

How to avoid a lack of work engagement among public police professionals

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the combined effect of five conditions—*influence at work*, *interactional justice*, *workload*, *laissez-faire leadership*, and *emotional exhaustion*—on the absence of work engagement in public police professionals. Using qualitative comparative analysis on a sample of 119 police professionals, the results show that none of the conditions on their own is necessary to lead to the absence of these professionals' work engagement. In addition, five casual configurations allow for the conclusion that *influence at work*, *interactional justice*, *emotional exhaustion*, and *laissez-faire leadership* are key conditions, while *workload* is less decisive in leading to the absence of work engagement in police professionals. The results inform managers of public police institutions on what variables can further contribute to creating workspaces in which learning, professional development, and positive experiences prevail among employees. This study is especially valuable to police professionals because the very nature of their work leads to engagement in acquiring a very powerful meaning.

KEYWORDS

emotional exhaustion, influence at work, interactional justice, laissez-faire leadership, work engagement, workload

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to analyze the combined effect of *influence at work*, *interactional justice*, *workload*, *laissez-faire leadership*, and *emotional exhaustion* on the absence of employees work engagement in the context of public police work. Work engagement has emerged as one of the most prominent positive organizational concepts in the field of human resource development because it focuses on human strengths, optimal functioning, and positive experiences at work (Banihani & Syed, 2017; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2008). To the best of knowledge, no previous studies have analyzed the combined effect of these five variables on the absence of engagement in public police professionals. The results of this study should shed light on the reasons why public police professionals are not always active, passionate, and engaged with their jobs, especially considering that this profession has a very important vocational component. The results should also

provide useful information for public administrations and human resources managers on promoting human resource development through the design of valuable strategies based on service quality and employee well-being.

Work engagement can be defined as “a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p.74). Engaged workers are energetic and positively connected to their work and feel they are doing their jobs effectively (Bakker et al., 2008; Roussillon Soyer, Balkin, & Fall, 2021). In the context of public police work, police professionals must face violent and risky situations, institutional legal requirements, and the continuous demands and expectations of the community (Ivie & Garland, 2011; McCarty et al., 2019). At the same time, an essential characteristic of police work is delivering protection and aid, finding solutions in threatening situations, and in all cases trying to do meaningful and

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important things for society (Smith & Charles, 2010). Police work mainly in the public context is often considered a vocational and valued way of living, so it is important to understand what aspects can lead police professionals to feel more fulfilled, motivated, and engaged with their jobs.

To achieve the goals of this study, the investigation is grounded in the job demands resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). This theory suggests that a high level of job resources may evoke a motivational process that can help employees accomplish their work goals, leading them to the manifestation of work engagement and, consequently, to provide positive experiences for both individuals and the organization. Previous research states that variables such as positive and constructive leadership, such as authentic leadership (Adil & Kamal, 2019), organizational justice (Farid et al., 2019), and autonomy (Hallberg, Johansson, & Schaufeli, 2007) can help employees engage with their jobs. However, few studies have analyzed the influence of other types of leadership considered destructive, such as laissez-faire leadership, on employees' engagement. In the same way, although the mostly public nature of police work identifies interactional justice as the most relevant explanation for many aspects related to employees' performance, there is very little research analyzing the implications of this kind of justice on employee engagement and even less where the context of public police work is considered. Furthermore, the nature of this specific work context, characterized by rigid, formalized, and hierarchical structures (Shane, 2010) as well as bureaucratic and regulated systems (Jones, 2008), can lead to low levels of engagement among police professionals. It seems clear that the importance and implications of police work justifies certain levels of "freedom" when life-and-death situations occur or speedy decisions must be made; however, the positive or negative implications of having influence at work on employees' engagement have not been enough studied in previous literature, especially where the public police work context is considered. Therefore, the public nature of this study's focus could lead to "careless" human resource management, which in turn could also lead to negative consequences for employees, such as emotional exhaustion or excessive workloads. This can make it difficult to accomplish work goals (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010; Maslach & Leiter, 2016), hindering employees' engagement with their jobs. To date, no previous studies have analyzed the implications of public police employees' emotional exhaustion and work overload on their engagement with their jobs.

This study proposes five factors that have been used in previous research, which can be considered possible antecedents of work engagement. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the combination of three different perspectives: organizational risk factors, leadership style, and employees' well-being. For this reason, using a study sample of Spanish public police professionals and fuzzy

set qualitative-comparative analysis (fsQCA), this investigation tests a model to identify causal configurations that lead to the absence of work engagement among public police professionals.

This study contributes to the advancement of knowledge in the field of study in at least two ways. First, this research provides an in-depth insight into the reasons for the absence of work engagement among public police professionals; specifically, it considers organizational risk factors, leadership style, and employees' well-being. Second, this study uses an innovative methodology that combines qualitative and quantitative analyses to establish the combination of conditions that leads to the absence of work engagement among police professionals. The results must allow public decision-makers and managers of public police institutions to design and implement policies and strategies that help employees promote a positive job environment in which human resource development, public service quality, and employee well-being are the main priorities.

