4. "Work engagement: a key to HEROs – healthy and resilient organizations

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Pablo Picasso, a Spanish painter and sculptor who was born in 1881 in Malaga, had a curious way of referring to himself when he was absorbed in his art: "When I paint, the brush paints alone." Obviously, it is not literally possible for the "brush to paint alone". There is an actor (Pablo Picasso) who drives it, gives it life. Picasso was a genius and loved his job; painting was his life's purpose – indeed, he was "work engaged". However, it is not necessary to be Picasso to experience work engagement. This psychological experience is more common than it may seem at first glance, and researchers have been busy documenting it in recent years, as shown in this inspiring book. However, work engagement is also a collective experience that occurs in today's organizations, and it is a crucial element in so-called HEROs (healthy and resilient organizations) – that being the topic of this chapter.

Positive organizational psychology and work engagement

From its beginnings, psychology has basically focused on the study of pathologies and disorders, and this negative orientation, based on the traditional medical model, has given rise to a theoretical framework of a *pathogenic* nature, focused on remedy and recovery. In Positive Psychology, begun in 1998 when Professor Martin Seligman delivered his speech as president of the American Psychological Association (APA), a new framework emerged emphasizing positive psychological characteristics and human strengths. Adapted to a work context, Positive "Organizational" Psychology (POP) is the scientific study of the optimal functioning of people in organizations at different levels of analysis. The study of POP at work aims to describe, explain, and predict optimal performance at individual, group, leader and organizational (IGLO) levels by

cultivating organizational well-being (Salanova, 2020a; Salanova et al., 2016, 2019). The ultimate goal of POP is to discover the characteristics of a "full organizational life" at the IGLO levels. To this end, it seeks to answer two key questions: How do employees experience positive organizations, and what are the attributes of positive organizations?

Based on previous research, I consider engagement to be a key indicator of employee health, specifically work-related psychological well-being, at all IGLO levels of analysis. Some researchers consider "health" and "well-being" in a broader sense, sometimes referring to both mental and physical attributes as a single entity, while others explicitly see them as separate constructs. In this chapter, I use the terms "health" and "well-being" interchangeably as they apply at all IGLO levels of analysis. And, to repeat, I consider employee engagement to be a key indicator of such well-being. The vast research literature on generic health and well-being takes into account different facets of health/well-being like physical (physical symptoms and physical illnesses and diseases), psychological (mental/emotional, like positive/negative emotional states, satisfaction, strain, burnout, thriving, and engagement), and social well-being (i.e., fairness, positive relationship, social support). While that breadth is attractive at a molar level of thinking, consistent with the theme of this book, I focus in this chapter on engagement as a key indicator of well-being, and seek to identify antecedents, consequences, and correlates at IGLO levels of analysis.

Work engagement is an indicator of, and a key facet of, organizational well-being in the HERO Model I will explore here. In that sense, I agree with Bakker et al. (2008), who defined work engagement as: "a positive, fulfilling affective-motivational state of *work-related well-being* that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (p. 187; emphasis added). Thus, work engagement is a facet of organizational well-being because this "positive state" integrates the motivational and affective-cognitive components identified by Bakker et al.

Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence in work activity, even in the midst of difficulties. Dedication refers to being strongly involved in one's work and experiencing a sense of transcendence, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Finally, absorption is characterized by the person fully concentrating while working and enjoying the activity such that time "flies by" and they have difficulty disconnecting from work. In accord with this conceptualization of work engagement, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) was developed and has been used widely (Schaufeli et al., 2002, 2006), revealing good psychometric properties (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2020). We have

used the UWES extensively in our work to measure engagement at multiple levels.

