From surviving to thriving: management leadership in smart organizations in the post-pandemic era

De sobrevivir a prosperar: liderazgo directivo en organizaciones inteligentes de la era pospandemia

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to describe emerging managerial leadership in learning organizations for the post-pandemic era. With a descriptive approach, sources of information available in Google Scholar were analyzed, selected according to the criteria of the research protocol, complemented with the hermeneutics-dialectics of authors based on their academic-professional experience. The managerial leader must possess technical and social skills, as well as competencies to master relationships and links by combining influence, objectives and processes from a social perspective that denotes his personal mastery. Adopt a participatory, resilient, stimulating and systemic leadership style to build a management style that recognizes that its collaborators are biopsychosocial, sensitive beings with new needs that demand meaning and purpose. As a human talent management strategy, it uses emotional salary aimed at promoting psychosocial well-being, attracting and retaining talent, improving quality of life and converting team members into partners of the organization, committed to generating profitable benefits that They will be shared. This promotes the creation of productive knowledge to promote change and adaptability in conditions of uncertainty, as a source of organizational learning that constitutes a sustainable competitive advantage for intelligent organizations.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de esta investigación es describir el liderazgo directivo emergente en organizaciones inteligentes para la era pospandemia. Con enfoque descriptivo, se analizaron fuentes de información disponibles en Google Scholar, seleccionadas según los criterios del protocolo de investigación, complementadas con la hermenéutica-dialéctica de autores con base en su experiencia académica-profesional. El líder directivo debe poseer habilidades técnicas y sociales, así como competencias para dominar relaciones y vínculos, combinando influencia, objetivos y procesos desde una perspectiva social que denota su maestría personal. Adopta un estilo de liderazgo participativo, resiliente, estimulador y sistémico para construir un estilo de dirección que reconoce que sus colaboradores son seres biopsicosociales, sensibles y con nuevas necesidades que demandan sentido y propósito. Como estrategia de gestión del talento humano, utiliza el salario emocional, destinada a fomentar el bienestar psicosocial, atraer y retener talentos, mejorar la calidad de vida y convertir a los miembros del equipo en socios de la organización, comprometidos con la generación de beneficios redituables que serán compartidos. Esto promueve la creación de conocimiento productivo para favorecer el cambio y la adaptabilidad en condiciones de incertidumbre, como fuente de aprendizaje organizacional que constituye una ventaja competitiva sostenible para organizaciones inteligentes.

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic represented a strategic turning point that forced organizations to face changes without a

clear direction (Li et al., 2021). The new reality imposed a transformation of know-how, triggering the most creative organizational reengineering disruption of the 21st century (Beilstein et al., 2021; Guerras & Navas, 2022; Pekolj, 2023).

In this context, human talent has acquired crucial importance for organizations seeking not only to survive but also to transcend toward competitiveness. However, today's employees are more sensitive, demanding, and demanding of satisfying elements, so leaders must pay special attention to these motivations, promoting work environments that generate cognitive (achievement), affective (positive moods), and sensory (pleasure) experiences, aimed at counteracting adverse effects such as inequity and inequality (Sánchez-Vásquez & Sánchez-Ordóñez, 2019). At the same time, these scenarios must foster the development of human capacities, transforming the need to work into an intrinsic desire (Saleem et al., 2021).

In the post-pandemic era, leaders must possess personal and social skills to self-regulate their emotions and understand those of their followers. These competencies, along with technical skills, allow them to effectively manage relationships and align work processes with organizational objectives. The leader's personality is reflected in stimulating behaviors that depend on their ability to approach the human essence of their followers, acting as a mediating agent to intervene in psychosocial states as a means of promoting stability, alignment, integration, and collaboration.

Convinced that human talent is the greatest source of competitive advantage, the leader adopts a management style that combines tools to improve organizational performance. Furthermore, they must foster strategic practices to promote safe and healthy work environments that facilitate the attraction and retention of talent, as well as emotional well-being, as fundamental elements for creating productive knowledge necessary for learning, change, and prosperity.

