

Character Strengths and Psychological Well-Being in Workers of a Food Company

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Abstract

The study of character strengths and psychological well-being shows the relevance of creating and maintaining healthy organizations by promoting and caring for people's optimal physical and mental function. The present study has a quantitative approach with a descriptive-correlational scope and it was carried out in a company of the agri-food sector with the participation of 95 employees. The application of instruments was carried out in a period of three weeks in two different forms: in person and written down. The results show the close relationship between the presence of Character Strengths and optimal well-being.

Keywords: Positive psychology, character strengths, psychological well-being

Introduction

As we know, people bring life to organizations. Thanks to the work of individuals change and transformation are possible, which are key elements in responding to a demanding, diverse and complex environment. As Chiavenato (2009, p. 5) states: "Organizations depend directly and irremediably on people to operate and produce their products and services, serve their customers, compete in markets and achieve their global and strategic objectives." Therefore, the fundamental approach of future-oriented planning is the worker's development and motivation to achieve a high level of identification, involvement and collaboration in synergy with interpersonal, labor and social values (Maak and Pless, 2006).

Today organizations demand effective healthy workers that possess commitment and optimal well-being who are adaptable to different

environmental, physical and psychological conditions. Organizations require motivated, strong and willing people that work together to achieve the proposed goals that benefit the individual as well as the organization. Ryan, Sheldon, Kasser and Deci (1996) mentioned that responding to the three basic and innate needs: autonomy, competence and workers' relationships generate greater psychological well-being and greater satisfaction (Castro, 2009).

Positive Psychology proposes a paradigm that focuses on the positive characteristics of people (talents, virtues and strengths) and organizations (family, work, societies). It has sought to contribute effective interventional strategies for the achievement of happiness and satisfaction with life. They do so by focusing on the integral development of individuals and communities (Vásquez and Hervás, 2014).

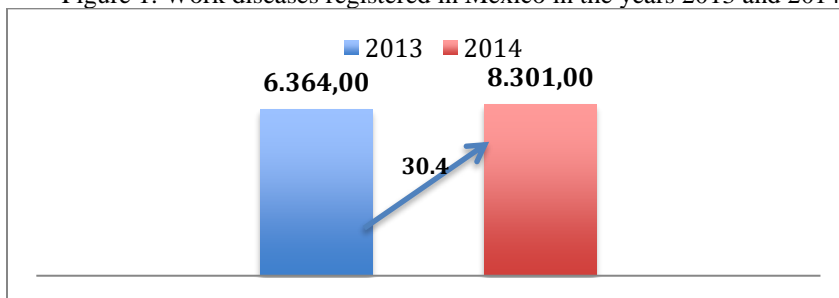
The present work has the purpose of exploring two topics of interest: "Virtues and Strengths of Character" of Seligman and Peterson and, the "Model of Psychological Well-being" proposed by Carol Ryff. Both topics significantly contribute to improving the optimal and comprehensive functioning of people.

Why the need of this study?

Currently Mexico is facing a financial and political crisis as a result of a neoliberal pattern in economic and political activities. In business the consequences of such crisis have lead managers to be more competitive by intensifying the workload, lowering wages and deregulating safety conditions for workers (Sotelo, 1999). These characteristics define what is called "Labor precariousness". This scenario has had consequences on people's physical and mental health. People who are not able to adapt are not satisfied in the work environment in which they are placed.

Regarding the health problems to which we reference, the Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social (STPS, 2015) has very specific data. With regard to occupational diseases they increased from 6,364 in 2013 to 8,301 in 2014. This represents an increase of 30.4%.

Figure 1. Work diseases registered in Mexico in the years 2013 and 2014.



Source: Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social, 2015.

On the other hand, studies by the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2000) showed that mental health at work is being compromised. Employers currently suffer from exhaustion, anxiety, low mood and stress. These factors can lead to carelessness and even accidents at work. For Espino (2014) Labor precariousness experienced today has caused greater numbers of affected workers with symptoms of depression and chronic fatigue.