Following this introduction, this paper provides an overview of the conceptual framework and previous literature guiding the study, including the study's propositions. The paper then outlines the research methods used. The third section of the paper presents the main results and findings of the study. The fourth section includes a discussion of the study results. The fifth section reflects on the managerial implications. Finally, the main conclusions and suggestions for future research are highlighted.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work engagement can be defined as a persistent and pervasive affective cognitive state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor is the willingness to spend effort on the job and persist even when facing difficulties. Dedication refers to a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge from work. Absorption captures the characteristics of attention and complete engagement with work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Engaged workers have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work, and perceive it as stimulating, as an important and meaningful achievement, or as something that requires their full focus (Bakker et al., 2008). In this sense, engaged employees are characterized by having a positive attitude and a high activity level, generating positive experiences with their colleagues as well as with other stakeholders as customers (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008). Besides being energetic, enthusiastic, and positive employees, engaged employees consider it worthwhile to regularly spend their energy on work. This attitude shows in their focus on the essence of problems, looking for new challenges, and paying attention to the details. Employees become absorbed by their work, lose track of time while working, and are less distracted

(De Simone et al., 2016). Moreover, these positive and enthusiastic experiences at work can also help employees get involved in other activities, even outside their workplace (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2008). Therefore, engaged employees are active agents who take initiative at work and are prepared to invest effort in their jobs (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008; Zeijen, Peeters, & Hakanen, 2018).

The special nature of public police work is recognized as challenging, dynamic, and demanding, which contributes to its great complexity (Ivie & Garland, 2011; Santa Maria et al., 2018). Characteristics such as crime control and maintaining law and order are aspects highlighted in the everyday work of this profession (Diez-Ticio & Mancebon, 2002; Islam et al., 2019). In this sense, police work includes a wide range of responsibilities and activities, such as the detection of criminal activities, emergency interventions, administrative duties, prevention activities, watching over individuals and properties, reporting infractions, enforcing the law, resolving conflicts, or helping citizens (Cosgrove, 2016). Police professionals regularly encounter unpredictable and potentially volatile situations in which there is a greater or lesser threat to them, to other colleagues, or to citizens (Anderson, Litzenberger, & Plecas, 2002; Ivie & Garland, 2011). At the same time, they are aimed at protecting society from violence and disorder and put themselves at risk of injury and death under critical circumstances (Ivie & Garland, 2011). In fact, they must respond to this type of situation with the highest discretion, authority, and precision, while simultaneously making speedy decisions in risky situations (Brunetto et al., 2012; Ivie & Garland, 2011). In addition, the mission and objectives of the police institution justify its public nature in most countries, showing a bureaucratic paramilitary structure (in organization and culture) based on specialization, hierarchy, authority, rules, and position orientation (Jones, 2008), which is not flexible enough to adapt to changes in the environment (Wang, 2015). Furthermore, as a public service organization, police work is embedded in a more widely regulated and institutionalized structure in which new practices and operational procedures do not always succeed (De Simone et al., 2016) or cannot be carried out.

Public police organizations, as people processors, deal with all kinds of citizens and only change the status or location of a citizen by applying the appropriate legal framework. This means that most citizens are unidentified because the service process requires police professionals to establish restricted and impersonal relationships to ensure fair and neutral processing (Van Loon, Leisink, & Vandenabeele, 2013). At the same time, police professionals provide services that citizens consider negative and unwanted, so they must justify their work as being positive for society (Van Loon, Leisink, & Vandenabeele, 2013; Van Loon, Vandenabeele, & Leisink, 2015). Therefore, police work is predominantly

driven by the desire to carry out socially valuable work based on public values, loyalty to society, and duty or moral obligation (Van Loon, Leisink, & Vandenabeele, 2013). Thus, police organizations whose purpose is to regulate services and enforce legal frameworks show strong values based on a professional calling, sense of duty, moral obligation, and desire to uphold justice that can lead employees to engage with their work, institution, and desire to serve the public interest (Borst, 2018; Van Loon, Leisink, & Vandenabeele, 2013).

