The representations of well-being and expectations among academic and administrative staff in the post-Covid phase: An Italian case study

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♟ ABSTRACT. L'obiettivo di questo studio è stato esplorare come docenti e personale tecnico-amministrativo universitari percepiscono e descrivono il loro benessere personale, professionale e comunitario. Ventuno interviste individuali narrative focalizzate sono state realizzate e il materiale testuale, analizzato seguendo l'approccio della Grounded Theory, evidenzia che il benessere è percepito come un fenomeno dinamico e multidimensionale, condizionato da esperienze individuali e contestuali. Inoltre, le implicazioni di tale studio permettono di sottolineare il ruolo dell'università nella promozione del benessere comunitario.

♟ SUMMARY. *Scientific literature reports quite scarce attention to university employees' well-being. The majority of studies focus instead on students' well-being and learning. Moreover, several theoretical perspectives confirm that when talking about individual well-being, there is a need for a multidimensional and ecological definition. This study aims to explore how university clerks and scholars perceive and describe their personal, professional, and community well-being. Twenty-one university workers were interviewed using a narrative approach. The Grounded Theory Methodology was used to analyze the textual corpus with the support of Atlas 8.0 software. From the textual data, 195 representative codes were defined and grouped into seven categories that reflect the main dimensions related to well-being, considering both the work context and the community environment. Results suggest that well-being in this post-pandemic scenario is perceived by clerks and scholars as a dynamic and multidimensional phenomenon that is shaped by individuals' experiences and contexts. The implications of these findings for promoting well-being among clerks and university scholars are discussed with a specific focus on the potential role of academic institutions in fostering community well-being.*

Keywords: *Well-being, University workers, Grounded theory methodology*

INTRODUCTION

Universities as institutions create and improve health and well-being and institutions have a profound significance in individual psychism and social grouping.

As Jaques (1953) and Bleger (1967) stated the institution performs a protective function for individual psychism, founded on the possibility of allowing and maintaining a split between the more evolved and the more archaic levels of its operation.

Moreover, universities play an important role in setting the local surrounding context (Brennan, King & Lebeau, 2004).

The academic world is a complex and articulated environment where different relationships, structures, and visions of different professional profiles interact (Torrisi & Pernagallo, 2022); and therefore, within it, well-being is characterized as the effect of a set of indicators on multiple domains, rather than as a single factor (Forgeard, Jayawickreme, Kern & Seligman, 2011; Keyes, 2007; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). The well-being of universities is even more important in this phase following the pandemic emergency. In fact, during the pandemic, new ways of working, increased job insecurity and instability and also changed the timing and methods of these activities, affecting the welfare of workers (Evanoff et al., 2020; Pacheco et al., 2020). Moreover, Esposito and colleagues (Esposito, Agueli, Arcidiacono & Di Napoli, 2022) considered the effects of the isolation that the Covid-19 health emergency determined both in its acute phase and for the effects of long Covid.

Di Martino and colleagues (manuscript under review) in their review highlighted which factors generate and maintain well-being in academics: building a sense of community, mattering, and inclusion; enhancing meaningful collaboration between all the actors involved in the system; fostering relationships as emotional connections and positive interactions with other community members within and outside of the universities; strengthening elements of successful transition and strategies for the promotion of university health; and, providing constant monitoring and tutoring.

Specifically, literature describes students' well-being mainly through the domains of the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011) or the domains of thriving (Schreiner, 2013; Schreiner, Louis & Nelson, 2012) which emphasizes the subjective dimensions of well-being. However, understanding the interacting contextual factors we rather refer to an ecological perspective, which considers the action of variables inherent in the social-cultural context and its organization, together with the forms with which the individual defines himself and interacts within the reference context.

From an ecological perspective, Prilleltensky (2012) divided well-being into various dimensions, identifying an interdependence between individual, organizational and community well-being, and in his theorization well-being is defined "a positive state of affairs, brought about by the simultaneous and balanced satisfaction of diverse objective and subjective needs of individuals, relationships, organizations, and communities" (p. 2).

Starting from these premises, Prilleltensky and colleagues (2015) developed the I COPPE model, which is a multidimensional model that considers six specific areas of well-being: interpersonal, community, occupational, physical, psychological and economic.

Well-being is, definitely, given by the satisfaction perceived by the individual concerning the individual dimensions and closely connected to the context of which it is part.

Moreover, literature has paid very little attention to lecturers and administrative technical staff because studies are in fact directed above all to students' well-being despite the role that the university, understood with its teachers and technical administrative staff, carries out in the achievement of higher education objectives, and how their performance affects the learning and success of students (De Lourdes Machado, Soares, Brites, Ferreira & Gouveia, 2011).