Work engagement can also be shared by team members as an index of (collective) team engagement (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011; Torrente et al., 2012). This sharedness of engagement can occur through an emotional contagion process defined as "the tendency to automatically imitate and synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person and, therefore, to converge together" (Hatfield et al., 1994). We have shown the existence of team engagement in studies of more than 200 work units and their leaders. This research reveals that team engagement is activated by the presence of social resources shared by the team (i.e., coordination, teamwork, social support) and results in high in-role and extra-role performance (Cruz et al., 2013; Gracia et al., 2013; Salanova et al., 2011; Torrente et al., 2012, 2013). Individual as well as collective team engagement are key elements of HEROs; that is the topic we turn to next.

HEROs and work engagement

HEROs are defined as

> those organizations that make systematic, planned, and proactive efforts to improve employees' and organizational processes and outcomes ... [and] that involve carrying out healthy organizational resources and practices aimed at improving the work environment at the levels of (a) the task (autonomy, feedback), (b) the interpersonal (social relationships, transformational leadership), and (c) the organization (HR practices), especially during turbulence and times of change. (Salanova et al., 2012, p. 788)

HEROs are hypothesized to be able to not only survive but to thrive in turbulent periods such as economic crises, critical internal changes, or even a pandemic like Covid-19. They do this by having resilient employees, groups, and leaders who are able to learn so that the organization can emerge even stronger (healthier) from these situations (Salanova, 2020b). HEROs are hypothesized to be resilient because they are able to effectively confront challenging circumstances and be strengthened by being effective in adverse situations. That is, they not only adjust to the turbulence, but also develop the ability to identify the need and to take action for change to meet future challenges (Salanova et al., 2012; 2019; see also Albrecht, this volume).

The HERO Model serves as a heuristic for both research and practice from a holistic, comprehensive, positive, and multi-level (i.e., IGLO) perspective. In practice, the HERO methodology is co-creative and participative, meaning that different stakeholders (i.e., executives, supervisors, employees, and customers) are important partners in the assessment, implementation, and data-dissemination process. Importantly, this process is followed up with the development of healthy action-research programs to influence organizational policies and eventually organizational culture. As shown in Figure 4.1, the HERO Model has three main interrelated components: (a) healthy cross-level organizational resources and practices, (b) healthy employees, and (c) healthy cross-level organizational outcomes (Salanova et al., 2012), as described below.

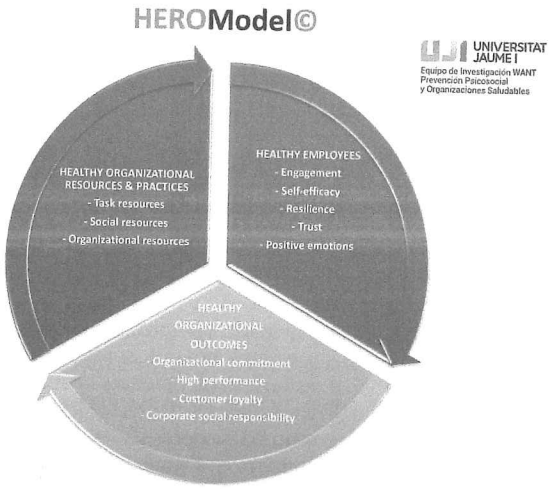

Figure 4.1 The HERO Model (Salanova et al., 2012)

1. *Healthy cross-level organizational resources and practices* include task resources (e.g., autonomy, variety), social environment (e.g., social support, transformational leadership), and organizational practices (e.g., work–life balance, equity and inclusion, wellness programs).
2. *Healthy employees* are characterized by engagement, resilience, self-efficacy, trust, and positive affect, with engagement being of central importance.
3. *Healthy cross-organizational outcomes* include in-role and extra-role performance along with other indicators of effectiveness (e.g., service quality, objective financial performance, commitment, customer loyalty), and positive relationships with the environment and the community.

Data on the HERO Model are collected from different respondents at multiple (IGLO) levels in an organization (e.g., CEOs, teams' immediate supervisors, employees, and customers). In-role and extra-role performance are assessed by team members and immediate supervisors, while organizational performance is assessed using quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (interviews and focus groups) methods, as well as with objective performance indicators (of quality, of financial outcomes) (Llorens et al., 2013).

