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# Corporate Well-Being Programme as a Tool to Cope with Reduced Engagement and Resilience in COVID-19 Times

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**Abstract:** *The coronavirus pandemic is having a dramatic impact on employees around the world, damaging their physical and psychosocial well-being, and triggering disengagement and affecting their resilience. This research aims to test, through a case study, the effects of a corporate wellness programme on engagement and resilience in COVID-19 times. A quantitative methodology has been used through self-administered questionnaires and two instruments; the reduced International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ), to measure the level of physical activity, and the Healthy and Resilient Organization (HERO) questionnaire to measure engagement and resilience. The results reveal that a corporate well-being programme, adapted to COVID-19 times, offers a better relationship between physical activity levels and engagement and resilience, compared with other pre-pandemic programmes, proving its efficiency. In a conclusion, this case study may be helpful to convince organizations of the importance of adapting their corporate well-being programmes in pandemic times, to maintain and even improve the engagement and resilience of their workforce.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

For the first time in history, the World is suffering two pandemics at the same time; the COVID-19 pandemic, declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2020), and the one declared, also by the same organization in 2012 due to physical inactivity and sedentary lifestyle (Kohl et al., 2012). COVID-19 has worsened physical inactivity levels (Diniz et al., 2020) with home confinement having a negative effect on physical activity and daily sitting time increased from 5 to 8 hours per day (Ammar et al., 2021) when physical activity has proven to be the best natural medicine to prevent the consequences of confinement and teleworking and stress (Chen et al., 2020). Furthermore, since 2020, and also in 2021, employees in most countries were still required or encouraged to work from home (De Klerk et al., 2021).

The impacts of COVID-19 on workplaces and workers worldwide have been dramatic and, given the uncertainties of the pandemic, organizations need to actively support the health and well-being of employees (Kniffin et al., 2021). During the last years, more companies are implementing corporate well-being programmes to take care of their workers' health and hence, the company's health, as the employee's well-being is an essential element that contributes to the long-term success of a company, becoming, therefore, a strategic element in corporate human resource management (Sparling, 2010).

Physical inactivity and increased sedentary lifestyles triggered by Covid-19 and teleworking are having negative consequences on the physical and mental health of employees; therefore, it is essential for companies that wish to look after the health of their employees to adapt their wellness programmes to the new situation as soon as possible (Núñez-Sánchez et al., 2021).

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Furthermore, Acuña et al. (2021) found that the COVID-19 pandemic is triggering stress and reducing engagement while Wang et al. (2020), underlined the importance to improve mental health and psychological resilience during this period.

Therefore, this research aims to test, through a real case study, the effects of a corporate well-being programme on engagement and resilience in COVID-19 times.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on scientific evidence, maintaining a regular exercise routine is a key strategy for physical and mental health during a forced rest period like the current coronavirus emergency (Maugeri et al., 2020). Physical activity has a positive impact on psychosocial variables in employees (Bezner et al., 2018), on the perception of health status and general health (Kim et al., 2019), and it is positively related to happier workers (Cohn et al., 2009). These physically active workers are more engaged (Gómez-Chacón et al., 2021), healthier and more resilient (Gerber et al., 2014). Employees are suffering physical inactivity consequences and also having a dramatic impact on their mental health, therefore it is of great importance to improve mental health and psychological resilience (Wang et al. 2020)

These two positive resources, engagement and resilience are part of the healthy employees' strengths such as self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience (Luthans & Youssef, 2004) and engagement (Salanova, 2012). This concept of a Healthy Employee is part of the Healthy and Resilient Organization, created by Salanova et al. (2012). The different strengths of the healthy employee are related to employees being more satisfied with their jobs and more engaged and better performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), employees with more proactive behaviors and creative ideas (Gawke et al., 2017).

First, engagement can be defined following Schaufeli et al. (2002) as a satisfactory cognitive-affective state in relation to the work performed in their company. Employee engagement, according to the last Gallup study (2021) remains dismally low (only 20%), in other words, 80% of an organization's employees are not engaged at work, therefore the organization's resilience during a crisis will be at high risk, and leaders won't be able to consistently reach their goals, as employees' disengagement creates a drag on productivity, innovation and organizational change.

Second, resilience can be defined, from the perspective of positive organizational psychology, as a stable trajectory of healthy functioning after a highly adverse event (Bonanno et al., 2011). These two concepts, engagement and resilience, are critical for the success of any business but also are positively related. Various studies indicate that there is a positive relationship between resilience and engagement, while engagement, as a positive organizational outcome, has a positive association with resilience (King et al., 2015).

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Spain, in 4 different companies, with different corporate well-being programmes, in 2 different periods, before and during a pandemic. To facilitate the presentation of results, the 3 companies in which the study was carried out before the pandemic have been grouped, thus achieving a similar sample size as the company in which the study was carried out during the pandemic.