Indeed, the more satisfied academic staff are with their work, the more productive they will be, and the more their perception of well-being in their workplace will increase (Aziri, 2011). Actually, job satisfaction represents a mix of feelings related to work and it is strictly connected to workers' expectations and their effective rewards' experiences (Aziri, 2011). Job satisfaction is characterised by three main aspects: a positive emotional and mental mood of employees; proactive behaviours; effective organisational performance (Aziri, 2011; Spector, 1997). Further studies highlighted that the job satisfaction can be affected by three main classes of variables: salary, working conditions, relations with colleagues (Kohli & Sharma, 2018). More specifically, job satisfaction is influenced by positive social characteristics of workplaces such as the university atmosphere and sense of community, perceptions of the university's climate and culture (Eagan, Jaeger & Grantham, 2015; Moors, Malley & Stewart, 2014),

institutional factors such as academic leadership (Fredman & Doughney, 2012) or the social reputation of academics in society (Shin & Jung, 2014), relationships with colleagues, students, and administrators (Bentley, Coates, Dobson, Goedegebuure & Meek, 2013).

In turn, job satisfaction is one of the most important predictors of overall well-being (Sousa-Poza & Sousa-Poza, 2000) and from the scarce literature on this topic, we acknowledged that the factors affecting the well-being of academic staff are also the pressures of teaching and research, the heavy administrative burden, the lack of resources, heavy email management, poor quality work relationships, poor leadership and management and lack of involvement in decision-making (Barkhuizen, Rothmann & Van de Vijver, 2014; Coulthard & Keller, 2016; Guthrie et al., 2017; Torp, Vinje & Haaheim-Simonsen, 2016).

Particularly, job satisfaction of academic staff has a significant relationship with their work performance and the academic performance of students (Muindi, 2011; Noordin & Jusoff, 2009). Moreover, a further element to take into account is mattering. Defined as "an ideal state of affairs consisting of two complementary psychological experiences: feeling appreciated and adding value" (Prilleltensky, 2014, p.151), Flett and colleagues (Flett, Khan & Su, 2019) argue that satisfying the need for mattering is fundamental to the psychological well-being of university students and also in promoting well-being in the workplace.

A mattering organizational culture is one in which employees feel valued by supervisors, colleagues, and the organization and provides them with the opportunity to add value by improving workplace engagement and success by reducing burnout (Dutton, Debebe & Wrzesniewski, 2016; Flett & Zangeneh, 2020; Jung & Heppner, 2017; Reece et al., 2021). When a workplace culture is rewarding, affirmative, and supportive, employees and staff feel a great sense of mattering which, in turn, is related to greater autonomy, satisfaction in life, physical health, and general well-being (Flett, 2018). Prilleltensky and colleagues (2020) argue that universities should ensure that all members feel valued and have the opportunity to add value, since mattering leads to involvement and well-being, encouraging universities to implement structures and policies that fuel mattering across the organization.

Finally, a last indicator to consider in the study of well-being also at the academic level is justice. For Prilleltensky (2012) social justice is defined as a fair distribution of

power and has proposed a welfare model that is inseparable from the assessment of social justice in a context. The term organizational justice (Greenberg, 1987) indicates employees' perception of what they consider fair in the organization; it is positively correlated to job satisfaction, trust and organizational support (Deconinck, 2010) and work commitment (Strom, Sears & Kelly, 2014). Moreover, procedural justice correlates positively with job satisfaction and productivity (Colquitt, Lepine, Piccolo, Zapata & Rich, 2012).

There is, therefore, a need to understand how the university staff in its dual component of academics and administrative staff, in particular in their own working environment, represent well-being, since it is closely related to its organizational functioning (Schmidt & Hansson, 2018). Moreover, the interactions between universities and territorial communities fit into ecological framework is also to be considered. Scholars (Benneworth, Charles & Madanipour, 2010; Lazzeroni & Piccaluga, 2015; Stachowiak, Pinheiro, Sedini & Vaattovaara, 2013) have deepened the critical role that the university assumes for the development of the economy of knowledge of the area that hosts it

In particular, Stachowiak et al. (2013) underline the centrality of the relational dimensions that exist between the university and the local context, considering the spaces of interaction and the importance attributed to social networks or personal, that implement trust between university and territorial context.

Aims

Based on the incomplete knowledge of the factors that promote well-being among academics and the universities' administrative staff, the aim of the current study is to detect the factors that improve and/or decrease individual and collective university well-being. Specifically, this qualitative research had the primary purpose of exploring the representations and perceptions of well-being both at the individual and university level.

In particular, this study highlights clerks' and scholars' visions and representations of well-being and what has been helpful to improve them in the university context during recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, another aim was to understand the factors impacting the weaknesses and strengths of universities' well-being at this time.

