whether differences in the type of leadership, engagement and perception of stress existed according to participant gender, age, contract type, work schedule, position and seniority in

the organisation. 5) Identify any correlations between the different scales used.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study was a quantitative cross-sectional study, using paper-based questionnaires carried out on employees at sports and premium fitness centres in Murcia, the capital city of the Murcia province, and its neighbouring hamlets. Convenience sampling was used for this study.

Participants

The sample for this study had been employees at sports and premium fitness centres in Murcia and the neighbouring hamlets, all with more than 1,000 users (N=204). There were three inclusion criteria for the participants volunteering for the study. First, they were required to be staff members at a facility in Murcia or the neighbouring hamlets with over 1,000 users. Second, they were required to have a valid employment contract at the time of the study. Finally, they were required to have direct contact with the users at the facility.

Regarding the exclusion criteria, participants who left more than three items blank in any of the questionnaires were eliminated. After applying the exclusion criteria, 24 participants in the sample were eliminated. Of the total 130 workers from all of the centres who had shown interest in participating in the study, the final sample included 106 (52%). Roughly half of the sample were male ($n=54$), representing 50.9% of the final total, with the remaining 49.1% being female ($n=52$). The age range was between 19 and 60 years with a mean age of 35 years (35.2 ± 8.5). As participants were selected based on convenience sampling, the sample may not accurately represent the characteristics of the target population.

Regarding the level of education, 39.6% ($n=42$) had high school or equivalent levels of education, 11.3% ($n=12$) had diplomas in EF, 31.1% ($n=33$) were university graduates of physical education and 12.3% ($n=13$) had another university degree. With regard to relationship status, 66% ($n=70$) had a partner, which was the predominant situation. The average number of years the employees had worked at their respective companies was approximately six years, 84% ($n=89$) of the workers had a fixed contract. The part-time employees comprised 51.9% ($n=55$) of the sample and full-time employees comprised 44.3% ($n=47$). Of the total sample, 55.7% ($n=59$) were sports technicians, 11.3% ($n=12$) worked in management, 20.8% ($n=22$) were receptionists and 12.3% ($n=13$) coordinated the fitness centres.

Instruments

For the data collection, four questionnaires were used, from which an original and specific collection of sociodemographic variables were selected: gender (male or female), age (in years), education level (primary, Bachelor's degree or training Cyclase diploma, LIC-Graduate at EF, other university degrees),

relationship status (single, living with a partner), time worked in the company (in years), type of contract (fixed, temporary, or other), schedule (fulltime or part-time), position at the fitness centre (instructor, coordinator, receptionist, or sports technician).

Leadership was measured using the short version of the *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-6S)*; Bass, & Avolio, 2004), comprised of 21 items and seven dimensions. The seven dimensions of leadership were, transformational/transactional/ laissez faire. Responses were based on ratings on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from (0-4).

The short version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) by Schaufeli & Bakker (2003), consisting of 9 items and 3 dimensions, or factors, was implemented to evaluate engagement. Responses were taken on a seven-point Likert scale (0-6). The total engagement value was obtained from the sum of all of the items' scores divided by the number of dimensions. The average score for each of the three subscales was obtained by adding the scores of each particular scale and dividing their result by the number of items in the subscale.

Perceived stress was measured using the Spanish version of Cohen, Kamarck & Mermelstein's (1983) Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), validated by Remor (2006). The scale is a self-supplemented instrument that evaluates the level of stress perceived by the subject in his or her life during the last month. It consists of 10 items, using a five-point Likert scale (0-4), with higher scores indicating greater perceived stress.

Procedure

The current research has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Murcia. A letter was given to the director of each sports centre, informing them of the nature and aims of the research, and requesting permission to implement the study. Following authorisation from each director, paper forms of the questionnaires were distributed to the employees who volunteered to participate and who had signed informed consent forms. The questionnaires were collected the following week at an agreed time and place. All questionnaires were kept completely anonymous so that the participants could answer more honestly. The anonymised data from each questionnaire was entered through a specific web link using Google forms that generated a table in Microsoft Excel with all of the items and their scores.

DATA ANALYSIS

Basic descriptive methods were used for the statistical analysis of the data. The qualitative variables were quantified using the number of cases present in each category and the corresponding percentage. For the quantitative variables, the minimum and maximum values for the sample are collected, along with the means, and standard deviations for each measure. A comparison of means between two groups was conducted on the qualitative

data, using a t-Student test. The normality of the data was confirmed with a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and the uniformity of variances was calculated with a Levene test. For comparison of means between three groups, an ANOVA test was performed.