In light of the above, the objective of this research was to describe the emerging managerial leadership in intelligent organizations for the post-pandemic era, resorting to the analysis of information sources available in Google Scholar and the hermeneutic-dialectic of the authors, based on their academic and professional experience. The process was carried out to establish plausible arguments that respond to the following questions:

- What are the skills and competencies of the executive leader in the post-pandemic era?
- What is the emerging executive leadership style in the post-pandemic era?
- What is the human talent management approach adopted by post-pandemic executive leadership?
- What is the human talent management strategy that enables the creation of a sustainable competitive advantage?
- What constitutes the sustainable competitive advantage of a learning organization?

After this introduction, the theoretical foundation that attributes epistemological legitimacy to the object of study is presented, followed by the methodological precisions, the structure of the underlying knowledge is constructed, and, finally, the conclusions are stated.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Leader and managerial leadership

A directive leader, as they occupy a position of authority in the organization, uses their influence, ability, and knowledge to direct the team toward achieving objectives, according to Landeo-Quispe et al. (2022) and Çalış & Büyükakıncı (2019). The behavior of a directive leader is interrelated with various organizational behavior variables, such as culture, change, climate, satisfaction, motivation, and commitment (Alegre et al., 2021; Mutmainnah et al., 2022; Santiago-Torner, 2024).

Directive leadership is defined as the process by which the leader influences, guides, and directs the team toward achieving the organization's goals (Saleem et al., 2020). Direction, as a substantive function, and influence, as a social process, determine the effectiveness of leadership. That is the strength with which the leader interacts and connects with their collaborators to achieve the expected results (Landeo-Quispe et al., 2022).

The pioneering theories of leadership place little emphasis on followers, focusing on the supremacy of the person who holds the power attributed by the organization and who stands out due to innate personality and social and intellectual attributes that enable them to guide the group towards the desired direction (Benmira &

Agboola, 2021). Over time, a social approach has emerged that recognizes the positive impact of the 'leader-follower' relationship on the organization to the extent that the leader's influence is mediated by motivational elements that meet the needs of the followers (Tran et al., 2020).

Directive leadership involves establishing a vision that gives meaning and purpose to organizational dynamics (Molina-Vicuña, 2023). This approach requires influencing team members to maintain the proper functioning of the organization; therefore, the directive leader adopts behavioral patterns that define their personality and leadership style (Geraldo et al., 2020; Saleem et al., 2020).

Considering the complexity and uncertainty of the post-pandemic era, influenced by variables that are difficult to describe, explain, and predict (Riquelme-Castañeda et al., 2020), organizations implement systematic changes to overcome obstacles that threaten their longevity and sustainability. Therefore, the directive leadership style plays a pivotal role in building organizational capabilities, especially in terms of integrating processes with people and objectives (Geraldo et al., 2020).

Following this perspective, this research theorizes four managerial leadership styles, considered representative for sculpting the ideal leadership style in the era of the 'new normal', allowing organizations to move from survival to prosperity:

- a) Democratic leadership
- b) Charismatic leadership
- c) Transactional leadership
- d) Transformational leadership

Managerial leadership styles
Democratic leadership

Democratic leadership fosters involvement by encouraging the expression of ideas to generate creative solutions through consensus as a mechanism for participation. It facilitates organizational communication, allowing the team to access the necessary information to engage in decision-making processes, thereby fostering enthusiasm, self-confidence, empowerment, and commitment (Hilton et al., 2021; Nedelko & Potocan, 2021).

Charismatic leadership

Charismatic leadership is energetically inspirational and uses motivation as a key factor to promote efficient performance. It employs an altruistic approach that relies on social skills and ideational rhetoric to garner individual commitment, foster collective conviction, and cultivate a sense of belonging to a clear vision of a promising future (Meslec et al., 2020). The charismatic leader is essentially empathetic when managing the needs of their collaborators to transform them into personality-driven capabilities (Ozgenel, 2020).

Transactional leadership

The transactional leader focuses on achieving objectives through an economic, political, and psychological exchange of rewards (praise) and punishments (sanctions) based on performance aligned with organizational standards and expectations (Donkor et al., 2022). The transactional leader is not interested in the personal development of their team; their operational focus is on maintaining organizational stability, monitoring performance based on established guidelines, and adjusting distortions before they become serious situations. However, their social skills are limited, which prevents them from managing changing contexts and managing qualitative information from the work environment (Tran et al., 2020).

Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership inspires and motivates to generate relevant behavioral changes in team members. It is admired for its optimism, self-confidence, and ability to change the current state, challenging reality, and promoting the integral development of its collaborators as a strategy to lead change and innovation (Manu, 2022; Geraldo et al., 2020).

Bolstered by strong convictions and inspirational power, the transformational leader guides the team toward collective goals based on a clear vision of the future, establishing agile conditions of adaptability and continuous

learning in the present to move toward competitiveness, synchronizing the team, generating collaboration, and enhancing dynamic capabilities (Barrios-Hernández et al., 2020; Riquelme-Castañeda et al., 2020).

Management skills of organizational leadership

Leadership skills allow leaders to manage resources and objectives, coordinating them with processes and people to achieve expected performance. According to Alegría-Zebadúa et al. (2023) and Paredes-Zempual et al. (2021), leadership skill is a managerial capacity acquired through learning to achieve predicted results with certainty and efficiency, minimizing the investment of resources and time.

In this sense, Gil-Díaz et al. (2022) outline two leadership skills necessary for leaders in the post-pandemic era:

a) Technical skills based on specialized competencies in a specific area of knowledge necessary for thinking, acting, and intervening in situations within the organizational context.
b) Social skills, essential for building healthy and balanced interpersonal relationships based on empathic understanding, cohesion, and synergy.

Technical skills focus on the systematization and programming of methods applied to work routines, attributing purpose to work (Molina-Vicuña, 2023). In contrast, soft skills focus on the human ability to give meaning to work through effective interaction between processes and collaborators (Feigenbaum, 2022).

In these modern times, leaders need the skills to face the challenges imposed by reality, which become strategic turning points. This dynamic requires implementing knowledge (laws, principles, methods, concepts), an adequate formal system (structure, organization, communication), and engaged collaborators (experiences, positive emotions, beliefs, values) (Bravo et al., 2023; Díaz et al., 2021).

A leader's skills, therefore, allow them to understand organizational behavior, favorably transform internal conditions, build knowledge, and learn as a team to anticipate environmental trends. This means challenging unforeseen events, managing change, and building critical success factors that create a competitive advantage.

Smart organization

An intelligent organization has the capacity to create in order to progress rather than just adapt to survive. Creation is possible thanks to the knowledge it has built and which it continually learns to generate in order to continue learning (Navarrete & Sánchez, 2022). Unlike a conventional organization, it uses knowledge to continuously improve, understand itself, and comprehend its environment in order to strategically advance toward prosperity, even in uncertain contexts. In this way, information, knowledge, and relational capital become distinctive characteristics of a smart organization that, in the post-pandemic era, adapts its system to develop resilience, flexibility, robustness, and self-regulation as a mechanism for longevity.

Managerial leadership in smart organizations in the post-pandemic era: a strategic perspective

In the post-pandemic era, organizations require more than ever executive leadership with skills that articulate processes and objectives through an inspiring, motivational, and well-being-generating influence among employees. The strategic foundations of the organization (mission, vision, values) must transcend the status of philosophical declaration to become the direction that gives meaning and purpose to work routines.

Directive leadership represents the management style through which the leader, with the primary responsibility of achieving predictable results, builds an integrative platform of processes based on the human talent they manage. Strategically, employees constitute the foundation from which opportunities emerge to consolidate good organizational performance and, consequently, advance competitively.

Faced with strategic inflection points, the executive leader recognizes that organizational change is inevitable. However, the answers to questions such as "Where do we want to go?" must remain aligned with the organization's vision; "How are we going to get there?" It requires the managerial leader to design and implement strategies that, along with vision, address complex situations and guide change using productive knowledge derived from organizational learning.

Human talent management constitutes the strategic foundation of the learning organization; the acquisition, development, and transfer of organizational knowledge facilitate the creation of innovations that, based on collective

wisdom, strengthen the competitive position. According to Barrios-Hernández et al. (2020), managerial leadership must foster the development of human capabilities to enhance performance and strengthen organizational learning.

Considering that a learning organization learns to change, transform, adapt, and progress, its members also undergo these same processes. In fact, they experience emotions that, in response to environmental turbulence, influence their psychosocial state. Therefore, creating a sustainable competitive advantage requires first, managerial leadership that helps mitigate the tensions in personal well-being, followed by the deployment of the necessary capabilities to cope with circumstances.