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METHOD

The context

This study is part of a larger participatory action research that was conducted in a small university (14,000 students) in the South of Italy founded in the early '90s. The aim was to increase the university well-being through the involvement and the contribution of students, tenured lecturers and staff. It is a young and ever-changing university aimed at steady growth, being able to adapt its courses to the needs of the environment combining tradition and innovation by creating value and fostering development. It is located in the Foggia communications and industrial center that is the main wheat market of Southern Italy. In this context, the Foggia University has positioned itself as a cultural, social and economic point of reference of ongoing change, thus underlining its role as an active player in the whole district.

Participants and procedures

The research involved 21 workers of the University of Foggia, 13 females and 8 males, aged from 31 to 67 ($M = 47.95$, $SD = 7.02$): 10 were scholars, while 11 were clerks. Years of work varied from 1 to 29 with an average of 13.88 ($SD = 9.54$). 12 participants live in Foggia, while 6 in the province of Foggia and only 3 in other Italian cities.

A purposive sample was used, considering the involvement and working experience of academic and administrative staff and also the city of residence was also considered to gather more information about the representation of the territorial context from those who live in Foggia and those who don't.

The interviews were carried out by a team of young researchers who contacted the participants and made an appointment with each of them, according to the most convenient days. The interviews took place at scholars' and clerks' offices, in the different departments of the University of Foggia. Informed consent declaration was undersigned by each participant: the research objectives, the data disclosure methods, respect for anonymity, and the privacy regulations were explained. The university ethics committee approved the entire procedure.

Data were collected through focalized open interviews

(Arcidiacono, 2016; Legewie, 2006) characterized by non-directive conduction, and an interview grid focused on the areas to be examined. This type of interview, therefore, adopts a dialogical approach, which in interaction requires specific criteria: a) to not be directive, by letting the flow of the interviewee's thoughts be as free as possible; b) to ensure specificity; c) to be inclusive by considering all data that emerges; and, 4) to adopt an in-depth approach by exploring personal and intimate aspects depicting the experience.

Therefore, this means that respondents were given enough freedom to share whilst narrowing the narrative to specific areas.

The interview included the following areas to explore:

– academic well-being: this area covered well-being in general and the absence of well-being in the academic context, concerning spaces, bureaucracy, competitiveness, etc.

– perceived well-being at the University of Foggia: this section was focused on the perception of well-being in the context of research, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the university in the promotion of well-being;

– well-being of the city: a section oriented to understand the resources and difficulties of the territory of Foggia and the connections of the university with its surrounding context;

– images of well-being: images of well-being that respondents have of their university were collected and deepened by some creative expressions. This section was especially useful for capturing emotional and unconscious aspects. Participants were invited to use metaphors, which represented the unspoken, to convey their personal representations (Ervas, Gola & Rossi, 2017).

Data analysis

The interviews collected were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and then analysed by the GTM (Grounded Theory Methodology) (Bryant, 2017; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2018; Corbin & Strauss, 2008), supported by the software ATLAS. ti 8.0 (Muhr, 2017), a strongly inductive method useful for deriving conceptual categories from the data.

Data analysis was carried out through a bottom-up approach, and based on Corbin and Strauss's recommendations (Corbin & Strauss, 2008); as good practice in GTM, the process of data analysis starts after the first

interviews were collected and this was aimed at shaping subsequent interview questions in light of the acquired data.

The research team adopted a reflexivity-based iterative process throughout the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the qualitative material.

The interviews were analysed following three coding steps: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. In open coding, two researchers coded independently the interviews, generating a diversity of codes and compared the coding to test the reliability of the coding process and thereafter they met regularly to review and discuss codes.

After this phase, the entire team, starting a collaborative and reflexive process contributed to the axial and selective coding processes, in which these codes were collected into larger code groups and then framed in wider macro-categories.

Several and consistent meetings provided further opportunities for reflection on the assumptions that brought to data analysis and how these might be shaping and defining interpretation. Indeed, the last coding generates what is known as the core category, which is a category that connects all other macro-categories into a theoretical framework.

Memo writing throughout the process captured the reflexive thoughts of the researchers during the coding process and the heterogeneity of the research team, composed of senior and junior researchers, was used as a resource to better interpret the content of the interviews.

In addition, towards the end of the analytical phase, an independent coder separately analysed the data, reaching similar conclusions. Whenever discrepancies were found, they were discussed with the research team and integrated into the analysis of the data.

The research steps and phases followed the guidelines for qualitative research (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme, 2018).