In the cases in which the ANOVA test was significant, a post-hoc Bonferroni correction was performed to determine between which two groups the differences occurred. To study the possible relationships between two quantitative variables, a Pearson linear correlation coefficient (r) was calculated. A multiple linear regression model was used to determine the possible effect of the demographic variables, such as seniority, position at the centre and schedule from the UWES and PSS scales on the types of leadership observed. The statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 25.0 for Windows. Statistical significance was defined as $p < .05$.

Results

The values of the Cronbach alpha (α) test for the MLQ-6S were greater than .75 for all dimensions, demonstrating the high reliability of the scale. In addition, the UWES ($\alpha=.76$) and the PSS ($\alpha=.76$) on all dimensions.

The average values of transformational leadership (L-TF; $M = 3.13$, $SD = .46$), transactional leadership (L-TS; $M = 2.93$, $SD = .63$) and laissez faire leadership (L-LF; $M = 6.79$, $SD = 2.43$) indicated that L-LF was the predominant style of leadership. Engagement was found to be high on all dimensions: force ($M = 4.6$, $SD = .92$), dedication ($M = 4.75$, $SD = .91$), and absorption ($M = 4.53$, $SD = .96$), in relation to the total score ($M = 4.63$, $SD = .84$). According to the PSS, on average, there was a moderate level of stress ($M = 20.44$, $SD = .45$).

The results showed that there were no statistically significant gender differences in leadership type or engagement. As shown in Table 1, the average PSS score for males ($M = 19.39$) was significantly lower than that for females ($M = 21.54$), $p = .013$. The conflict-work family association is a differentiating element between the two genres (Llorca-Rubio, 2017).

Table 1. Descriptive and comparative results of stress scale according to gender.

	Sex (mean [SD])		Average difference	Try t-Student	
	Male	Female		t(104)	p-value
Stress	19.39 (3.98)	21.54 (4.79)	-2.15	-2.518	.013

SD: standard deviation.

There were no statistically significant differences in terms of leadership type when comparing fixed-contract workers and those with other types of contract: L-TF ($p = .41$), L-TS ($p = .34$), L-LF ($p = .61$). Similarly, in terms of the engagement ($p = .05$) and vigour ($p = .74$), dedication ($p = .65$) and absorption ($p = .31$), there were no statistically significant differences. However, as Table 2 shows, the level of stress in fixed-contract workers ($M = 20.97$) was significantly higher than that of workers with other types of contract ($M = 17.71$), $p = 0.006$. Kunda, Barley & Evan (2002) indicated that temporary contracts were associated with a higher likelihood of psychosocial risks.

Employees on indefinite contracts have also been found to have higher levels of irritation and lower levels of overall health (Peiró & Ramos, 2012). Temporary work seemed to have a negative impact on mental health, work stress and uncertainty, which was consistent with the findings in the past literature (Kim et al., 2017; Milner, Currier, LaMontagne, Spittal, & Pirkis, 2017).

Table 2. Descriptive and comparative results of stress scale according to contract type.

	Contract type (mean [SD])		Average difference	Try t-Student	
	Fixed	Other		t(104)	p-value
Stress	20.97 (4.35)	17.71 (4.44)	3.26	2.824	.006

SD: standard deviation.

When comparing the leadership type with full-time or part-time working status, no statistically significant differences were found in the perception of L-TF, L-TS or L-LF. No significant differences were found in relation to working status and engagement or the individual dimensions of engagement. The average level of perceived stress was similar in full-time workers ($M = 20.81$) and part-time workers ($M = 20.22$), $p = .515$. Thorsteinson (2003) similarly found that there were no significant differences between the attitudes of the two groups of workers, as well as Acosta (2018). The results also showed that there were no statistically significant differences in leadership, engagement or perceived stress depending on workers' roles at the fitness centre: L-TF ($p = .65$), L-TS ($p = .10$), L-LF ($p = .06$), engagement ($p = .58$) and perceived stress ($p = .24$). Although the differences were not significant across managers ($M = 21.25$), receptionists ($M = 21.77$), sports technicians ($M = 20.14$) and coordinators ($M = 18.85$) in terms of perceived stress, workers in higher positions in the organisation tended to be more committed to the organisation (Alvarez, 2008).

Table 3 shows the ratio of seniority to the scores obtained in each questionnaire and their corresponding dimensions, calculated using the Pearson correlation coefficient (r). When comparing the elements of each type of leadership, the results reflected that greater seniority within the company was significantly associated with lower scores in the intellectual stimulation ($p = .04$) and individual consideration ($p = .04$) dimensions. With regard to engagement, the results demonstrated that the longer an employee worked at the company, the lower the total motivation level ($p = .01$) and, more specifically, the lower the absorption ($p = .004$). Alvarez (2008) stated that seniority was positively correlated with employees' commitment to their companies.