METHODOLOGY

This descriptive research is developed through a review and rational analysis of documentary sources, following the methodological strategy proposed by Martínez-Corona et al. (2023).

The open-access search engine Google Scholar is used as a source for searching information based on keywords and related concepts. The search protocol is based on the following inclusion criteria: a) articles published in indexed open-access journals in English or Spanish, b) books derived from research published by open-access university presses, and c) intellectual productions published between 2019 and 2024, inclusive.

Research leading to academic degrees and presentations at scientific outreach events such as conferences, seminars, and symposia are excluded. Regarding the documentary record, the authors have developed an instrument to organize, systematize, categorize, and interpret, following the hermeneutics-dialectics of Martínez (2002), based on the academic-professional experience of the authors, whose articulation leads to the epistemological construction of the structure that proposes the redefinition of managerial leadership in intelligent organizations of the post-pandemic era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Skills of the executive leader in the post-pandemic era

Following the humanitarian crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the latest scientific evidence reveals that personal traits, charisma, and extraordinary training are not the only determinants of the effectiveness of managerial leadership. The strategic turning point has reversed the outdated conception of the "leader-follower" relationship based on transactional models, which recognize employee performance based on progress measured with indicators that the organization values as the sole source of productivity and performance (Torner, 2020).

It is clear that the technical skills of the managerial leader provide them with the necessary know-how, allowing them to understand the environment, acquire in-depth knowledge of the processes under their responsibility, and master the relationships (Masenya, 2022). This contributes to determining the strategic direction through which they intend to lead the organization toward the desired position. Certainly, in conditions of increasing uncertainty, cognitive skills allow us to interpret facts, attribute meaning to them, and establish the most assertive courses of action to address them (Ramírez-García et al., 2019).

However, training specialization is insufficient to foster employee engagement and involvement; leaders' cognitions need to be complemented with social skills capable of fostering safe and healthy work environments where human talent finds meaning and purpose in their time in the organization. Currently, employees significantly value non-economic benefits that allow them to experience positive emotions derived from a work environment that promotes personal development, work-life balance, and psychosocial well-being.

Feeling satisfied with one's job generates behaviors that increase productivity, heighten engagement, and satisfy personal self-realization, resulting in an experience of happiness at work (Salvador-Moreno et al., 2021; Inayat & Jahanzeb Khan, 2021). In this sense, the managerial leader, in their role as an intervener in the life sphere of their team members, aims to understand people's fears, motivations, needs, and expectations.

Understanding employees' underlying assumptions is a glimpse of the humanization of labor relations and promotes close ties that are conducive to identifying strengths and weaknesses and managing them for the benefit of the organization. It is a complex and sensitive task whose intervention involves mitigating the effects of external circumstances beyond the managerial leader's control, transforming mental models that impede personal mastery, and building collective learning, capable of turning adversity into a source of knowledge for sustained growth.

Therefore, the effectiveness of the managerial leader is mediated by the management of elements that influence the work environment, the implications of which translate into the improvement of the conditions that generate satisfaction and enable the creation of knowledge for collective learning. To this end, according to Lolito (2022), the managerial leader needs:

a) A personal skill, understood as the ability to positively manage one's own emotional burden to act with maturity, self-control, and resilience.
b) A social skill that involves emotional balance to master the organizational landscape, establishing healthy interpersonal relationships based on effective communication as a tool for understanding, influence, persuasion, and conflict management.

Personal aptitude and social aptitude constitute what Goleman (1999) called emotional intelligence, defined as the ability acquired by the executive leader to know themselves, self-regulate, motivate themselves, face adversity, understand their team, and comprehend the dominant patterns of the environment. According to Rincón (2021), personal aptitude involves self-assessment to identify personal limits and scope, manage emotionality, and direct actions with self-control toward a clear direction.