RESULTS

The analysis of the textual material resulted in 195 codes, subsequently grouped into 20 code groups and 7 macro-categories: Problematic areas; University and territory; Relational dimensions; Justice; Mattering; Perceived and proposed academic well-being; and Desired university context. Table 1 reports the coding process with some examples of attribute codes, all code groups and macro-categories.

Problematic areas

In this macro-category what emerged was a double meaning concerning the problematic areas, both from the organizational and the structural point of view.

Area of organizational problems. Within this code group, interviewees talked about planning as a poorly structured process, without design. In this sense, they underlined the lack of a shared design line and therefore the need to create shared design spaces that guarantee the opportunity to give voice to all requests: "the focus of the people around a project is missing, in my opinion, it would bring out all the positive energies around the positive actions of a department" (M, 45, scholar). Moreover, they complained about the poor work organization: "malaise due to unclear procedures, one does not know who should do what and therefore it is taken for granted that some things are done by some people that instead should be done by others at the university level" (F, 54, clerk).

Finally, a further meaning of this code group referred to the availability of an active internal communication system which, however, can also induce problems in terms of absence of boundaries. The clerks perceive constant expectations on their availability in responding to the requests and the needs of the scholars and students affecting the organization and management of their work.

An interviewee referred specifically to the right of disconnection: "it is not said that when I wake up, I must be available to the world [...]. In fact, I wake up early just to have time for myself before I work, so [...] instead, I get reached by WhatsApp messages of work groups that have multiplied. Here, for example, is a negative effect, especially in academia" (M, 46, scholar). In other participants' view, this aspect needs to be addressed, especially after the new communication path introduced by the Covid-19 emergency and remote working practice.

Area of structural problems. As regards to this code group, workspaces were often mentioned in both positive and negative terms. The positive sense regarded the amplitude and the adequacy of the workspaces: "the spaces are such also to be able to manage numerous presences, meanwhile, a minimum quota of well-being is guaranteed" (M, 45, scholar). The negative declination of this category concerned the need or just a desire, for a space for socialization or sharing: "maybe we lack a place where... a relaxation room, for example, where we can take a short break" (F, 43, clerk) or "what is missing is a meeting space for professors" (M, 46, scholar).

Table 1 – Coding process

Codes	Codes groups	Macro-categories
Absence of online boundaries; Absence of shared planning; Well-being in the workplace; Situation load; Teaching load; Disorganization of work; Disorientation of the students; Excess of bureaucracy that hinders well-being; Obligation of office hours; Organisation of activities; Work imbalance; Turnover	Area of organizational problems	Problematic areas
Need for equipment and infrastructure; Spaces to be enhanced; Working spaces; Recreational spaces for teachers; Recreational spaces for students	Area of structural problems	
Actively involve citizens; Make research available to the territory; proactivity of the university (in the territory); University as a source of trust and hope for the young people of the territory; University as positive image of the city; University as hope; University as the only resource of the territory; University for cultural change	Role of the university in the territory	University and territory
Deterioration of the territory; Territory as an obstacle to the university; Territory as a complex and problematic reality; Territory critical; Territory not receptive	Critical dimensions of the territory	
Well-being as collaboration; Working well as mutual trust; Collaborative climate; Collaboration between departments; Communication as a source of personal well-being; Cooperation; Synergy; Organizational support; team building	Positive relational dimensions	Relational dimensions
Interpersonal conflicts as a source of harm to the university; Conflict that affects the well-being of students; Difficulties with colleagues; Difficulties in relationships with others; Ongoing interventions to reduce conflict; Malaise caused by exclusion; Disrespect; Fear of sharing information	Negative relational dimensions	
Collective well-being; Welfare as justice; Equal distribution of the workload; free will	Distributive justice	Justice
Need for transparency; Clarity of processes; Clarity of rules and regulations of rules; Lack of clarity of the objectives and tasks of its function; Transparency	Procedural justice	
Malaise as unfairness and injustice; Need to put everyone on the same level; Need to adopt a meritocratic system	Injustice	
Align the work hours of scholars with those of clerks; Lack of recognition by top management; Non-recognition; Marginal role of clerks	Lack of recognition	Mattering
People before workers; Recognition; Formal recognition as a source of individual well-being	Recognition	
Wellness as satisfaction; Rewards by category; Reward and incentive	Reward	