Studies carried out by disciplines related to occupational health have shown that work related stress is one of the main diseases that workers present. As a result, the pressures of work surpass the physical and intellectual coping capacity of the worker, violating their physical and mental well-being and generating absenteeism, labor turnover and attempts to quit work (Valerio, 2005).

As regards México, González (2013) comments that during the period of 2013-2014 disorders such as stress, anxiety, depression and suicide attempts have increased by 20%. He states that if this trend continues, by the year 2025 these diseases will displace chronic degenerative diseases, which are currently the number one reason for labor incidents.

Likewise, according to a Gallup report presented in an Adams investigation in 2013, he mentioned that in Mexico only 12% of workers are completely satisfied with their jobs while 60% are not committed and 28% do not have any kind of link with it.

What do we mean by Character Strengths?

For several years, the knowledge provided by different philosophical theories has been forming a more concrete idea about the characteristics or character traits that every happy person should have. Specifically in the field of positive psychology, research has been carried out on human virtues. Thanks to the work of psychologists Cris Peterson and Martin Seligman, "The Manual and Classification of Strengths of Character and Virtues" was published. In this manual they classified and defined 24 strengths, grouped into 6 virtues. According to Peterson and Seligman (2004) and following Aristotelian thinking, all people poses Strengths of Character and Virtues, although in varying degrees depending on the case. Working on virtues allow their development, giving us the opportunity to reach higher levels of well-being.

To define the meaning of Character Strength, Seligman and Peterson relied primarily on "Virtue Ethics" (a philosophical theme). It states that virtue is the willingness to act, to desire and to feel which leads to human excellence and exemplifies human progress (Yarley, 1990, p.13, cited in Vazquez and Hervás (2014). On the other hand, character is a complete set of positive traits that define a good life. These traits would be the equivalent

of the Strengths of Character. (Baumrind 1998, quoted in Vazquez and Hervás, 2014).

Character strengths are defined as follows: Character strengths are the psychological ingredients (processes and mechanisms) that define virtues. They are a subset of personality traits to which we attach moral value (Vázquez and Hervás, 2014, p.185).

To reduce and systematize the list of strengths that were accumulated during their research, Seligman and Peterson had to adopt a series of strategies. The first one was based on previous research by Dahlsgaard, Peterson and Seligman (2005) who based on studies of the most influential religious and philosophical traditions in the world identified six virtues as the most important, which are mentioned and defined below:

Table 1. Virtues and their conceptual definition.

Virtue	Definition
Wisdom	Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge.
Courage	Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of external or internal opposition.
Humanity	Interpersonal strengths that involve “tending and befriending” others.
Justice	Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life.
Temperance	Strengths that protect against excess.
Transcendence	Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and thereby provide meaning.

Source: Dahlsgaard, Peterson and Seligman (2005).

Also, as a result of the classification and simplification strategies of Character Strengths, Seligman and Peterson defined the following 24 Strengths of Character, which are presented in Table 2:

Table 2. Classification of Strengths *Values in Action* (VIA)

Wisdom
Creativity: Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things. Curiosity: Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake; finding fascinating subjects and topics; exploring and discovering. Judgment: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions; being able to change one’s mind in light of evidence. Love of learning: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one’s own or formally. Perspective: Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people.
Courage
Honesty: Speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way and acting in a sincere way. Bravery: Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain. Perseverance: Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles. Zest: Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or halfheartedly.
Humanity

<p>Kindness: Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them, taking care of them. Love: Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people. Social Intelligence: Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself; knowing what to do to fit into different social situations.</p>
Justice
<p>Fairness: Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice. Leadership: Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done. Teamwork: Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group.</p>
Temperance
<p>Forgiveness: Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others. Humility: Letting one’s accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is. Prudence: Being careful about one’s choices; not taking undue risks. Self-Regulation: Regulating what one feels and does, being disciplined.</p>
Transcendence
<p>Appreciations of Beauty and Excellence: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various domains of life. Gratitude: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks. Hope: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it. Humor: Linking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side. Spirituality: Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe, knowing where one fits within the larger scheme.</p>

Source: Peterson y Seligman (2004).

What is Psychological Well-Being?