Social aptitude, as Quinde-Lituma and Álava-Atiencie (2024) point out, is the succession of personal mastery. It constitutes the competence to establish empathetic and resilient relationships with the work team based on the closeness the leader has established to diagnose and channel, from a humanizing perspective, the needs, expectations, strengths, and weaknesses of their people. With an adequate intrapersonal balance, leaders use their influence to contribute to the development of self-regulated individuals capable of coping with adverse situations, acting as organizational coaches who leverage relationships to achieve emotional balance with interpersonal resonance, fostering collaboration, communication, solidarity, and a shared vision.

In this way, executive leaders in the post-pandemic era understand that the essence of their role lies in their own being and not solely in the power attributed by the organization's structure (Verenzuela-Barroeta et al., 2023). Combining technical expertise with social skills enables the construction of healthy relationships capable of facing adversity together with fortitude and assertiveness.

Skills of the executive leader in the post-pandemic era

In the current era, described as a "new normal," organizations need to attract and retain talent to establish a strategic differentiation from their competitors, many of whom still view their employees as a resource rather than as relational capital. However, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, talented people are scarce, and their commitment to the organization tends to be short-term.

To ensure employees feel part of the organization, it is necessary to provide them with much more than just a salary; the workforce, especially the millennial generation, demands meaningful and purposeful work, opportunities for career development, and benefits that foster emotional well-being (Beilstein et al., 2021; Farhan, 2021). In this sense, organizational resources of a financial nature are no longer the only determining factors in retaining human talent; therefore, they do not, on their own, ensure organizational longevity and competitiveness.

Leaders, having developed their own social learning model, have the ability to transform their own behaviors and those of team members in the face of emerging forces of change. These forces of change, in addition to being inevitable, reflect the tension between vision and strategic inflection points, which forces leaders to master organizational relationships and purposes. Therefore, collective learning is crucial to challenge the *status quo* and move in directions that, although risky, suggest a high probability of success.

Mastering relationships implies recognizing that social transformations have changed the expectations of human talent due to the adoption of more globalized skills that expand career possibilities. Additionally, the work practices adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic, fostered by information and communication technologies, have led to greater digitalization of work (Valdés et al., 2023). Consequently, the emergence of new organizational forms is shaping more flexible work structures.

In fact, employees value flexible work practices as mechanisms that allow them to balance work with other aspects of their lives. This forces leaders to continually reflect on rethinking the organizational structure of work based on the redefinition of occupational roles and responsibilities, even analyzing psychosocial risk factors to mitigate exposure to stress and work overload (Chandler, 2022). As a result, leaders design and implement forms

of "workplace smoothing" (Verenzuela-Barroeta & Araque-Manrique, 2024a), mentioned below, aimed at providing effective responses to employee demands, improving working conditions, and avoiding talent loss.

Following this dynamic, leaders must also master the objectives, adapting agile process technologies and methodologies to the organizational platform and integrating them into organizational forms. Strategically, the modernization of the occupational structure must allow for the mapping, execution, control, and supervision of work, aiming for an adaptive culture committed to meeting the objectives and needs of stakeholders. The managerial leader then adjusts the management system to facilitate the construction of productive knowledge based on the company's dynamics, which constitutes a source of learning for adapting and creating in the face of new strategic inflection points (Barrios-Hernández et al., 2020).

Emerging managerial leadership style in the post-pandemic era

To transform organizational learning into a sustainable competitive advantage, leaders assume that, in order to understand the environmental trends, they must first recognize that their team is a privileged source of information that allows them to identify needs (Azeem et al., 2021). It is assumed that interpretations of the organization's future cannot be separated from an understanding of the emotions, expectations, and desires of their employees (Cadena et al., 2021).

Based on the above, this research suggests a participative, resilient, stimulating, and systemic leadership style focused on managing human talent by introducing satisfying elements that allow for the transformation of internal conditions. These dynamics generate the organizational capacity to align influence with processes and objectives through acquired knowledge and learning as a source of growth and prosperity (Peche Sanes et al., 2023).

As Bravo et al. (2023) explain, in an organizational context, people are political actors who continually seek to intervene, propose, and reach consensus for the collective benefit, and, in line with the closest experience, innovations related to overcoming the tensions produced by the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted from a joint effort, made possible by the fluidity of communication, collective participation and the duality of roles, among others (Sanabria, 2022).