Based on the above, wishing to do something meaningful, helping others, finding excitement in dangerous situations, helping solve societal problems, or being part of a greater whole by participating in public services are important aspects that provide meaning to public police professionals' work and help them engage with their jobs (Borst, 2018; Smith & Charles, 2010). In this way, police professionals' sense of calling puts the needs of others over their own personal needs, focuses on providing social value, and enhances employees' work experiences (Thompson & Christensen, 2018). In this regard, Crank (2003) and Nguyen, Teo, & Dinh (2020) posit that, as members of an institutionalized organization whose main characteristics are its valuable work and the prioritization of values in terms of public safety, police professionals can achieve very positive experiences as public servants. In this sense, the public nature of police institutions reinforces police professionals' calling, and vice versa. In fact, functions such as recruitment, selection, performance assessment, and career design are conditioned by the public nature of police work. The same happens with autonomy, job design, interpersonal relationships, leadership, or the possibility of experiencing emotional exhaustion. Therefore, even though the police profession is considered particularly stressful (Cosgrove, 2016), it seems reasonable to think that because of the public and vocational nature of police work, relatively high levels of work engagement should be achieved (Brunetto et al., 2012; Richardsen, Burke, & Martinussen, 2006).

The job demands resources theory suggests that work engagement arises when job resources are high (Demerouti et al., 2001). Job resources refer to those aspects of a job that help one achieve goals, reduce job demand, and often stimulate personal growth and development. Job resources are assumed to play both an intrinsic motivational role because they fulfill basic human needs and an extrinsic motivational role because they help individuals reach work-related goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Therefore, a high level of job resources may spark a motivational process that can help employees attain their work goals, leading them to higher work engagement and providing positive experiences for both the individuals and the organization (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). In line with notions about the motivational role of job resources, previous research states that job resources such as authentic leadership (Adil &

Kamal, 2019), organizational justice (Farid et al., 2019), and autonomy (Hallberg, Johansson, & Schaufeli, 2007) may act as significant predictors of work engagement. Conversely, negative aspects related to work conditions such as workplace bullying may hinder work engagement (Nguyen et al., 2019). Specifically in the context of police work, previous research indicates that while a work climate characterized by self-determined work motivation (Gillet et al., 2013) or active coping (Kaiseler et al., 2014) promotes and fosters employee engagement, job demands and organizational stressors (Li, Cheung, & Sun, 2019) can hinder it. To date, there has been little empirical research analyzing the antecedents of work engagement among public police professionals, or more importantly, what antecedents can lead them not to be engaged with their jobs.

Considering the special nature and characteristics of the public police work context, the choice of the five antecedents of work engagement is justified by previous research. In this sense, this study aims to analyze how the combined effects of organizational risk factors, such as the absence of influence at work, perceptions of interactional justice and the presence of workload (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2008; Wolter et al., 2019), leadership styles such as the presence of laissez-faire leadership (Fors Brandebo, Nilsson, & Larsson, 2016; Fors Brandebo, Österberg, & Berglund, 2019; Fosse et al., 2019; Herrington & Colvin, 2016), and employees' well-being—such as the presence of emotional exhaustion (Queirós et al., 2020; Santa Maria et al., 2018; Wolter et al., 2019)—can lead to an absence of work engagement in the public police work context.

Influence at work and work engagement

Influence at work can be defined as an individual's degree of control over working conditions regarding order, methodology, or tasks (Moncada et al., 2005). It refers to the sense of control that an individual feels over issues such as what tasks they will perform, how they will be performed, or in what order they will be performed (Hansson et al., 2017). The public nature of police work, characterized by its high degree of centralization and formalization (Mintzberg, 1979) and its hierarchical nature (Jones, 2008), does not help employees freely make decisions about methodology or task prioritization. At the same time, police professionals must make decisions in ambiguous and complex circumstances (Flynn & Herrington, 2015) under high pressure and with insufficient information, so police work involves some degree of discretion to ensure immediate, accurate, and fault-free responses to citizens (Lipsky, 2010). This freedom of action allows professionals to face situations in which rules and regulations may be contradictory, confusing, or not fit to complex realities (Hupe & Hill, 2007).

However, as public servants, police professionals must intervene in a fair and proportional manner according to the circumstances using available lawful methods. Thus, the abuse of discretion or discretionary decisions not aligned with the values of institutions and public services can be constrained by more rules, tighter control, and stricter procedures (Hupe & Hill, 2007; Cronin, McDevitt, & Cordner, 2017). In other words, police professionals make decisions within the boundaries of existing bureaucratic structures (Lipsky, 2010). Therefore, considering the large number of existing rules and standard procedures (Benders, Bleijerveld, & Schouteten, 2017), rigid bureaucratic and regulated structures (Jones, 2008), and structured discretion (Cronin, McDevitt, & Cordner, 2017), public police professionals do not have enough freedom to make their own decisions in all situations, hindering the performance of their tasks and the possibility of engaging with their work and institution. Thus, higher levels of influence at work can provide employees with the necessary autonomy to act according to their experience and instinct to complete their tasks properly, leading them to engage more with their profession (Inoue et al., 2013). Given the relevance of this variable in the public police work context and considering that there is no previous research analyzing its combined effect on the lack of police professionals' engagement, the following proposition is tested:

P1-The absence of influence at work leads to the absence of work engagement among public police professionals.