The scientific study of welfare has been approached in two main ways through time: hedonic (subjective well-being) and eudaimonic (psychological well-being). The first perspective proposes that well-being is defined by the presence of positive emotions and affections and the absence of the negative ones. The maximization of positive experiences in people’s life and the minimization of the negatives will likely increase the quality of welfare. (Ryan and Deci, 2001).

In 1989, psychologist Carol Ryff proposed a multidimensional model of psychological well-being characterized mainly by seeking people’s self-realization through their abilities and personal growth. Ryff (1995, p. 100) comments that "a tighter characterization of psychological well-being is defined as the effort to perfect oneself and the realization of one's own potential."

This is how the author designed the Psychological Well-being Model which is composed of six dimensions: self acceptance, positive relationships with other people, autonomy, mastery of the environment, purpose in life and personal growth. They are described below:

A. Self-acceptance: it is the positive attitude towards oneself, it is associated with self-esteem and self-knowledge. What constitutes a fundamental characteristic of a good psychological functioning (Páez, 2008).

B. Purpose in life: it is the sense of direction in life, associated with the motivation to act and develop. People need to set goals and objectives that give meaning to their lives (Páez, 2008).

C. Autonomy: refers to being able to sustain our individuality and control in different social situations, being firm in the convictions and maintaining independence and personal authority (Keyes, Ryff and Shmotkin, 2002).

D. Control or dominance of the environment: it is associated with locus of internal control and self-ef. The ability to create favorable environments to satisfy our desires and needs. Low perception of the control of the environment is associated with a increased reactivity to stress and less adaptive ways for coping (Páez, 2008).

E. Positive relationships: it is the certainty of having warm relationships, trust and intimacy with other people. It is the ability to maintain these relationships as well as the ability to love and have friends. In this regard, a great deal of research has been carried out during the last decade in which isolation and loss of social support are strongly related to the risk of mental illness and reduced life span (Berkman, 1995; Kraus, 1998; House, Landis and Umberson, 1988).

F. Personal development or growth: it is the commitment to develop potential and the desire to continue in a process of learning and self-actualization, maximizing the person's abilities (Keyes, Ryff and Shmotkin, 2002).

Well-being in the workplace

In 1989 Carol Ryff conceived well-being as an entity composed of different areas that affect people's emotional stability and define human development. These elements can also be observed in the workplace precisely because the worker will always be pursuing his physical, emotional and financial well-being. It is very important and beneficial for companies to stop and analyze the levels of well-being of their workers in order to know what their development needs are (which as mentioned above is a subjective issue and will depend on the perception of each person) and thus implement the most appropriate staff development strategies.

It has been studied that workers with high levels of psychological well-being tend to evaluate stressful situations in a more positive way. They are certain about their ability to overcome them successfully or even being able to control them because they use coping strategies such as resolution of problems and cognitive reevaluation (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh and Larkin, 2003).

Similarly, as mentioned by the psychologist Gonzálo Hervás (2009) of Ryff's model of multidimensional psychological well-being, it is

emphasized that not only can it be used as an indicator of individual development, but also organizations will have the guidelines to provide business strategies that encourage the collective development of each of the areas proposed by Ryff, which are the main reason of this research.

Methodology

The present research has a quantitative nature with an exploratory-correlational-descriptive scope (Sampieri, Collado and Baptista, 2010). It should be mentioned that the analysis of the relationships between the variables is descriptive because the results concerning the Character Strengths of the subjects are qualitative (profile of strengths per individual), while the level of psychological well-being is of quantitative nature.

Participants

The company in which the study was carried out has a total population of 186 workers. A simple random sample of 95 workers representing 51.07% of the total was taken, of which 81 belong to the operations area and 14 to the administrative area. Participants have an average age of 44 years, 92.7% are males and 7.3% are females.

Instruments

Two instruments were used for the measurement of the two variables: Strengths of Character and Psychological Well-being. The first one is "The Psychological Well-being Scale of Ryff", whose characteristics are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Characteristics of the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale Survey.