Codes	Codes groups	Macro-categories
Attention to well-being; Attention to diversity; Organizational change as a source of malaise; Need to break with the past; Pride in the university; Existing services; Unifg as a community	Perception of the current state	
Attention to health; Benefits of smart-working; Reconciliation of travel and work time; Professional-private life balance; Training as a concrete action; Ongoing training; Proposal for change of vision of work; Smart-working proposal; Psychological support	Proposals to promote well-being	Perceived and proposed academic well-being
Well-being as absence of boredom; Well-being as balance; Well-being as work satisfaction; Well-being arising from beauty; Well-being in a multi-density sense	Personal representations of well-being	
Supportive environment; Air conditioning as a source of physical well-being -psychophysical; Activities carried out for the promotion of well-being; Actions to promote well-being; proactivity - initiative; Resilience	Resources to promote well-being	
"Jump the puddle"; the city I would like; new generations at the centre; Perception of a change for well-being; "here comes the sun"; Hope	Hope	
Increasing the sense of belonging; Environmental conditions to increase the sense of belonging; Social identity; Not recognizing oneself in a department; Sense of belonging	Sense of belonging	Desired university context
Central institutional interest; Recovery of institutional dimensions; Request for participation in decision-making processes; University as freedom of expression; Values	University as value	

Respondents clearly acknowledged the quality of the working spaces, but they also voiced the need to improve spaces devoted to facilitating personal interactions and communications.

Participants also referred to the need for equipment and infrastructures that inevitably represent a problematic area: "many of them believe that offices are not suitable to meet all the needs in terms of achieving the objectives, I am also talking about technological resources trivially" (F, 38, clerk).

University and territory

This macro-category collected codes that refer to the relationship between the university and the territorial context in which it is embedded.

Role of the university for the territory. Within this code group, the idea that the university is a promoter of well-being for the territory seemed rather widely shared and relevant: "I do not know what Foggia without the university would be now" (M, 46, scholar) or "if there were no University in Foggia it would be a very bad thing for the city. The university has helped a lot, in my opinion, the promotion and improvement of this city" (F, 43, clerk).

These statements displayed a strong attachment to the territory and a solid social identity: some also revealed a certain emotion in saying that the city context is benefiting from the presence of the university.

Moreover, participants underlined the role of the university as the main resource for the territory. Respondents highlighted the difficulties that characterize the territory at a social level, but also to the potential of the university as a

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promoter of well-being: "is a territory in which we are called to face complex social situations [...] we are therefore faced with a very important challenge [...] the university as well as all the educational structures that act on the territory such as schools, must have the strength to produce an important change and therefore education becomes an important lever for change" (F, 51, scholar). In this case, there was also a strong reference to the primary mission of the university: training, recognized as a tool for social change.

Critical dimensions of the territory. Although some participants recognized this role of the university, others highlighted a lack of responsibility on the part of the community: "I am not convinced that the citizens of Foggia have well understood the wealth that the university brings and could bring to the territory" (F, 45, clerk) and also "it is a symptom of a cultural heritage that does not do well, because it does not approach, because it does not allow the community to be brought closer to academia, therefore to the university" (F, 31, scholar).

It is interesting to note that a sort of asymmetry in communication was perceived and that this was one of the major problems for well-being also in the territorial context.

The asymmetry was clarified by another participant focussing on the slow recognition of the university role by the inhabitants "the university is a great opportunity and the territory has not managed to fully understand it and exploit it. Foggia is very slow to grasp this opportunity, but slowly something is moving. I would like it to accelerate a little in this movement, indeed, the university and the territory go at two different speeds" (F, 56, scholar).

It seemed that this interchange between the university and the territory was already in place, but that it is still to be taken care of and strengthened, so as to create a bond characterized by greater harmony, integration, and openness. "There is a mentality that is a bit […] there is a bit of reluctance [...] a cultural heritage that in my opinion does not fully allow that third mission, of which we spoke before. That is, there is a bit of a culture of suspicion" (F, 31, scholar).

Relational dimensions

Interpersonal relationships emerged as a key element in different aspects of both individual well-being and as a strength for a working environment characterized by sharing and community.

Positive relational dimensions. Some interviewees described their job emphasizing their involvement in the creation of working groups and teamwork: "always in this circular logic, not according to the logic of the military despot that has under him [...]. This kind of logic is fine in certain contexts but I always try to create group and teamwork here" (M, 49, clerk).

Others recognized the importance of the group as a strength for achieving personal and working well-being: "feeling part of a cog, because obviously, my fear at the time I came here was this, that was not feeling part of a group, for me, that is the foundation of well-being" (F, 31, scholar).

Negative relational dimensions. Most statements relating to the relational dimension had a positive connotation and described the current working context; on the other hand, some negative opinions focused on interpersonal conflicts and difficulties with colleagues, capable of hindering the natural development of activities and the construction of well-being: "what disappoints me most is the relationship between colleagues that in this department is not the best" (M, 53, scholar).