Interactional justice and work engagement

Interactional justice refers to the quality of interpersonal treatment that employees receive from supervisors in the workplace (Bies & Moag, 1986; Colquitt et al., 2001). This dimension of organizational justice focuses on the human side of organizational practices, emphasizing politeness, honesty, and respect during the interpersonal communication process (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). Moreover, interactional justice includes the provision of information about decision-making procedures (Bies & Moag, 1986; Askun, Yeloglu, & Yildirim, 2018). Perceptions of fair and respectful treatment and transparency in decision-making procedures can provide employees with high levels of motivation and involvement, which can then lead to higher levels of confidence in establishing healthy relationships (Inoue et al., 2010; Kumasey, Delle, & Hossain, 2019). It seems reasonable to think that in the public police context, respectful treatment, fluid and comprehensible information, and clarity in decision-making procedures can lead to more effective work teams and better communication processes, not only among police workers but also among citizens (Myhill & Bradford, 2013). Furthermore, proper interpersonal treatment and clear and truthful

explanations about the procedures used can make it easier for police professionals to accept and comply with decisions (Myhill & Bradford, 2013; Srivastava, 2009). Conversely, police professionals who perceive disrespectful interpersonal treatment or ambiguity in decision-making can be more prone to violate the institution's rules and regulations, driving them to misconduct (Wolfe & Piquero, 2011). The presence of interactional justice can promote favorable attitudes and behaviors towards the organization (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001). In this sense, the perception of respectful, courteous, and fair communication and interactions can make police professionals feel more confident, more willing to take initiative, greater identification with the organization, or greater adherence to rules and regulations (Carr & Maxwell, 2018). Thus, providing a positive experience through the perception of interactional justice may enhance employees' work engagement with goal accomplishment (Farid et al., 2019; Inoue et al., 2010). Similarly, the presence of interactional injustice may lead to negative interactions in the workplace (Wolfe & Piquero, 2011) and lower levels of enthusiasm, involvement, concentration, and well-being (Bies & Moag, 1986; Kumasey, Delle, & Hossain, 2019). Thus, the positive consequences of employees' perception of fair, equal, and respectful treatment demand the analysis of the combined effect of this variable on the lack of police professionals' work engagement. Therefore, the following proposition is tested:

P2-The absence of interactional justice leads to the absence of work engagement among public police professionals.

Workload and work engagement

Workload refers to the relationship between the volume of work and the time available to do it (Kahn et al., 1964). Employees who suffer under a heavy workload are not able to meet the task requirements established by their employer (Tomic & Tomic, 2011). When work overload is chronic (hindrance job demand) and not the occasional emergency, employees have little opportunity to rest and to restore their balance, perceiving their workload as an obstacle. Excessive workloads can hinder the achievement of work goals and objectives (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010; Maslach & Leiter, 2016), which can affect employees' engagement with the organization (Tomic & Tomic, 2011; Ahmed et al., 2017). Conversely, a sustainable and manageable workload (challenge job demand) can provide a sense of purpose and achievement as well as an opportunity to improve existing skills, mainly in new areas of activity (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). A fair workload may lead to positive attitudes among employees, such as generating the energy needed to complete work tasks, promoting mastery, achieving personal growth, making future gains,

or generating feelings of engagement (Hallberg, Johansson, & Schaufeli, 2007; Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010). Although workload, per se, does not necessarily have to impact employees' well-being (Lockey et al., 2022), its influence depends to a large extent on the level of work required by employees and the time pressure they are under.

Police professionals, as a public and vocational service, must carry out their work by allocating scarce resources and, in turn, providing a high-quality service. Thus, the limited budget of police services and the own characteristics of the police may lead professionals to deal with excessive workloads (Berlin et al., 2021; Liljegren et al., 2021). In this sense, an unmanageable workload can make it difficult for police professionals to develop their work properly, avoiding them engage with their work, and foster unwillingness to fulfill responsibilities and duties (Lockey et al., 2022). The public nature and the special characteristics of police work, along with its importance and implications for the safety of the whole society, make it necessary to analyze the potential influence of workload on police professionals' engagement. To date, no previous studies have analyzed the combined effect of workload on the lack of police professionals' work engagement. Therefore, the following proposition is tested:

P3-The presence of workload leads to the absence of work engagement among public police professionals.

Laissez-faire and work engagement

Laissez-faire leadership can be defined as the absence of leadership in the decision-making process and in the development of organizational functions (Bass, 1985; Avolio & Bass, 2004). This style of leadership is characterized by the passive attitudes of leaders who are uninvolved and do not assume responsibilities when it is desirable or required by the organization (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Blomme, Kodden, & Beasley-Suffolk, 2015). Laissez-faire leaders tend to delay the explanation of goals and how to achieve them (Ågotnes et al., 2018; Bernhard & O'Driscoll, 2011). Moreover, passive leaders have difficulty in designing motivation and satisfaction measures and do not provide employees with the necessary help to learn from their experiences, create a learning environment, and promote the necessary development and training to cope with challenges (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Ruiz-Palomino, Martínez-Cañas, & Bañón-Gomis, 2021). In this sense, passive styles of leadership on a repeated and systematic basis can lead to negative behaviors such as incompetence, lack of knowledge, or even harm to others, and they can violate the legitimate interest of the organization and the expectations of subordinates (Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007).