Psychological Well-being Scale of Ryff	
Author	Carol Ryff
Year	1995. Review: 2004
Items	29
Format of the items	6 point Likert Scale
Dimensions	Dominance of the environment Personal growth Purpose in life Autonomy Self acceptance Positive relationships
Level of reliability (internal consistency of the reduced version)	Self acceptance: .84 Positive relationships: .78 Autonomy: .7 Dominance of the environment: .82 Purpose in life: .7 Personal growth: .71

Source: Own elaboration based in Díaz, Rodríguez, Blanco and Van Dierendock (2006).

The second instrument used was the "Values In Action (VIA) Survey of Character Strengths", whose characteristics are presented in Table 4 below:

Table 4. Characteristics of VIA survey of strengths of character.

VIA survey of strengths of character	
Author	VIA Institute
Year	2001
Items	120
Format of the items	Escala Likert de 5 puntos
Dimensions (strengths of character)	Creativity, Curiosity, Open Mind, Love of Learning, Perspective, Authenticity, Value, Persistence, Vitality, Kindness, Love, Social Intelligence, Justice, Leadership, Teamwork, Forgiveness, Humility, Prudence, Self-regulation, Appreciation of beauty and Excellence, Gratitude, Hope, Humor, Spirituality
Level of reliability	All VIA-IS scales have Cronbach alphas .70 Correlations test-retest. 70.

Source: Own elaboration based in VIA Institute on Character (2014).

Process

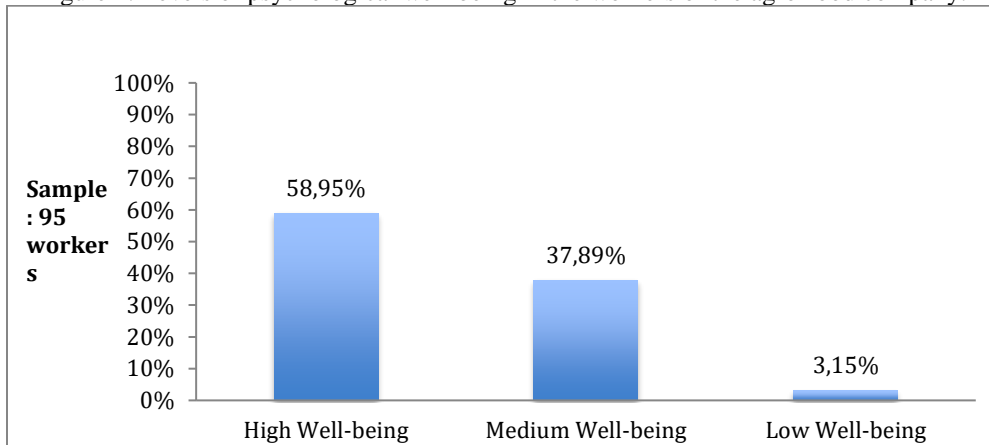
The application of instruments was carried out in a period of three weeks. It was performed in person and written form to 95 participants. Meetings were scheduled for 40 minutes with groups consisting of 20 people each. They were informed about the purpose of the investigation, how to respond to the questionnaires as well as the confidentiality of their data such as name, area of work and age.

Results

Psychological well-being.

It was observed that 56 workers report a High Psychological Well-Being, representing the 58.94% of the sample. There were 36 people who reported a medium level of well-being which represent 37.89% of the sample. Finally, there were only three people who fell within the lowest welfare range, representing 3.15% of the sample and 1.61% of the total population of the company. These percentages are presented in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2. Levels of psychological well-being in the workers of the agro-food company.