Even the organizational support, which was perceived or expected, seemed a recurring theme often described as fundamental for the performance of work activities: "in recent years, something has changed. The fact that we are more listened to has changed. There will also be cases where you do not feel understood, but they will be individual cases; then I speak collectively. Here, collectively the theme of well-being is more listened to" (F, 43, clerk), and still "well-being is being put in a position to be able to give the maximum" (M, 49, clerk).

Justice

Justice was a recurring theme when participants talked about well-being in employment. In particular, this macro-category collects codes referring to distributive justice, procedural justice, and injustice.

Distributive justice. This code group related to well-being as justice, with a collective and community dimension: "a fair distribution of the personal workload must guarantee the opportunity for everyone to have access to incentives" (M, 48, clerk), or also: "to think more in a collegial way, collegiality not to the individual but to the collective well-being not of the individual or the individual department or the individual

office. Therefore, to bring well-being to all, a chorus in the action of well-being" (F, 49, clerk).

Procedural justice. Many participants referred to elements that encourage or, on the contrary, hinder the serene performance of work activities: "because often when there is confusion about the roles and the various labels that must be imposed within a working group, often this confusion affects the concept of organizational and working well-being" (F, 38, clerk); "malaise, which has depended on regulations, decrees or notices, competitions in which the principle of transparency is not respected, fairness, to give little advantages to some in spite of others" (F, 45, clerk).

Moreover, some of them believed that resources are distributed and invested in a non-transparent or inconsistent way: "often the perception I have is that the University of Foggia works with deadlines of a week or a month and how do you manage to be transparent [...] a lack of transparency that is sometimes systematically linked to the absence of a vision" (M, 46, scholar) and also: "we need to start with transparency and be aware of why we apply certain criteria for awarding additional assignments, and we are talking about important economic resources, in order to establish a stake in terms of consistency, between what is the additional assignment and what is the additional salary and the premises must be created to create less tension" (M, 48, clerk).

Mattering

This macro category expressed the feeling of being recognized and valued by the work context.

Lack of recognition. Some significant examples had been identified in the code group lack of recognition: "try to be appreciated but find indifference or annoyance on their part" (M, 46, scholar) or "I do not feel, as a working category, I do not feel I belong, in a consistent way, to the decisions of the university policies" (F, 45, clerk).

There seemed to be a general need for recognition and reward both by the teaching staff and by administrative technicians: "choices about careers that leave a bitter taste in the mouth of colleagues, and it is not clear why" (M, 46, scholar) and also "you know that your contribution is also evident and fundamental. This, in my opinion, is what makes me feel good at least" (F, 31, scholar).

Recognition. Recognition was also understood as the need to highlight and increase awareness of their tasks: "the

work processes themselves should be clear, that is, we have a technostructure, we know the people who are part of that service or that other service, but it is not clear all the activities that a service must carry out, this is something that we have been carrying on for some time" (F, 54, clerk).

Reward. Rewards could be instruments for the recognition of one's work in the university context. In particular, it was interesting what an interviewee reported requesting a non-economic reward, such as a day off to rest that recognizes the effort made to achieve important work tasks. In his/her words rest represents the need to regain a state of well-being after heavy workload conditions. "The rewards are to recognise who does their job well and who doesn't, you have to offer some type of reward. I do not want to say that it must be an economic incentive but even, for example, a day of leave at the end of a completed job" (F, 42, clerk).

Perceived and proposed academic well-being

Four distinct code groups were gathered in this macro-category: perception of the current state, proposals to promote well-being, personal representations of well-being, and resources to promote well-being.

Perception of the current state. Perceptions of the present condition were generally positive and recognized an active commitment on the part of leaders in the promotion of well-being: "I believe that in this university there is a strong focus on well-being and that therefore it orients itself to try, in any way, to accommodate all these levels, to improve, however, communication and the environment of collaboration between different colleagues also from different disciplines. This seems to me to be an important opening; a place, however, well cared for, as much as it tends to take care concerning instruments, places and dimensions" (F, 48, scholar). Among the proposals expressed for the promotion of well-being, there were some references to the desire for ongoing training: "and we feel the need for continuous training of the employee, so that, makes him aware" (M, 49, clerk).

Proposals to promote well-being. This code group collected all codes referring to ideas or effective proposals that respondents have for the promotion of well-being in their university. Great attention to both physical and psychological well-being emerged: "As for my point of view, I am very practical: sincerely, among the forms of well-being

that I would expect, but maybe I do not know if it is right, correct, there would also be greater attention to our health not only mental, but physical. That is, we have a polyclinic, and we have no benefit, as personnel, but it can be extended to the whole community, even to teachers [...] we do not have any agreement that creates a path, like saying, I do not say facilitated at the economic level, but at least at the level of service (booking appointments...) to be able to undergo screening tests" (F, 51, clerk).

