Relations Between Workload, Work Attitudes And Psychological Variables In Spanish University Professors

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Abstract

This paper analyses materialistic and post materialistic attitudes towards work amongst university faculty and also the relationship between work attitudes and changes in workloads and levels of well being and burnout. The sample of 111 teachers completed questions about changes in workload, a scale of post materialist and materialist attitudes to labour; the MBI-GS to measure burnout, and the MHC-SF to measure hedonic and eudemonic well being. The main results show a prevalence of post-materialistic attitudes and adequate levels of well being and burnout. Workload is only related to eudemonic well-being levels, and the best predictor of burnout and well-being is the postmaterialistic attitude. The results are discussed taking into account the work of university professors in Spain and the theory of work identities.

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Keywords: Postmaterialistic attitude; Eudemonic Well-being; Burnout; Personal Accomplishment; College Teachers.

Theoretical Framework

The current economic crisis and the consequent adjustments taking place in the Spanish university system have a direct effect on academic productivity. The three most important elements of change are the Bologna Process, as well as the creation of the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) in 2002 and the approval of Royal Decree-Law (RDL) 14/2012, on urgent actions to rationalise public expenditure in education. These key milestones have marked the work of university teachers, along with the 25% reduction in research funding in 2012 compared to the previous year (Corral, 2012). The goal of RDL 14/2012 is to establish a series of measures to reduce the state budget by EUR 3 billion.

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The distinction between materialist and postmaterialist work makes it possible to identify changes in social values because the two terms are not ends of a continuous variable, but rather a process, where the first precedes the second on a temporal socio-historical continuum (Veira, Pena & Sánchez, 2007). Materialistic values were associated with the transformations of industrialisation, when the predominant values were closely related to economic growth, achievement motivation, income maximisation, hierarchical management of authority, individual property, the regulatory role of the state, fundamentalism, etc. Meanwhile, post-materialist values are related to quality of life as the highest priority, motivation towards subjective wellbeing, the search for fulfilment through work, participatory ways of administration, decreasing individual authority, lower regulatory role of the state, etc. The motivation for the work would be in the rewards, both expected and received, as values such as self-realisation and spirit of achievement are intangible values (Veira, Pena & Sánchez, 2007).

With this background, this paper analyses whether the increased workload on university teachers (mainly in teaching and mentoring of graduate and master students’ final research) could be related to distinctions regarding work-related attitudes. The cultural framework of values and attitudes contribute in guiding the behaviour and configuration of identities related with work and transmitted through social and generational changes (Throsby, 1999; Veira & Muñoz, 2007).

This study describes the attitudes of professors from the Castilla-La Mancha University in Albacete Campus, to a further intensification of work in the context of crisis. Furthermore, it examines the relationship between changes in workloads, attitudes towards work and psychological variables such as well-being and burnout.

2.- Method

2.1.- Participants

We sampled 111-university faculty, who constitute a representative sample of Albacete Campus of Castilla-La Mancha University (8.5% margin of error; 95% confidence; heterogeneity 50%). The average age of the sample was 44.74 years (SD = 8.91), with 37.8% of the sample being female and 61.3% male. The majority of the sample (61.3%) was married, 25.2% single and 4.5% separated (the rest had another marital status or did not answer this question). Most of the sample (59.5%) had children, while 33.3% did not (the rest do not answer). Regarding their contractual status, 61.3% are civil servants (professors), public worker (lecturers) 30.6% and 7.2% associated (part time).

2.2. Instrument and Procedure

In addition to socio-demographic and other characteristics of their work, participants completed a questionnaire with the following scales:

- **Attitude to Work**, adapted to this study from the World Values Survey (del Pino & Bericat, 1998) and Veira’s study (Veira & Muñoz, 2004, p.55; Veira, 2007), which proposed to build an “index of instrumental attitudes and expressive towards work” according to the degree of importance attributed to job characteristics such as security, wages, advancement opportunities, interesting work, independence and schedules. The scale consisted of 12 items whose sentences expressed post materialist attitudes ($\alpha = .772$) and materialist attitudes ($\alpha = .686$), which were rated on a 5-point scale where 1 = not important and 5 = very important.

- **Maslach Burnout Inventory General Survey** (MBI-GS), adapted to the Spanish population by Moreno, Rodriguez and Escobar (2001). It is a scale consisting of 16 items that together provide an overall score of Burnout ($\alpha = .782$), but it is usually analysed along three dimensions: emotional exhaustion ($\alpha = .862$), depersonalisation ($\alpha = .686$), and personal accomplishment ($\alpha = .892$).

- **Mental Health Continuum Short Form** (MHC-SF. Keyes, 2005) previously applied in the Spanish context for similar research (Romero & Olivos, 2012). The scale consists of 14 items measuring wellbeing ($\alpha = .882$). It also can be
analysed according to two subscales, a Hedonic wellbeing scale (α = .813) associated with pleasure or experienced emotions, and a eudemonic wellbeing scale (α = .851) related to psychological development or personal growth.

3. Results

Figure 1 shows the mean levels of attitude towards work, wellbeing and burnout for the entire sample of professors.