Although a leader's passivity is not necessarily negative itself (Fosse et al., 2019), the complex, uncertain, and

demanding nature of a police work environment requires decisive and effective leadership intervention. However, the great relevance of protocols, norms, and rules in public police organizations can make it easier for leaders to avoid participation and responsibilities, entrusting the decision-making process to police professionals. In turn, police professionals need to seek feedback from superiors on their use of discretion and applying rules to provide a decisive and effective response (Lipsky, 2010). A leader avoiding intervention in decision-making and the assumption of duties and responsibilities can drive subordinates to lose trust and even their willingness to follow the said leader (Fors Brandebo, Nilsson, & Larsson, 2016; Fosse et al., 2019). In addition, police professionals, who are subject to an extensive selection process, socialize within a strict hierarchy, with great discipline and a regimented environment, so they are less vulnerable to aggressive or abusive leaders' behaviors (Fosse et al., 2019). In this sense, passive forms of leadership can be more damaging to police professionals than actively destructive leadership styles (Fors Brandebo, Nilsson, & Larsson, 2016; Fosse et al., 2019). Therefore, laissez-faire leaders can lead to employee disinterest, low involvement, low engagement (Nelson & Shraim, 2014; Blomme, Kodden, & Beasley-Suffolk, 2015), and an increased use of force more frequently to resolve complex situations (Cronin, McDevitt, & Cordner, 2017). For all of these, laissez-faire leadership is the most common leadership style in the context of police work (Fors Brandebo, Österberg, & Berglund, 2019), and to date, no study has analyzed its combined effect on the lack of police professionals' work engagement. Therefore, the following proposition is tested:

P4-The presence of laissez-faire leadership leads to the absence of work engagement among public police professionals.

Emotional exhaustion and work engagement

Emotional exhaustion refers to the loss of resources caused by interpersonal demands (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001) and is characterized by feelings of wear, loss of energy, exhaustion, and fatigue (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Emotionally exhausted employees distance themselves emotionally and cognitively from their work to cope with excessive job demands (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Gao et al., 2020). Police professionals are exposed to confrontation, violence, traumatic incidents, human misery, and even the possibility of being seriously injured or killed on a daily basis; therefore, they must regulate their feelings and expressions (Collins & Gibbs, 2003). Furthermore, the tasks carried out by public police professionals are based on specialized functions, rigid regulations, and vertical hierarchies, which makes it very difficult to instigate change (Jones, 2008; Wang, 2015). As a people-processing negative service

provider, police professionals have fewer opportunities to understand the direct impact of their service on citizens, so they may become frustrated and disappointed with their work, leading to emotional exhaustion (Van Loon, Vandenebeele, & Leisink, 2015). All these particularities can lead to public police professionals depleting their emotional resources and experiencing emotional exhaustion (Santa Maria et al., 2018; Queirós et al., 2020). There are serious consequences to having emotionally exhausted employees in the police context and the fact that, to date, no previous research has analyzed the combined effect of emotional exhaustion on the lack of police professionals' work engagement. Therefore, the following proposition is tested:

P5-The presence of emotional exhaustion leads to the absence of work engagement among public police professionals.

METHOD

FsQCA combines qualitative and quantitative variable-based approaches (Ragin, 2008; Ragin & Fiss, 2008). The aim of using QCA is to establish asymmetrical configurations, which means that an outcome can be explained through several combinations of causes. This means that just because a certain cause leads to a certain outcome does not mean that the presence of the outcome implies the presence of the cause (Fiss, 2009; Ordanini, Parasuraman, & Rubera, 2014). This method is particularly suitable for studying, as in this paper, causally complex social phenomena that can be articulated as groups and explained in terms of necessity and sufficiency (Legewie, 2013; Woodside, 2016).

Participants, procedure, instruments, and calibration

The first step involved developing an extensive systematic literature search. The most cited publications from the main scientific journals included in the main databases were considered. Different strategies were used for each database to accommodate the research methods for each. Then, data were obtained through a self-administered questionnaire distributed to 1500 Spanish public police professionals, yielding 119 usable questionnaires (response rate of 8%). In the sample, 81.81% of the participants were men, with an average age of 47.29 ($SD = 5.168$), and 18.18% were women, with an average age of 44.90 ($SD = 5.238$).