The attention increased especially during the period of the pandemic: "I gave a contribution as a therapist and as a psychologist, in the critical phase of the pandemic, I proposed the introduction of psychological counselling to the Rector, just to give a space of listening and technical support, specific, to everyone, then from students to professors, and the administrative staff. Therefore, in these two years, we were available practically 5 days a week, morning and afternoon, for all those who requested it. So, I have done a lot to reduce the sense of isolation, to reduce the anxiety deriving from the uncertainty of these difficult years, the depression of seeing life suspended, but also the obsessiveness, but also the hypochondria was in short something that increased a lot" (F, 48, scholar).

Personal representations of well-being. The representations of well-being involved both the strictly individual and the relational sphere, also reinforcing in this way the importance of the community and support, already highlighted in the 'relational dimension' macro-category. For example, there were descriptions which focused mainly on the relational aspect: "in my opinion, the word wellness comes from being well together, with others. Only if we are comfortable with others can we be comfortable at the individual level" (M, 48, clerk). Following this vein, there is great space for predictors of job satisfaction, such as a sense of community and relations with colleagues, which in turn can positively affect well-being as well. There are also other representations that could be defined as more systemic in nature: "well-being cannot be enclosed in small and few aspects, but in a larger set it makes the person feel good both mentally and physically. Well-being depends on many aspects, therefore the work, the family, the friendships, environments, and also the predisposition of the person play a joint role" (M, 50, clerk). It seems that workers are conveying a representation of well-being that confirms the ecological perspective defined by Prilleltensky (2012); indeed, they express a strong interdependence between individual, organizational and community well-being.

Resources to promote well-being. Finally, in the category of resources to promote well-being we included the organizational support and how its perception is fundamental for the well-being of not only individuals but also the work environment: "I also think that well-being is customization and therefore there is well-being at the working level if your organization is able to understand your specific needs and then orient the work choices according to your needs and predispositions" (M, 48, clerk).

A context capable of detecting the professional resources of employees by enhancing more congenial jobs by virtue of their skills and needs was considered to be a key issue for to the protection of everybody's well-being in the workplace.

Desired university context

In this macro category, there were elements representing the ideal context of participants in order to promote and enhance well-being.

Hope. This code group contains codes and quotation that recall a general sense of hope, understood as a possibility for the future. In particular, a sense of hope of being able to take advantage of all the potential of the university, in particular to take advantage of young people trained in the academic context, was recurrent: "students must find a job here instead of moving to the North or leaving Italy. It would be more profitable if they stayed here. Obviously, it is not a situation that affects everyone, there are also those who find work in Foggia" (F, 43, clerk). Meanwhile, the sense of Hope is also intended as a possibility to develop the local territory better and to activate in its context more collaborations to counter any form of fragmentation:

"Support those who choose to stay in this difficult and complicated territory and try to transform it" (F, 51, scholar). A further goal was to propose inter-institutional collaboration spaces supporting internal calls that "encourage university projects to coalesce groups with institutional interests; this could be an innovative institutional solution" (M, 53, scholar).

Sense of belonging, Moreover, increasing one's sense of belonging was considered to be one of the objectives to promote because it is considered an important resource to protect the academic context, especially in times of difficulty: "belonging is something I would work on, because in my opinion, when there are critical or unstable conditions, the sense of belonging is a potential resource for well-being" (F,

48, scholar).

Participants also called for better communication with university students to find a real dialogue and contact point with them.

University as value. Finally, this study highlighted clerks' and scholars' visions and representations of well-being in the university context during the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. At this time the potential of well-being at universities was defined by this quote: "University is freedom. Freedom of expression, and then, I have the image of a university in constant motion in the direction of growth" (F, 56, scholar).

Moreover, the respondents stressed the importance of justice and mattering as elements promoting well-being in the university context. Therefore, the importance of procedural and distributive justice and the possibility of increasing personal recognition and contribution were mentioned as the main expectations of respondents to ensure well-being. Last but not least, the potential identity and distinctiveness attributed to the University of Foggia, was considered a significant value issue for the enhancement of its territory.

Overall, giving space to desires and expectations is a key motivation factor toward well-being; for example, the desire for relational attachment is an essential human motivation associated with well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 2017). An agentic hopeful disposition can have a positive impact on personal well-being (Pleeging Burger & van Exel, 2021), also the belongingness feeling is positively related to health and well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 2017).

The core category

The core category that best expressed the representations and perceptions of the well-being that emerged from the responses of both the scholars and clerks involved in our study was "University: bonding and bridging for the future".

The respondents had a positive expectation that the University of Foggia would increase the well-being of those who work there. In fact, trust and hope were the words reported about the possibilities of increasing their own well-being and the entire academic community. Respondents, therefore, recognized the potentiality of the academic context.