Because of HEROs' multi-level focus, care is taken in data-gathering to reflect those different levels (see González-Romá, this volume). For example, survey items are worded to reflect the specific level of interest, such as the work unit (e.g., "In my work unit, we are coordinated with each other") or organization (e.g., "In this company there are practices to facilitate the workers' work–family balance"). Such care in assessment permits establishing linkages among different levels in the HERO Model based on team/organizational perceptions and experiences over time. Gathering these kinds of IGLO data permits the use of multi-level models in order to test within- and cross-level relationships among variables of the HERO Model (see Xanthopoulou & Bakker, this volume). The following provides some examples.

At the *individual level*, Lisbona et al. (2018) showed that employee engagement is a relevant driver of positive individual outcomes in organizations such as personal initiative, which, in turn, influences individual job performance. Indeed, Lisbona et al. also showed an indirect effect of employee engagement on individual performance through personal initiative in two different studies, one cross-sectional and the other longitudinal. In both studies, high levels of engagement led to higher personal initiative, which, in turn, led to higher individual job performance.

Focusing on the *group level*, Torrente et al. (2012) showed that team social resources (such as social support climate, coordination, and teamwork) were significant antecedents of team aggregate engagement. This project involved data on 533 employees nested within 62 teams and 13 organizations. In combination, the aggregate antecedents of team engagement might be said to form a kind of engagement climate (Albrecht, this volume). Also at the team level of analysis, Rodríguez-Sánchez et al. (2017) showed that team work engagement is an important mediator in explaining how team cohesion leads to team performance in creative tasks over time. This longitudinal team-level simulation project involved 18 project teams (composed of 605 individuals).

At the *organizational level* of analysis, Gracia et al. (2013) studied a sample of 107 Spanish tourist establishments involving 615 service workers and 2,165

customers. The purpose of this project was to explore engagement as a mediator of the relationship between organizational resources provided to workers (i.e., training opportunities, autonomy, and technical support) and customers' perceptions of service quality. The results revealed that when organizations are seen as providing employees with sufficient resources this (a) leads to aggregate feelings of engagement, which in turn result in (b) collective feelings of competence (more empathic with the customer and more extra-role behaviors), and (c) customers' perceptions of superior service quality. Also, using multi-level models, we showed that organizational practices (i.e., improving psychosocial health and developing team workers' skills and careers) at the organizational level are positively associated with team work engagement (at the group level) (Acosta et al., 2013).

We have also done more work on multi-level models now involving the *leaders level*. In multi-level modeling, issues at one level can influence issues at other levels (González-Romá, this volume). For example, Martínez et al. (in press), in a study of 1,079 employees nested in 124 work teams, found significant cross-level effects of leadership (at the leader level) on individual-level work engagement. When employees feel emotionally overloaded, there are leader behaviors that relieve the potential negative impact on follower levels of engagement. Also, we showed that transformational leadership (at the leader level) has a significant effect on team-level work engagement, which in turn is directly related to team performance (Cruz et al., 2013).

In summary, work engagement plays an important role in the IGLO model of multi-level well-being (along with self-efficacy and resilience) and is, therefore, a key element of HEROs. Research at each level of analysis reveals the multiple roles that work engagement can play, sometimes as a direct correlate of outcomes, sometimes as a mediator of antecedents in relationship to outcomes, and sometimes as a moderator of relationships.

Enhancing work engagement through Positive Psychological Interventions based on the HERO Model

The research on the HERO Model presented so far leads to questions as to how they might be put into practice. For the present purposes, I focus on the potential impact of Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs) on multi-level (IGLO) engagement. PPIs include the design and application of multi-level strategies implemented by individuals, teams, leaders, and the organiza-

tion as a whole to promote organizational performance, through improving multi-level well-being including work engagement (Salanova et al., 2013).