The total sample is composed of  $n= 538$  employees, of which belong to the male sex  $n = 365$ , and the female sex  $n = 173$ . This total sample has been divided into two groups: the pandemic group of  $n= 251$  (Group 1) and the pre-pandemic group of  $n= 287$  (Group 2). Group 2 (the pre-pandemic group) is the union of three different Spanish companies; one software company, a food company and an engineering company. The information collection period in the pre-pandemic companies started in May 2015 and ended in May 2016. The pandemic group is composed of one of the biggest beverage manufacturing companies in Spain, with more than 4.000 employees, and one of the most awarded companies for its corporate wellness programme. They started this well-known programme in 2001, and since then, they have been improving it year by year, becoming, therefore, a benchmark. This company had to adapt its worksite well-being programme to the new reality provoked by COVID-19, and this is the period that will be studied; data collection began on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2020 and ended on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

The collection of data was made by self-administered questionnaires and two instruments have been used. The first one, the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ) in its reduced version was used to measure the level of physical activity, which has valid and reliable psychometric characteristics (Brown et al., 2004). The second one, to measure engagement and resilience, healthy employee questionnaire (Salanova et al., 2012) in its adaptation by Gómez-Chacón et al. (2020). In both models, of eight dimensions and five dimensions, they show a good fit, since the incremental indexes (CFI and NNFI) and the absolute SRMR are higher than .90 and lower than .08 respectively (Gómez-Chacón et al., 2020). In this case study, in order to achieve the aim of the research, only engagement and resilience will be considered.

The normality test was performed between the variables of the healthy employee, type of physical activity, and type of company, analyzing the means, standard deviations and significant differences. Non-compliance with the assumption of normality led to nonparametric tests using the Mann-Whitney U test. All analyses were conducted with the SPSS 24 statistical program.

#### 4. RESULTS

In the following tables results are presented, showing the influence of physical activity levels on engagement (Table 1) and resilience (Table 2):

**Table 1.** Influence of physical activity levels on engagement

Physical Activity Level	Group	N	Average	Standard deviation	Mean standard error
High	Group 1	41	4,7060	,67292	,10509
	Group 2	81	4,3745	,79542	,08838
Moderate	Group 1	157	4,4533	,76315	,06091
	Group 2	124	4,3992	,72277	,06491
Low	Group 1	53	4,4570	,78026	,10718
	Group 2	82	3,6836	,70731	,07811

Source: Own elaboration

In table 1, it can be observed that Group 1 presents better engagement averages than Group 2 in all the three different levels of physical activity. The employees with a higher level of physical activity and with a lower physical activity present significantly (see table 3) better engagement.

**Table 2.** Influence of physical activity levels on resilience

Physical Activity Level	Group	N	Average	Standard deviation	Mean standard error
High	Group 1	41	4,6864	,65326	,10202
	Group 2	81	4,4286	,87657	,09740
Moderate	Group 1	157	4,4122	,81392	,06496
	Group 2	124	4,4816	,78107	,07014
Low	Group 1	53	4,5445	,75751	,10405
	Group 2	82	3,7787	,74524	,08230

Source: Own elaboration

In table 2, it can be observed that Group 1 also presents a better resilience average than Group 2 in all the three different levels of physical activity. The employees with a low level of physical activity present significantly (see table 3) better resilience.

**Table 3.** Independent samples test

		Sig. (bilateral)	95% of interval difference confidence	
		Lower	Upper	
High Physical Activity	Engagement	<b>0,024</b>	0,04428	0,61867
	Resilience	0,099	-0,0492	0,56485
Moderate Physical Activity	Engagement	0,546	-0,1222	0,23044
	Resilience	0,471	-0,2585	0,11973
Low Physical Activity	Engagement	<b>0,00</b>	0,5166	1,03024
	Resilience	<b>0,00</b>	0,50425	1,02721

Source: Own elaboration

These results are in line with Gómez-Chacón et al. (2021) and Gerber et al. (2014) respectively as physically active workers are more engaged, healthier and more resilient.

## 5. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The covid-19 pandemic is still active and changing, as the measures adopted by governments. It would therefore be of interest to practitioners and researchers to update this study once the pandemic is over. It would also be advisable to compare the results of the same company at different times, or companies with the same characteristics and similar welfare programs, to draw conclusions and adopt better solutions and improvements. Finally, it would also be advisable to compare bigger samples and segment these samples by age, sex, or position in the company.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting employees' physical and mental health dramatically, and this is also affecting companies' outcomes as a result of this worsened health, lower engagement and resilience.

This research responds to the importance of pandemic investigation in generating resources to foster worker resilience and engagement (Salanova, 2020), proving the importance of corporate well-being programmes to improve physical activity levels of employees as a means to maintain and improve resilience and engagement. Engagement and resilience are of significant importance for companies around the world, as resilience is required for businesses to respond to disruptions as well as positively adapt in the face of challenging conditions, leveraging

opportunities and delivering sustainable performance improvement (Deneyer, 2017). On the other hand, as Harter et al. (2013) stated, business units with high employee engagement achieve higher productivity, higher customer loyalty, and higher customer engagement, better safety, and higher profitability, among other positive business outcomes, having a significant impact on corporate results, and on customer engagement (Chandni & Rahman, 2020).

Organizations and their leaders need to recognize the influence of employee wellbeing and employee engagement on workforce resilience (Gallup, 2021). Therefore, a corporate well-being programme, adapted to COVID-19 times and telework, as this case study shows, may be of major help to maintain and even improve employee's resilience and engagement.

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