Therefore, the approach toward a participative leadership style encourages team members' involvement in decision-making processes, establishing itself as a democratizing practice of the communication system that fosters the two-way, timely, and creative exchange of information between peers, teams, and units, sustainable even under adverse conditions. Organizational reengineering requires ensuring that employees have access to complete, transparent, and truthful information, thus fostering relational trust, functional autonomy, empowerment, commitment, and a sense of belonging (Fetais et al., 2022).

The resilient dimension of the emerging directive leadership style for the post-pandemic era refers to the ability to generate adaptive mechanisms to respond quickly and vigorously to unexpected changes. The leader and their team master the sources that favor adaptability, having learned to develop a personality that is malleable according to circumstances.

In the face of adversity, the directive leader inspires, motivates, and empowers to foster self-confidence, continue with fortitude, and "bounce back" (Villa, 2020). Thus, the social group has learned to resolve its external adaptation problems by confronting forces, controlling emotions, and acting purposefully to continue with a clear purpose (Molina-Vicuña, 2023).

Resilient leadership resists conformity, combats discouragement and resignation, connects with oneself, and connects with the team to persevere (Eliot, 2020). It is based on four levels that express the degree of personal mastery the team has achieved:

    a) I 'have' confidence in myself and in others to recognize danger, set limits, and act with restraint.
    b) I 'am' even-tempered, lively, capable, and resourceful.
    c) I 'am' convinced, willing, confident, and optimistic.
    d) I 'can' regulate myself, resolve problems, work as a team, and ask for help.

In itself, resilient leadership is an inexhaustible exercise in cognitive-emotional affirmations that strengthen psychological well-being. Along with beliefs and values, the leader learns to pivot by extracting experiential learning from the position they are leaving, which constitutes knowledge for the present and the future (Nan & Chaiprasit, 2023).

Third, the stimulating style that characterizes directive leadership is based on principles of exchange that promote personal development and emotional well-being, which leads to significant improvements in employee performance and productivity. By implementing motivational practices, such as feedback, team members will be able to recognize their strengths and identify weaknesses, understanding them as areas for improvement that require intervention to strengthen competencies and seek new opportunities for personal growth (Verenzuela-Barroeta & Araque-Manrique, 2024a; Tran et al., 2020).

At the same time, the leader fosters behavioral transformations that add value to work, promptly dismantling distortions that affect productivity and, consequently, influence the efficiency with which objectives are achieved (Manu, 2022). These incentives seek, among other things, self- and peer-assessment of the contribution of the meaning of work to the organization's purpose, drawing on extrinsic elements that transform the sense of belonging into an intrinsic expression of the employee.

Finally, the systemic style of directive leadership tends to cultivate new leadership through the competency-based management of its employees' skills, promoting the development of well-rounded individuals who understand themselves and their peers and are capable of performing any position within the team (Geraldo et al., 2020; Saleem et al., 2020).

The leader needs to have talents capable of challenging reality, having a clear purpose of moving towards the strategic threshold that the organization seeks, and having contributed to the formation of empowered, resilient, and stimulated collaborators, advances in the construction of teams with a systemic vision, who know how to discover the trend patterns of the environment to frame them with the structure of the organization, identifying difficulties and threats to generate creative solutions (Echebiri & Amundsen, 2021; Ramírez-García et al., 2019).

Human talent management approach adopted by senior leadership in the post-pandemic era

Human talent needs to connect the organizational purpose with the meaning of their work. Naturally, employees analyze to what extent the organizational strategy, in addition to mitigating the consequences of the strategic inflection point, provides their well-being. Aware that their capabilities enhance the organization's profitable benefits, they expect their efforts to be rewarded in different ways.

Thus, the human talent management approach establishes an interrelational bond capable of making employees think, act, and feel like "partners" in the organization. This is achieved through guarantees that, beyond monetary salary, reward performance (Luna-Arocas et al., 2020). Aligned with strategic direction, human talent management adopts a generative approach of positive psychosocial changes, conceptualized by Verenzuela Barroeta and Araque-Manrique (2024b) as humanistic, motivational, and committed.

The humanistic approach focuses on personal development, establishing flexible work policies. Such practices allow employees to self-manage their time, increase productivity, and foster empowerment through methodologies that, without losing sight of organizational objectives, mitigate the factors that generate psychosocial harm. Executive leadership creates these conditions, convinced that good performance depends not so much on the time dedicated to work as on the performance achieved autonomously.