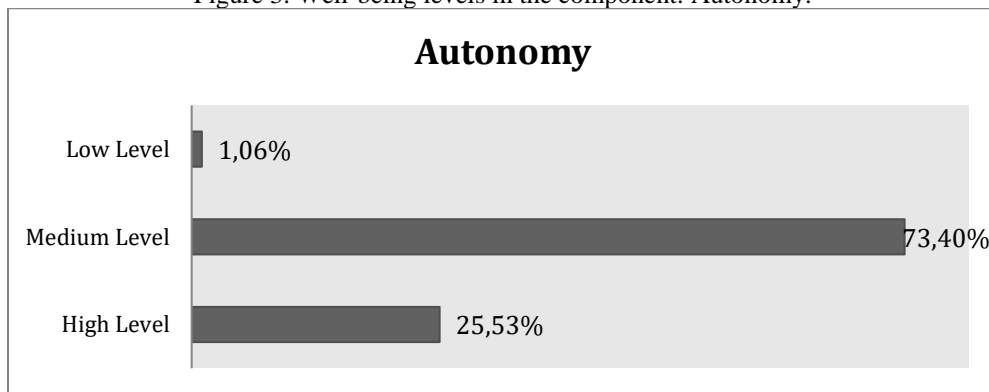


Source: Own elaboration.

The analysis of the scores obtained by each element leads to the following results:

The levels of Autonomy in the majority of workers surveyed are within the average range according to the conversion tables previously shown. That is, 73.4% of the total workers surveyed showed a medium satisfaction, representing firmness of convictions before making decisions as well as being independent and having personal authority. This can be seen in Figure 3 below:

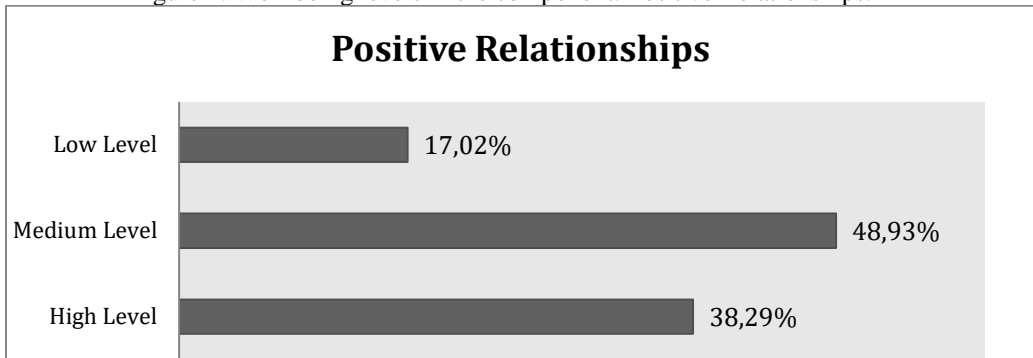
Figure 3. Well-being levels in the component: Autonomy.



Source: Own elaboration.

As for the construct of Positive Relationships, a percentage of 48.93% show that almost half of the workers have average levels when addressing their perception of having warm relationships, trust and intimacy with other people. This result is presented in Figure 4 below:

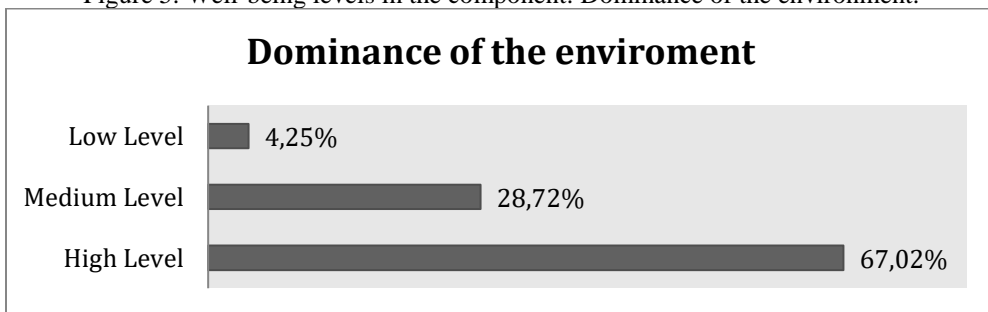
Figure 4. Well-being levels in the component: Positive Relationships.



Source: Own elaboration.