Table 3. Pearson correlation coefficient between seniority and scales

Leadership type	Seniority	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Transformational	-0.167	.087
Idealised influence	-0.135	.166
Motivational inspiration	-0.006	.951
Intellectual stimulation	-0.205	.035
Individual consideration	-0.198	.042
Transactional	0.061	.533
Contingent reward	-0.040	.685
Exception management	0.149	.127
Laissez-faire	-0.025	.797
Engagement	-0.238	.014
Force	-0.183	.061
Dedication	-0.179	.066
Absorption	-0.277	.004
Perceived stress	0.131	.181

Table 4 shows the correlation between the different scales. There was a positive, statistically significant correlation between L-TF and L-TS ($p < .001$), L-LF ($p < .01$) and engagement ($p < .001$). There was also a statistically significant positive correlation between L-TS and L-LF ($p < .001$) and engagement ($p = .028$). Finally, engagement correlated negatively with perceived stress ($p = .024$). The relationships between the leadership scales and perceived stress and between L-LF and engagement were not significant.

Table 4. Correlations between types of leadership, engagement and stress

	L-TF	L-TS	L-LF	Engagement	Stress
L-TF	1				
L-TS	.607***	1			
L-LF	.256**	.412***	1		
Engagement	.390***	.213*	.134	1	
Stress	-0.13	-0.05	-0.009	-0.219*	1

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

In order to determine the possible effect of the demographic variables seniority, position, work schedule, engagement and perceived stress on leadership, multivariate linear regressions were conducted. The model was significant for L-TF ($F [7,98] = 3.13, p = .005$), explaining 12.4% of the variance in L-TF. Although the demographic variables and the perceived stress scale did not significantly predict L-TF, engagement showed a significant effect ($p < .01$), demonstrating that higher levels of engagement were associated with higher levels of L-TF. The model for transactional leadership showed no significant effects for any of the scales. However, the model for L-LF was statistically significant ($F [7, 98] = 3.19, p = .004$), explaining 12.8% of the variance in L-LF. In particular, management ($p = .001$) and coordination ($p = .024$) had significant effects, compared to sports technicians. Thus, those participants who performed management and coordination duties perceived higher levels of L-LF in relation to those who performed sports technician functions. With regard to

the work schedules, there was also a significant effect, with the full-time employees perceiving higher levels of L-LF in relation to part-time employees ($p = .039$). The engagement scale also showed a significant effect, such that higher levels of engagement were associated with higher levels of L-LF ($p = .052$).

Table 5. Regression models

Predictor	Leadership								
	L-TF			L-TS			L-LF		
	B (SE)	t	p-value	B (SE)	t	p-value	B (SE)	t	p-value
Seniority	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.72	.472	0.01 (0.02)	0.74	.462	0.06 (0.06)	1.09	.279
Position									
Manager	-0.05 (0.18)	-0.25	.804	0.31 (0.26)	1.22	.227	-3.21 (0.94)	-3.42	.001
Receptionist	0.12 (0.16)	0.75	.458	0.12 (0.22)	0.55	.584	-0.84 (0.82)	-1.03	.308
Coordinator	-0.07 (0.14)	-0.46	.648	-0.10 (0.20)	-0.49	.624	-1.70 (0.74)	-2.29	.024
Sports Technician	Ref.								
Schedule (Full and Part-time)	-0.01 (0.11)	-0.07	.941	-0.01 (0.16)	-0.07	.944	-1.19 (0.57)	-2.09	.039
Engagement	0.20 (0.05)	3.75	< .001	0.15 (0.08)	2.00	.048	0.56 (0.28)	1.97	.052
Stress	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.61	.544	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.44	.665	0.03 (0.05)	0.60	.551
R² (%)	12.4			4			12.8		
Model	$F(7, 98) = 3.132, p = .005$			$F(7, 98) = 1.625, p = .137$			$F(7, 98) = 3.193, p = .004$		

B: non-standardised regression coefficient. SE: standard error.

DISCUSSION

In recent years, the fitness industry has seen considerable growth throughout Spain. While the success of fitness centres depends on various factors, the present research investigated one of the most important factor: the human factor. The results were in line with both Boned, Felipe, Barranco, Grimaldi-Puyana & Crovetto's (2015) and González & Landero (2007) findings, who had also researched similar samples in terms of gender and age. The sample, however, differed in age range from the National Institute of Qualifications-Higher Council of Sports (INCUAL-CSD; 2008) study in which the ages ranged from 20 to 29 years.