The motivational approach advocates the implementation of fair and equitable practices that recognize "good work," the contribution to organizational progress, and the empowerment with which employees assume control of their job position (Malik & Singh, 2022). To this end, it is necessary to design and implement a non-financial compensation system accompanied by a career development system that promotes recognition, promotion and advancement, ongoing training, and career opportunities (Malik & Singh, 2022; Verenzuela-Barroeta & Araque-Manrique, 2024a).

The committed approach focuses on environmental conditions at work; it understands that organizational factors, based on information and communication technologies, structural and instrumental resources, communication, and the ongoing mediation of the managerial leader, must be suitable to prevent work-related stress, work overload, and exposure to occupational and psychosocial risks. Maintaining occupational health involves managing physical variables, including environmental aspects related to preventing workplace harassment and discrimination in all its forms (Cordero-Guzmán et al., 2022; Verenzuela-Barroeta & Araque-Manrique, 2024a). Managerial leadership recognizes human dignity and strives to guarantee the right to a safe and healthy work environment (International Labor Organization, 2022).

Emotional Salary: A Human Talent Management Strategy for Creating Sustainable Competitive Advantage

According to Guerras and Navas (2022), the human talent management strategy must be based on the organizational philosophy (mission, vision, values, objectives). These foundations determine the purpose of the know-how and, therefore, give meaning to efforts, guide actions, and provide the necessary knowledge to understand and address strategic inflection points efficiently, creating key success factors that sustain a competitive advantage.

Thus, the emotional salary strategy seeks to attract and retain talent, evaluate and motivate employees, stimulate productivity, differentiate, and achieve competitiveness. It consists of contractual and labor policies based on teleworking, dual-shift work, interspersed rest, technical training leave, ongoing training programs, performance evaluations, and recreational and leisure activities, among others.

In recent years, emotional salary has positioned itself as a social investment whose return ensures a satisfied, productive, and emotionally committed human talent with the organization (Rojas & Blanco, 2023). The experience of belonging to an organization that considers its employees "partners," beyond contributing to the organizational reputation, constitutes a loyalty strategy capable of transforming the need to work into a genuine desire (Seminario & Seminario, 2020).

The executive leader plays a mediating role between the needs of their team and the organization's responsiveness, articulating their leadership style with their management approach to achieve the goal of generating productive knowledge as a source of organizational learning for creating a sustainable competitive advantage, which is made possible through the psychosocial well-being of employees (Ortega, 2020).

Sustainable competitive advantage in smart organizations of the post-pandemic era

Managerial leadership is an instrumental agent of organizational change, a transformative and entrepreneurial driver that challenges behaviors, structures, routines, beliefs, mental models, and conventions. Furthermore, it relies on the subtle, conscious, rational, and intuitive personality it has built to articulate it with a humanizing management style of labor relations (Vito & Sethi, 2020).

Figure 1.
Redefining Executive Leadership for Smart Organizations Post-Pandemic
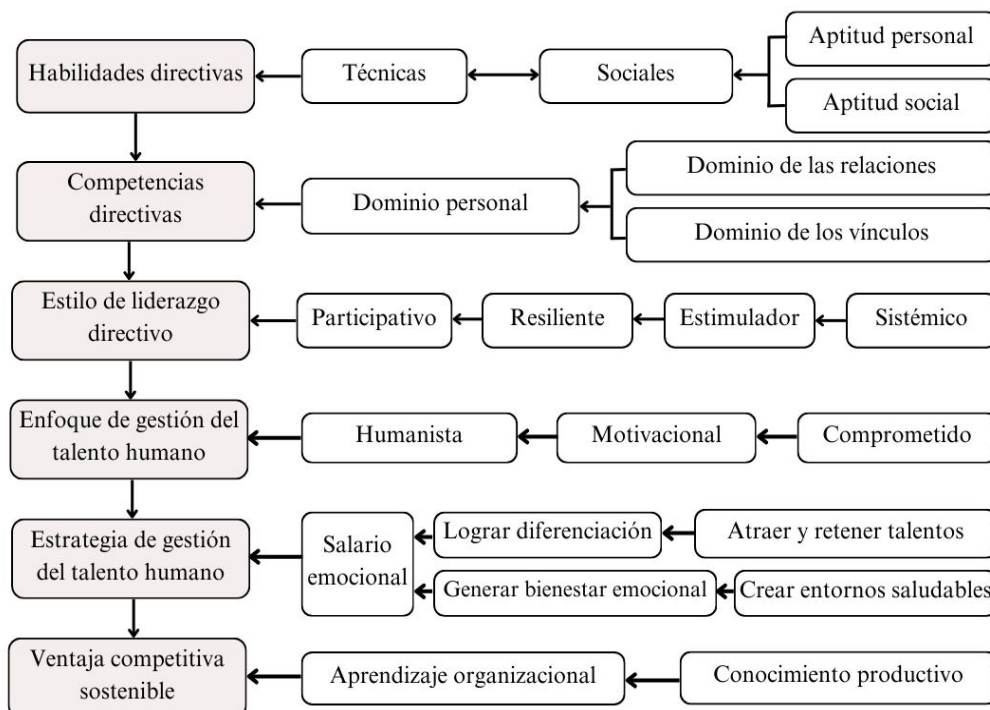
Source: own elaboration
Note: the figure appears in its original language