Data collection was conducted from May to June 2019. A letter and e-mail (depending on the case) were sent to the National Occupational Risks Committee of the Unified Police Union (SUP) requesting their collaboration in this study. Both the letter and the e-mail included the purpose and justification for the study

and a survey to be completed by the respondents. Before this step, several meetings were held with SUP members to ensure that they had a clear picture of the aim of the study. Once the questionnaire was completely defined and approved by both parties, paper copies or online surveys were provided or sent to SUP members to collect the data in a completely confidential manner. During the study period, two requests for collecting information were placed to ensure a sufficient number of responses. The response rate is in line with previous studies in the fields of social sciences (Čater & Čater, 2009; Rivard, Raymond, & Verreault, 2006), human resource management (Cox & Goodman, 2005; Justicia, Muñoz, & de Haro, 2006), and police professionals (Nix et al., 2019).

To measure work engagement, the 5-item UWES–Utrecht scale (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003) along with a 7-point Likert scale (0 = *never*; 6 = *always*) were used (ENG - α Cronbach = 0.906; ω Omega = 0.910). The scale included items such as “I am enthusiastic about my job.” The 4-item scale by Moncada et al. (2005) along with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *never*; 5 = *always*) was used to measure influence at work (INF - α Cronbach = 0.810; ω Omega = 0.811). It included items such as “Do you have a large degree of influence concerning your work?” The 4-item (Martínez-Tur, Moliner, & Carbonell, 2003) scale along with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*) was used to measure interactional justice (IJ - α Cronbach = 0.916; ω Omega = 0.917). It included items such as “My immediate superior is very sincere with me.” The 4-item scale by Moncada et al. (2005) was used to measure workload (WL - α Cronbach = 0.792; ω Omega = 0.800). It included items such as “Do you have enough time for your work tasks?” The 4-item Avolio and Bass scale (2004) from the MLQ-5X (short form) along with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *never*; 5 = *always*) was used to measure laissez-faire leadership (LF - α Cronbach = 0.929; ω Omega = 0.930). It included items such as “Leader avoids making decisions.” The 5-item MBI-GS scale (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) along with a 7-point Likert scale (0 = *never*; 6 = *always*) was used to measure emotional exhaustion (EE - α Cronbach = 0.899; ω Omega = 0.908). It included items such as “I feel emotionally drained by my work.” After evaluating the psychometric properties of the scales, the values of all items were multiplied to obtain the value of each construct (Palacios-Marques, Roig-Dobon, & Comeig, 2017). Calibration was then applied to transform the data into a fuzzy set, establishing three anchors—full membership, maximum ambiguity, and full non-membership (Ragin, 2008)—and setting the thresholds at the 90th, 50th, and 10th percentiles, respectively (Beynon, Jones, & Pickernell, 2016; Dul, 2016; Misangyi & Acharya, 2014).

RESULTS

The outcome of the model is the absence of work engagement, and the five conditions are influence at work, interactional justice, workload, laissez-faire leadership, and emotional exhaustion. To conduct a more complete analysis and provide more conclusive results for the proposed model, the analysis considers both the absence and presence of engagement among public police professionals. Table 1 shows the results of the analysis of the necessary conditions for the absence (and presence) of work engagement among police professionals. Table 2 also shows the results for the analysis of necessary conditions, considering both the conditions with “positive” (INF*IJ) and “negative” (LF*WL*EE) connotations for the organization for the absence (and presence) models.

The results indicate that none of these conditions when considered independently leads to the absence (or presence) of work engagement. While the absence of one of the two positive conditions (\sim INF* \sim IJ) is not a necessary condition for the absence of engagement, the presence of one of the three negative conditions of the model (LF*WL*EE) is a necessary condition for the absence of engagement among public police professionals (consistency value 0.91). On the other hand, while the absence of one of the three negative conditions (\sim LF* \sim WL* \sim EE) is not a necessary condition for

TABLE 1 Analysis of necessary conditions (absence/presence of work engagement)

Conditions	\sim ENG		ENG	
	Consistency	Coverage	Consistency	Coverage
INF	0.468713	0.431801	0.720130	0.828937
\sim INF	0.814317	0.699578	0.506382	0.543570
IJ	0.568917	0.460139	0.705400	0.712868
\sim IJ	0.644991	0.636657	0.465793	0.574485
WL	0.639674	0.611415	0.507691	0.606333
\sim WL	0.588140	0.488783	0.674631	0.700544
LF	0.699388	0.617106	0.550245	0.606640
\sim LF	0.554193	0.496519	0.652699	0.730671
EE	0.802865	0.730826	0.464484	0.528295
\sim EE	0.481801	0.418621	0.763338	0.828714

Note: (\sim) means absence of the condition.