In their review of generic intervention studies, Knight et al. (2019) have shown that there are benefits of workplace interventions to improve employee engagement. They presented the results of 40 intervention studies, such as: development of personal resources (N=5), development of job resources (N=12), leadership training (N=3), health promotion (N=18), and joint development of job and personal resources (N=2). Twenty (50 percent) of the studies they reviewed showed positive and significant effects on engagement. The most successful interventions to increase engagement were bottom-up interventions, particularly job crafting, and health promotion (specifically mindfulness interventions). While they identified some moderators of these encouraging findings, they note that more such research is needed.

In what follows I review some of the intervention work we have been doing in our WANT-Research Team (www.want.uji.es). We have been conducting PPIs using controlled and randomized designs with at least one intervention group and a waiting-list control group. In addition, we have been collecting baseline and post-intervention follow-up data.[1] I briefly review results about PPIs that specifically impacted work engagement as a key element of the HERO Model at the individual, group, and leadership levels of analysis.

In a quasi-experimental longitudinal study (i.e., control group with baseline and post-intervention measures) on work stress, Cifre et al. (2011) implemented an intervention program for work team redesign. The program involved numerous changes, such as supervisor role redesign and changes in job demands and resources for better fit, as well as improved training and increased information about the company. These interventions collectively produced improvements in personal resources (self-efficacy and perceived competences) and job resources (innovation team climate) that increased work engagement at the individual and team levels in a manufacturing company.

Several additional quasi-experimental studies on mindfulness programs at the individual level (Coo & Salanova, 2018, 2020) have also been conducted. The first of these studies was conducted with 35 nurses and consisted of three sessions based on the traditional eight-week Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) program (Kuyken et al., 2010). Results indicated that the program was successful in promoting happiness at work, work engagement, and performance, as well as improving nurses' ability to pay attention to the present moment in an open and non-judgmental way (Mindfulness). The intervention in the second study consisted of eight MBCT sessions, and the

results indicated that the program was successful in increasing the participants' levels of emotional intelligence and work engagement at the individual level of analysis. Similar results have been obtained by Coo et al. (2020), where they showed that the MBCT intervention increased participants' perceptions of the personal resources they bring to work such as psychological capital.

Finally, we recently conducted experimental studies of coaching programs (Peláez et al., 2019, 2020) in an international automotive company in Spain. The first study was conducted at the individual level of analysis with 60 staff employees who participated in a team coaching session followed by three individual sessions. Results indicated that, compared to the controls, the intervention program significantly increased all the study variables at the end of the program and three months later, including individual levels of work engagement. The second study was conducted at the individual, leader, and group levels of analysis. In it we implemented the coaching program with 41 executives and managers who first received 360-degree feedback (about positive leadership, engagement, psychological capital, and performance), and then over three months received the group-coaching leadership workshop (with five weekly, four-hour sessions), and three individual sessions. Follow-up 360s indicated that the intervention program was successful in producing significant differences against the controls in leadership skills, psychological capital, work engagement, and performance at the individual, leader, and team levels of analysis.

In summary, it is clear from our experimental and quasi-experimental research, as well as others' research (Knight et al., 2019) that interventions can produce the desired effects on individual, team, and leader behavior and work engagement. Such intervention studies add experimental evidence to the existing findings based on largely concurrent and correlational studies in support of the HERO Model. However, there are many research questions that remain to be answered.

Challenges for future research on work engagement

In this chapter, I explained how and why work engagement is a key psychological concept in understanding HEROs as positive organizations, and provided supporting evidence using a variety of methods in varying contexts. In this section, I propose some challenges for future research on work engagement as a key to HEROs.

First, more research is needed to understand how work engagement relates to other key indicators of employee health, particularly self-efficacy and resilience. Engagement, self-efficacy, and resilience appear to operate in tandem as indicators of health. However, it would be interesting to explore whether self-efficacy also operates as an individual difference variable that contributes to a propensity to engage, as suggested by Hough and Oswald (this volume). This issue could also be explored at the team and leadership and organizational levels of analysis.