In the Dominance of the environment dimension the percentages obtained show that 60.02% of the respondents feel highly satisfied with their locus of internal control and self-efficacy. This score can be seen in Figure 5 below:

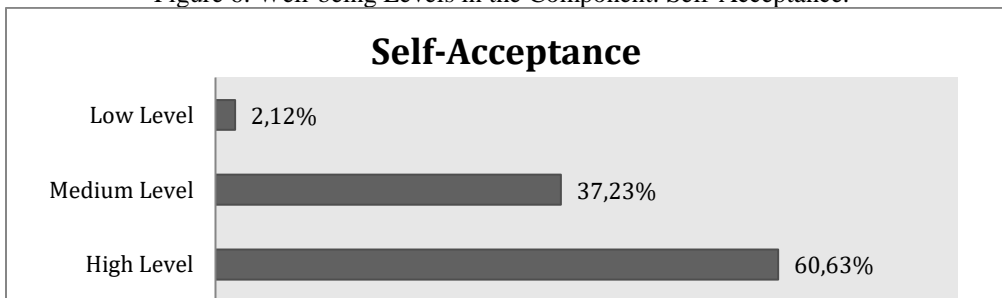
Figure 5. Well-being levels in the component: Dominance of the environment.



Source: Own elaboration.

Likewise, the levels of Self-acceptance in the workers surveyed show that 60.63% (Figure 6) of them are at the highest level of this area. They are highly satisfied with their perception of themselves and with their accomplishments in life.

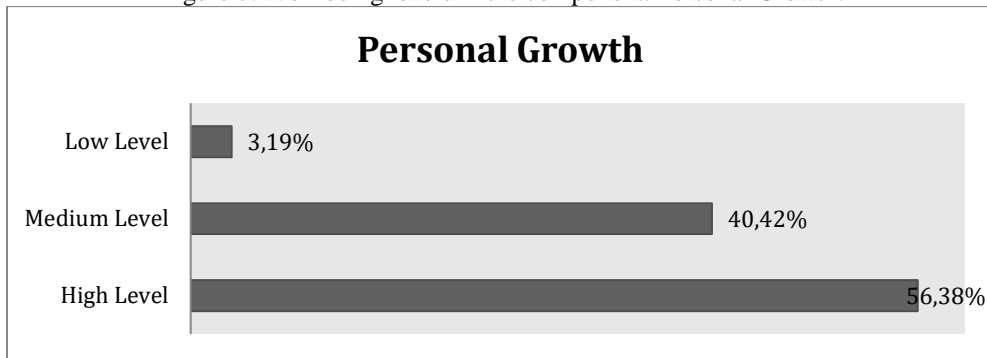
Figure 6. Well-being Levels in the Component: Self-Acceptance.



Source: Own elaboration.

In the results of the Personal Growth dimension, it is shown that more than half of the respondents score at the highest level in their continuous desire for learning and self-actualization (Figure 7).

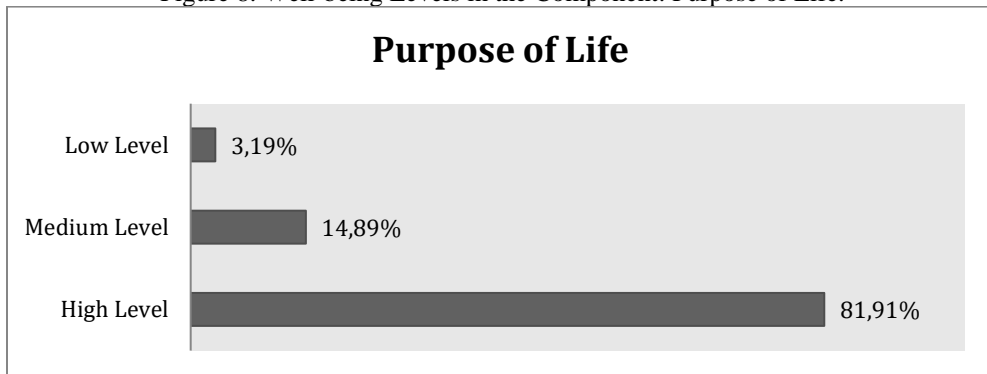
Figure 7. Well-being levels in the component: Personal Growth.



Source: Own elaboration.