TABLE 2 Analysis of necessary conditions (absence/presence of work engagement)

Outcome	Conditions	Consistency	Coverage
\sim ENG	LF*WL*EE	0.913294	0.561196
\sim ENG	\sim INF* \sim IJ	0.570962	0.798627
ENG	INF*IJ	0.884778	0.720416
ENG	\sim LF* \sim WL* \sim EE	0.428477	0.860618

Note: (\sim) means absence of the condition. (*) is the logical operator “OR”.

the presence of engagement, the presence of one of the two positive conditions (INF*IJ) is a quasi-necessary condition for the presence of engagement among public police workers (consistency value close to 0.90) (Schneider, Schulze-Bentrop, & Paunescu, 2010).

An analysis of sufficient conditions was also conducted to identify causal configurations that lead to the absence of work engagement among public police professionals. To corroborate the results of the absence model, a model testing the combinations of conditions that lead to the presence of work engagement was also carried out. Therefore, the following models were analyzed:

$$\sim \text{ENG} = f(\text{INF}, \text{IJ}, \text{WL}, \text{LF}, \text{EE})$$

$$\text{ENG} = f(\text{INF}, \text{IJ}, \text{WL}, \text{LF}, \text{EE}).$$

Intermediate solutions are presented for both the models in Figure 1. Five solutions led to the absence of engagement among police workers, explaining more than 74% of the analyzed cases, and four solutions led to the presence of engagement, explaining almost 80% of the cases.

The first path ($\sim \text{INF} * \sim \text{IJ} * \text{LF}$) establishes that the absence of influence at work, the absence of interactional justice, and the presence of laissez-faire leadership lead to the absence of work engagement among public police professionals. The second path ($\sim \text{WL} * \text{LF} * \text{EE}$) refers to the presence of laissez-faire leadership and the presence of emotional exhaustion, even in the absence of workload. The third path ($\sim \text{IJ} * \text{LF} * \text{EE}$) shows that the absence of interactional justice, the presence of laissez-faire leadership, and the presence of emotional exhaustion lead to the absence of work engagement. The fourth

path ($\sim \text{INF} * \text{LF} * \text{EE}$) refers to the absence of influence at work, the presence of laissez-faire leadership, and the presence of emotional exhaustion. Finally, the fifth path ($\sim \text{INF} * \sim \text{IJ} * \sim \text{WL} * \text{EE}$) establishes that the absence of influence at work, the absence of interactional justice, and the presence of emotional exhaustion lead to the absence of work engagement, even in the absence of workload. The results also show four intermediate solutions that lead to the presence of engagement among public police professionals, corroborating the results of the absence model.

DISCUSSION

The results show that none of the conditions on their own lead to the absence of work engagement among police professionals. The joint analysis of the variables with negative connotations for the organization concludes that, in line with previous research, work overload, a laissez-faire leadership style, or feelings of emotional exhaustion can hinder the achievement of work goals (Ahmed et al., 2017; Blomme, Kodden, & Beasley-Suffolk, 2015) and the connection between the organization and employees, whose work engagement is reduced. However, the joint analysis of the variables with positive connotations concludes that the absence of the autonomy necessary for employees to make their own decisions or the absence of the perception of fair and respectful treatment among police workers is not a necessary condition for the absence of their engagement. Previous research has also shown the importance of employees' perception of fair and respectful treatment, together with the

	~ENG					ENG			
	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C1	C2	C3	C4
INF	●			●	●	○		○	○
IJ	●		●		●		○	○	○
WL		●			●	●			●
LF	○	○	○	○			●	●	
EE		○	○	○	○	●	●		
Consistency (incl.)	0.794840	0.870061	0.847185	0.881031	0.941446	0.922215	0.851497	0.868373	0.890656
Raw Coverage	0.516566	0.405318	0.516975	0.545195	0.335379	0.485106	0.465466	0.466448	0.439934
Unique Coverage	0.043354	0.009816	0.000000	0.018814	0.030675	0.079214	0.068739	0.023895	0.003601
Solution coverage	0.742742					0.797380			
Solution consistency	0.758563					0.849965			

Note: '●' means the absence of the condition. '○' means the presence of the condition. Large circles mean core condition and small circle means peripheral condition (Fiss, 2011). Consistency cutoff: (0.79 and 0.90). Frequency cutoff: 5.00. Vector of expected directions (0,0,1,1,1) and (1,1,0,0,0) (Ragin and Sean, 2016). The truth table can be available upon request.

FIGURE 1 Analysis of sufficient conditions (absence/presence of work engagement)

possibility of influencing work-related aspects of employees' work engagement (Inoue et al., 2013; Kumasey, Delle, & Hossain, 2019).

The results of the analysis of sufficient conditions conclude that police professionals who do not have the necessary freedom or autonomy to make their own decisions, and who do not perceive fair and equal treatment within the organization, lead employees to not engage with their jobs. Furthermore, work environments that lead to emotional exhaustion make it difficult for employees to become fully dedicated to their jobs.