In this way, it fosters the organizational capacity to face strategic inflection points based on productive knowledge and the adaptive culture that enables it to generate innovations. For the intelligent organization of the post-pandemic era, collective wisdom is its greatest source of learning and one of the most valued resources in terms of relational capital; learning to unlearn in order to learn, adapting with resilience, and transforming to move toward a more predictable and less risky future is a sustainable competitive advantage (Iannotta et al., 2020; Pilotti, 2024).

Sustainable competitive advantage, based on human talent, is strengthened to the extent that leaders and collaborators combine experiences, knowledge, and personal mastery to detect the forces of change, question the organization's formal system, adapt it to overcome entropic tendencies, and build new learning from their dynamic capabilities (Barrios-Hernández et al., 2020). This means overcoming adversity without remaining in their comfort zone but rather challenging themselves to grow even more, increasing competitiveness, that is, organizational prosperity.

Figure 1 below illustrates the theoretical redefinition of managerial leadership for the creation of smart organizations in the post-pandemic era.

CONCLUSIONS

This research describes managerial leadership in smart organizations of the post-pandemic era, revealing that cognitive skills, although necessary, are not the only determinant of its effectiveness. Managerial leaders require social skills to self-regulate and teach their team to master their emotional burden as a mechanism for achieving interpersonal understanding in the organizational context. Thus, leaders advance their goal of mastering relationships and bonds, considering that the strategic turning point caused by the COVID-19 pandemic brought with it new organizational structures for work, roles, and responsibilities that have generated new motivations in employees. Understanding the complexity of this dynamic requires combining expertise with social sensitivity.

Therefore, in their quest to achieve their objectives, managerial leaders are immersed in a new paradigm of organizational development in which, first, they must address the deepest selves of their employees to reconstruct the scenario based on trends, motivations, and facts. It involves generating adaptive capacity in search of the meaning and purpose that both the leader and their followers require to give meaning to the present and learn to cope in order to move toward the future.

In this sense, the emerging directive leadership style distances itself from the preeminence granted by its organizational position, sculpting a leadership style that tends to encourage participation, balance psychological states with resilience, stimulate the potential of talent, and challenge the tensions imposed by an unpredictable and changing environment. Having understood that for employees, it is not enough to have clear objectives that benefit only the organization, the directive leader focuses on managing talent from a humanizing perspective of labor relations, concerned with generating strategies to attract and retain talent, create safe and healthy work environments, and improve quality of life.

In this sense, managerial leadership adopts the emotional salary strategy as a tool for recognizing and satisfying needs, aimed at establishing the necessary conditions for creating productive knowledge through which the organization learns to adapt and challenge reality in order to create, grow, compete, and prosper.

Finally, recognizing the multifactorial complexity surrounding the object of study, the scientific community is urged to develop new research to validate and enrich current findings. It is crucial to explore perspectives that reflect new conceptions of managerial leadership, given that the theoretical constructs that have emerged since the strategic turning point that shook humanity are scarce and unfinished.

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