In evaluating the correlation between certain dimensions of transformational leadership (level of intellectual stimulation and individual consideration) and engagement (level of absorption), the results of this study coincided with those of Caridi, Del Otero, Savino & Silva (2018). In both studies, scores on these dimensions significantly decreased with increasing years working at the company. In contrast, the results of Garrosa, Moreno, Rodríguez & Sanz (2008) study showed a positive and significant association between seniority in the company and stress, attributed to two main reasons: the possible presence of a cumulative wear process depending on the time spent in the company and a higher level of responsibility that is often found in the most veteran workers.

This study also revealed that fixed-contract workers had significantly higher levels of stress than those with other types of contract, contrary to Aristizábal, Mejía & Quiroz's (2018) findings that there were no differences between groups. The difference found in the present study could be explained by the responsibility felt by employees of having a stable job and maintaining that stability.

The results found for the relationship between transformational and transactional leadership were consistent with Molero, Recio & Cuadrado's (2010) findings that greater transformational leadership was associated with higher levels of efficiency, satisfaction and motivation generated in employees (Alava et al., 2016). Transformational leadership thus seems to produce higher levels of satisfaction, effectiveness and engagement at work (Hermosilla et al., 2016).

Regarding the type of leadership and perceived stress, there were no significant differences between leadership type, which was inconsistent with Calcina & Cumpa's (2019) and Camacho & Melgarejo (2012) arguments that there was a relationship between leadership style and work stress. However, one possible explanation for the differing results is that the present study used different instruments to measure.

In the literature, several studies have found that perceived stress was significantly higher in women than in men (e.g., Moreno-Jiménez & Rodríguez-Carvajal, 2005; Párraga, González, Méndez, Villarín, & León, 2018), although the relationship has been argued to be controversial (e.g., Fernández, 2017; Guerrero-Barona, Gómez, Moreno-Manso, & Guerrero-Molina, 2018).

Finally, Guerrero-Barona et al. (2018) stated that one of the main sources of stress was a lack of motivation, thus showing an inverse relationship between the level of engagement and stress, similar to that recorded in this study; the higher the level of motivation, the lower the level of stress and vice versa. Coinciding with Salgado-Barandela, Barajas, Sánchez-Fernández, Gambaun & Silva (2019) study of municipal public management workers in Galicia, who were satisfied with their work. Also, Garrosa et al. (2008) demonstrated that emotional competition translated into a low level of stress, preventing professional fatigue and encouraging engagement.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the results of this research and the objectives raised, several conclusions have been drawn. The most common style of leadership, according to the participants, was the *laissez-faire* style, which seems to indicate that the participants may not have clear goals set by their superiors, thus reducing the effectiveness of work within the organisation. The second type of leadership they perceive is transformational, albeit with values far removed from the previous one.

In terms of the perceived level of stress, the results were moderate. Overall stress

was lower in men than in women, possibly because women generally experience a higher level of emotional attrition due to cultural or other reasons, such as being forced to combine work with housework. In relation to the assessment by the participants of the total level of engagement, they determine that it is high.

Leadership type, engagement and perceived stress were not significantly different across genders. However, a difference was found between contract types, with fixed-contract workers. This could be explained by the greater responsibility inherent to a stable position.

Working schedule and position within the fitness centre did not produce significant differences in the different types of leadership, engagement and perceived stress. Employees who had worked at their companies for longer periods perceived lower levels of transformational leadership, particularly in intellectual stimulation and individual consideration. Motivation, creativity and individual contributions of the employees thus are thought to diminish if their superior do not present constant stimulation and individualised attention.

Greater perceptions of transformational leadership also coincided with higher levels of engagement. It is possible that transformational leadership entails the creation of a safer and more satisfying working environment for workers by fostering a greater degree of motivation or engagement in workers. Higher levels of transactional leadership were also associated with higher levels of laissez-faire leadership and engagement and lower perceived stress.

In spite of the contributions of this research, several limitations existed in the data collection. The data was obtained from self-report questionnaires, which can be biased in many ways including. However, measures were taken to reduce the bias, offering greater privacy and thereby increasing the validity of the data collected.

The results of this work confirmed the need to measure and quantify variables such as perceived leadership type, engagement and stress in workers of sports or premium fitness centres. In order to determine how these variables could influence the development of employees' work and, in turn, the effectiveness and productivity of the organisations, such key elements and data must be collected to implement effective training and continuous improvement programs for workers. Such measures are indispensable in emerging businesses today that depart from the classic management styles. It is important to proactively respond to the current market, which is extremely volatile and changing.

Future research should include identifying the difference between workers who voluntarily occupy a part-time position and those who occupy them involuntarily. To determine causation among variables, it is also advisable to carry out studies, mainly of a longitudinal nature so that the research can better guide the organisations to design and implement effective intervention plans.

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