Finally, in the dimension related to the Purpose of Life and the motivation to set goals that give meaning to their lives almost all respondents showed high levels of satisfaction, obtaining a score of 81.91%.

Figure 8. Well-being Levels in the Component: Purpose of Life.



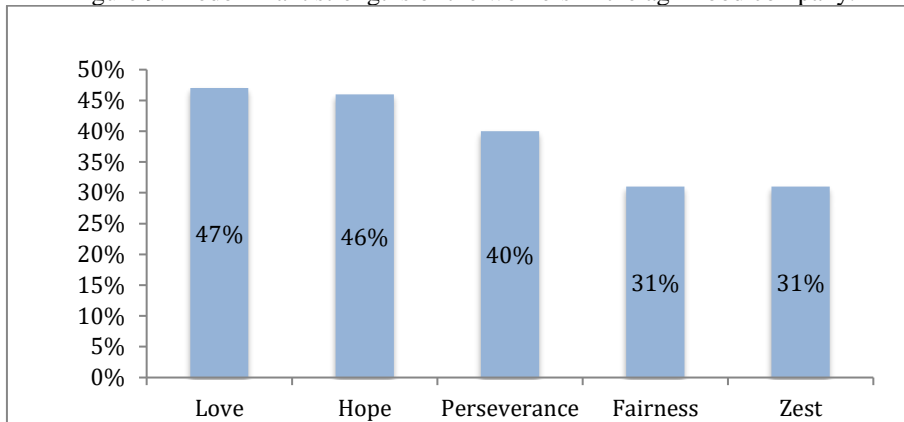
Source: Own elaboration.

Strengths of character

In the analysis of the results of the questionnaires regarding the Strengths of Character, we obtained the list by order of predominance of the strengths of each worker. The first five strengths that top the list are part of the already mentioned strengths list.

Once we collected the lists of all the participants (by means of an absolute frequency calculation) the Strengths of Character that predominate within the companies workers were obtained: Love (fa 45), Hope (fa 44), Persistence (fa 38), Equanimity (fa 30) and Zest (fa 30), which belong to the virtues of: Humanity, Transcendence, Courage and Justice respectively. This is presented in Figure 9 below:

Figure 9. Predominant strengths of the workers in the agri-food company.



Source: Own elaboration.

Relationship of levels of psychological well-being with strengths of character

Once both results were analyzed (the levels of Psychological Well-being and the Strengths of Character) we proceeded to analyze the relationship between both constructs.

It was observed that the strengths present in the people who reported a high level of psychological well-being (56 people) are: Equanimity, Teamwork, Persistence, Hope and Love. The last three being the predominant ones reported using the absolute frequency within the total sample of workers. This is presented in Figure 10 below:

Figure 10.Character Strengths in High level of Psychological well-being.



Source: Own elaboration.

Conclusion

The relationship observed between the presence of Character Strengths and different levels of Psychological Well-being in the participating workers allows to conclude that this is a positive relation. The majority of workers reported high levels of psychological well-being (58.9% of the sample) presenting as their predominant strengths: love, hope,

persistence, equanimity and enthusiasm. With this results the postulates of Peterson and Seligman (2004) confirm that the presence of virtues and values gives us a fuller and happier life.

When analyzing the results of psychological well-being and taking into account that more than half of the workers reported a high level of well-being, it can be concluded that the company in which this study was performed has workers with coping systems necessary to face stressful and challenging situations at work. As Carol Ryff mentions in her model: they have better control and knowledge of themselves and of the areas on which they must work to strengthen their well-being. This will shape their means to satisfy their needs and desires in order to develop a sense of individuality that allows them to find their sense of life by unifying their capacities, challenges and efforts (Vázquez and Hervás, 2014).

Thus, the conclusions of this research point out that if people have psychological tools (Strengths of Character and optimal levels of well-being) that allow them to face the adversities of everyday life they will be happier, more satisfied and productive. They will manage to meet every challenge that is presented. If companies know the strengths of their employees and the factors that determine their well-being they can increase the workers level of satisfaction and increase their quality of life and level of productivity.

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