The interest in resilience is based not only on the research summarized here but also on Cooke et al. (2016), who showed that resilient employees not only sustain effort through challenges, but also cultivate self-efficacy regarding their own competences as well as engagement (de Lucena Carvalho et al., 2006; Mache et al., 2014; Malik & Garg, 2020; Wang & Li, 2017). Further research on this nesting of resilience, self-efficacy, and engagement and their antecedents and consequences could prove important for use as a basis for additional intervention studies.

Salanova (2020b) has proposed specific areas of future research that may be particularly important in the time of Covid-19. It is recommended, for example, that it would be important to study the kinds and combinations of resources for resilience that might help to maintain, or even enhance, work engagement during crises. For example, is it psychological resources (i.e., positive emotions, self-efficacy, optimism, meaningful work, mental flexibility, emotional styles), social resources (i.e., positive social relationship among co-workers, teams and leaders, fairness, trust) and/or organizational resources (i.e., work–life balance, wellness, and positive communication programs) that have the most important effects?

Research on the following multi-level questions would also be important: (1) what are the personal and social psychological processes and variables that influence contagion of engagement in teams? For instance, one might study diversity (in age, in culture, for example) to answer questions about the degree to which more or less diverse groups experience emotional contagion vis-à-vis engagement; and (2) how might engagement change at multiple levels during organizational change, vis-à-vis use of new technologies (see Boudreau, this volume)?

The issue of the methods used for studies also requires attention. That is, most of the organizational studies on work engagement are quantitative in nature, and there is a need for more qualitative studies (see Macey, this volume). We found in our HERO studies that qualitative data (mostly interviews)

with various individuals and groups (e.g., the CEO, immediate supervisors, employees, and customers, among others) revealed quite different perspectives (Acosta et al., 2015). For example, differences were observed on such issues as: (a) the number and type of policies, practices, and resources in the organization to support engagement, and (b) the level of employee and team engagement and how well-being programs are or are not connected with organizational success and performance. In short, from a practical perspective, combining qualitative and quantitative sources of information can give us a more complete conceptual map about the drivers and consequences of work engagement to enhance a more engaged workforce.

The last challenge for future research on work engagement and HEROs is related to interventions and the durability of their effects over time. To date, the longest follow-ups have been three months, so research over longer periods of time is required; we know they work but we do not know for how long. The fact that positive effects are mainly found immediately after interventions translates into the imperative to investigate the tactics/interventions and mechanisms required to sustain the effects of positive interventions effects over time. We now need to provide answers to such questions as:

- If job autonomy is increased for front-line workers, will they engage in more job-crafting to enhance engagement over time?
- If coaching is implemented on an on-going basis rather than as a short-lived experiment, will leaders be more continuously engaged and will that engagement, through contagion, yield more engaged teams and employees?
- Is it possible to train employees to be well-being champions who could actively reinforce the effects of the interventions to facilitate transfer of training to the daily routine of the workplace over time?
- To what degree do improvements in work engagement yield effects for people outside of the workplace (see Saks, this volume)?

In conclusion, the HERO Model in its current multi-level form identifies a complex set of issues targeted at the full range of well-being with an intense focus on work engagement as a key element. Positive consequences seem to follow from well-being, specifically engagement, at multiple levels of analysis. Nevertheless, additional research needs to be undertaken to further reinforce and extend what has been learned and how it can be applied to create more HEROs.

Note

1. We work within the framework of competitive projects at the national level (both in companies and in the government) and R&D contracts with surrounding organizations. In addition, just this year we started a European project in the framework of Horizon 2020, a European Union research programme, on multi-level interventions to improve mental health at work in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and public institutions. In this project, we will include work engagement as a key indicator of health and well-being; please see the website for more information. We are actively participating in nine European countries and 14 institutions from those countries. The support we have received suggests we are responding to a felt need for these kinds of interventions across much of Europe.

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