According to the results and in line with previous research (Inoue et al., 2013), the absence of influence at work is a variable that seems to play an important role in the absence of public police professionals' work engagement (present in three casual configurations as a core variable). The highly bureaucratic and regulated structure of police institutions, together with their nature, makes it difficult for police professionals to have the necessary autonomy to make their own decisions, leading them not to engage with their work and the institution. Another important variable in this study is emotional exhaustion (present in four configurations of the absence model, absent in two configurations of the presence model, mainly behaves as a core variable). Police professionals who are emotionally exhausted because of excessive job requirements and demands (Santa Maria et al., 2018; Queirós et al., 2020) are hindered from engaging with their responsibilities and duties. According to previous research (Farid et al., 2019), another variable that appears clearly linked to the absence of work engagement among police professionals is interactional justice (absent in three configurations of the absence model, present in three configurations of the presence model, mainly behaves as a core variable). Disrespectful interpersonal treatment or ambiguity in decision-making procedures can lead to negative experiences and misconduct in the workplace (Wolfe & Piquero, 2011), making it difficult for police professionals to feel involved with their jobs. Given the strict hierarchical structure with explicit rule systems and strong authority of police institutions, these types of practices are often accepted or regarded as "usual" by their members (Cosgrove, 2016), who avoid incorporating human aspects into the organizational practices that do not help enhance employees' work engagement. In line with previous research (Blomme, Kodden, & Beasley-Suffolk, 2015; Nelson & Shraim, 2014), laissez-faire leadership seems to be linked to the absence of public police workers' engagement (present in four configurations of the absence model mainly as a core variable, absent in two configurations of the presence model). The lack of a leader's intervention in decision-making and avoidance in the assumption of duties and responsibilities forces employees to put in extra effort to carry out their jobs correctly, leading to disinterest, low involvement, and low work engagement. Finally, workload seems to play a secondary role in

explaining the absence (and the presence) of engagement among public police professionals. This could be due to the fact that workload is an antecedent of emotional exhaustion (López-Cabarcos, López-Carballeira, & Ferro-Soto, 2019; Wolter et al., 2019). This is corroborated because this variable acts as peripheral in most configurations of the absence (and presence) model. Furthermore, police professionals' discretion allows them the freedom necessary to make decisions and, therefore, better manage their workload (Liljegren et al., 2021). Hence, the results support P1, P2, and P3. However, P4 and P5 are not supported because it is not the presence but the absence of workload that better explains the absence of engagement among public police professionals.

CONCLUSIONS

This study identifies the variables that are relevant to avoiding the absence of work engagement in the police work context. In this sense, the findings suggest that while influence at work, emotional exhaustion, interactional justice, and laissez-faire leadership play an important role in relation to police professionals' work engagement, workload seems to play a less important role. The enormous importance of public police professionals' work and the implications of the quality of the service they offer for the societal security require the analysis of effective formulas to improve police professionals' well-being. For this purpose, public administration and human resources managers should design strategies based on promoting positive experiences in which human resources development, public service quality, and employee's well-being are the main priorities. Job environments characterized by a positive wellness approach can count on healthy and happy employees that are better able to achieve results for the organization. The analysis carried out in this study could be replicated in other public activity contexts, for example, in healthcare, where the vocational nature, the intensity, and the implications on society of the work performed coincide. The variables used and the analysis carried out could also be applied to private sectors, as long as they show similar work characteristics to those of the public police (for example, highly technological sectors). In addition, the extensive derivations of this type of studies advise accompanying the theoretical approaches related to business management with others more focused, for example, on organizational behavior.

As with any empirical study, this study has some limitations. A QCA analysis with one outcome variable and five potential antecedents might seem simple; therefore, this study has tried to corroborate the results of the absence model with those of the presence model. Although QCA is quite valuable for investigating causal complexity, the interpretation of the results depends on

the calibration process. To make the best choice of the calibration criteria, an in-depth analysis of the study data was performed in two steps: first, variable by variable; and second, all the study variables together. Taking these analyses into account, together with the very nature of the variables being studied and the way they are measured, the calibration criterion capable of ensuring the most reliable results was chosen. Moreover, the sample included only public Spanish police professionals. Before defining the study variables, a deep review of public police institutions throughout several main European countries was carried out, showing very similar characteristics. In fact, the variables considered in this study behave in the same way in all areas considered. Therefore, the variables considered, but not the specific study context, are determinants in this case for understanding how to avoid a lack of work engagement among public police professionals. Finally, the results were built on self-reported data, and to overcome this fact, other methods such as in-depth interviews were used to provide valuable information to complement the findings.

Although the research setting and variables considered in this study are important, the analysis of other variables such as positive leadership, psychological capital, or extra-role behaviors might also yield interesting findings. Future research as already mentioned could also analyze other sectors to highlight their idiosyncrasies and generalize the findings of this study.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

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