Although average scores for both attitude towards work scales are relatively high, post materialistic attitude is significantly higher than materialistic attitude (t = -9.84; df = 110; p < .001). Wellbeing levels are also moderately high, with a slightly higher level of hedonic welfare compared to eudemonic well-being (t = 4.108; df = 109; p < .001). Burnout is not as high as the other variables of interest; however, the most affected dimension is the personal accomplishment. The following table shows the correlation between these variables.

Table 1. Correlations between Attitude, Well-being and Burnout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Materialist Attitude</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.351**</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>-.030</td>
<td>-.154</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td>-.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Postmaterialist Attitude</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.237*</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>.269**</td>
<td>-.073</td>
<td>-.220*</td>
<td>.140</td>
<td>-.023</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Wellbeing</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.783**</td>
<td>.976**</td>
<td>-.345**</td>
<td>-.184</td>
<td>-.186</td>
<td>-.312**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Hedonic Wellbeing</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.629**</td>
<td>-.353**</td>
<td>-.070</td>
<td>-.323**</td>
<td>-.328**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Eudemonic Wellbeing</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.308**</td>
<td>-.207*</td>
<td>-.121</td>
<td>-.274**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Burnout</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.645**</td>
<td>.624**</td>
<td>.641**</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>7. Personal</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.024</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Accomplishment</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.280**</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Emotional Exhaustion</td>
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<td>9. Depersonalisation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05  ** p < .01

Correlations with post materialist attitude are observed, which although weak, are significant. First, it is positively correlated with well-being, which can be explained mainly by the correlation with a eudemonic dimension (r = .269; p < .01). There is also a negative correlation with the personal accomplishment subscale of burnout (r = -.220; p < .05).

Table 2 shows the distribution of the respondent’s frequencies according to their self-reported changes in workloads.

Table 2. Frequencies and percentages of teachers according to workload
Successive analysis of average differences showed no significant differences in attitude towards workload according to differences in teaching workload (ECTS), not even according to well-being and burnout levels. There are only differences in well-being levels ($F = 4.87 \ [2, 95]; p < .05$), specifically in eudemonic well-being ($F = 4.56 \ [2, 95]; p < .05$) between those professors who say that their workload has increased in the tutoring of GFR and MFR ($M = 3.7; SD = .575$) and those who say it has not changed ($M = 3.34, SD = .565$), with slightly higher levels of well-being in the first ones.

Finally, we conducted a stepwise regression analysis to predict the levels of burnout, well-being, and the dimensions that compose them, from the levels of workload and materialist and postmaterialist attitudes to work.

### Table 3.- Step-by-step linear regression to predict Burnout and Well-being from Attitude and Workload

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variables</th>
<th>Models and predictors</th>
<th>$R$</th>
<th>$\Delta R^2$</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Accomplishment</td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>.328</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>10.95**</td>
<td>-.726**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post materialist Attitude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eudemonic well-being</td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>.260</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>6.55*</td>
<td>.313*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post materialist Attitude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .05$  ** $p < .01$

As summarised in table 3, post materialist attitude only significantly predicts personal accomplishment of burnout ($F=10.95; \beta=-.726; p<. 01$) and eudaimonic well-being ($F=6.55; \beta=. 313; p<. 05$).

### 4. Discussion.

There is a predominance of post materialistic work attitude in the group of university faculty studied. Well-being levels are relatively high and burnout levels are low.

There are not large differences in participants’ workloads during one year (self-reported). This is because the fieldwork was conducted one year before the approval of RDL 14/2012 so that the actual application of the decree and the workload adjustment was not carried out completely at that time.

However, significant differences in workload according to well-being levels can be observed. Interestingly, teachers who have seen an increase in load show higher levels of eudemonic well-being, which could be explained by an effect of cognitive dissonance reduction resulting from increasing its workload without reward for that effort.

Furthermore, our results are favourable in principle, according to a more post materialist interpretation in the studied group. The work offers more than immediate material rewards. It provides ways of thinking and organising life, both day by day and in the course of individual life stories. Therefore, it is likely that the negative effects of burnout level resist being displayed in all its magnitude in the sample because, in general, people tend to preserve the value of complex, strong and stable identities (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Brewer, 1991; Hogg & Terry, 2001).

Thus, the identity-constructed purpose of the work, as well as the organisations in which they are developed, are nourished by the attraction that other members of society attach to the organisational image. Members incorporate those assessments as the image to preserve the continuity of their self-concepts, give them distinctiveness, and
improve their self-esteem (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994). In the case of university professors, these identities, of course, are very complex, often given a status or professional categorisation that is more or less positive (Badano et al., 2004; Guerrero, 1992, 2007; Zabala, 2004). However, the structural pillars of those identities (frozen job positions, lack of recognition of the actual workload, mismatch between load and career promotion merits, etc.) are fading, which eventually will affect the work at the University, not only in health and well-being but also on the social significance, which seems to combine connective (facing our problems together) and binding (merit and individual promotion mechanisms) functions.

5. References.