For the respondents, the trigger and main resource of the promotion of well-being in the academic community was the

relational dimension. Creating collaborative and supportive links was considered very significant for an increasingly wellness-oriented vision of the future.

Although the participants recognized the difficulties of the territory, they were aware that the university plays a significant role in being the pivot identity of the city and promoting and encouraging a positive and project-oriented vision of the future for young citizens; thus, making the cultural domain a context of possible future planning for young people.

The area dedicated to the well-being of the city was among the most mixed: there were references to the difficulty for citizens to receive and absorb the initiatives promoted by the university, as well as the importance of training students who may have the desire to remain in their home territory.

Finally, also the images of well-being strongly recall the sense of hope. In many interviews, the possibility of improving the well-being of the university is common and transversal. This possibility of improvement is expressed through various images, such as the idea of a peaceful skyline and films whose plot is based on the possibility of redemption and resilience, increasing a process of change in contexts characterized by few resources.

DISCUSSION

Universities had to make profound changes in their educational and work organization during the Covid-19 emergency and the impact of this new mode has been widely demonstrated (Marino & Capone, 2021; Novara et al., 2022). Well-being in the academic context of students and staff has become one of the main issue investigated in this specific moment of emergency (Nurunnabi, Almusharraf & Aldeghaither, 2020).

In particular, it is relevant the impact that the isolation from Covid-19 has produced in the human and organizational relations of the university system.

Our findings showed that for scholars and clerks, the central conditions for their well-being in the academic context were: justice, mattering, and relationships. Already other studies have emphasized the importance of procedural justice in promoting academic staff well-being (Mugizi, Rwothumio & Amwine, 2021; Pignata, Winefield, Provis & Boyd, 2016).

The relationship between distributive justice and

procedural justice with psychological well-being was positive and significant (Huong, Zheng & Fujimoto, 2016; Sahai and Singh, 2016).

In this regard, Prilleltensky (2012) considered justice as a fundamental aspect of well-being and happiness, according to which the individual is the only maker of his/her own life, to take up a new vision in which a well-lived life is the outcome of personal efforts that are interlinked with the opportunities provided by the environment.

Finley (2016) considered that each university has to assume well-being into their ethos and missions. Other scholars highlighted (Carter, Andersen, Turner & Gaunt, 2022; Keeling, 2014; Sherman, 2020) the importance of justice, respect for rights, and care, underlining their significance in creating a conducive environment for well-being in academic contexts.

Another important aspect considered essential for well-being is mattering, defined by Prilleltensky (2014) as "an ideal state of affairs consisting of two complementary psychological experiences: feeling valued and adding value" (p.151). Within the academic context in several studies the importance of promoting mattering has been argued to increase conditions of well-being (Newton, Dooris & Wills, 2016; Prilleltensky et al., 2020; Schwartz, 2023).

Moreover, referring to relational dimensions, the centrality of positive relationships in enhancing one's well-being emerged in our study. As a recent review points out, relational dimensions remain central to all theorizing on well-being even though there is still the need to delve deeper into the qualities of positive relationships and how they take into account the specifics of the context in which they were established (Mertika, Mitskidou & Stalikas, 2020).

Our findings confirm that any type of intervention must be designed with reference and sensitivity to the organization. Borrowing the Gestalt principle that "everything is more than the sum of the individual parts", it is fundamental to focus on the idea of a system, context, and collective vision, in order to take care of the individual relational structures that are inside. Tay (2021) assumed that well-being in university must be considered in a complex sense that includes the well-being of all members of the university context.

Finally, it emerges the recognition of the university as an institution that promotes hope both for those who work and study in it but also for the territorial context in which it is located.

Tight (2019) identified eight major areas of research in academic context, including teaching and learning, course design, the student experience, quality, system policy, institutional management, academic work, knowledge, and research. Moreover, a positive university actively encourages the utilization of individual and institutional strengths for the benefit of all members within the educational community (Oades, Robinson, Green & Spence, 2014).

This finding is particularly interesting during the post covid where malaise produced by isolation and distrust of both, Others and institutions was one of the challenges facing scholarly communities and professionals. Recently, Ericsson and Kostera pointed out that: "the university as a bringer of hope is an institution of acknowledging complexity, perceiving and narrating it, and turning it into an engagement with the Other" (p. 309, 2022).

Due to the characteristics of qualitative research, the number of participants is limited and recruited with a purposive sample, so our study has as its main limit the non-replicability of the inferential process that induces the generalization of the data to the general population. The views expressed by the participants in this study cannot fully represent the experiences of all the workers of the University of Foggia, or are generalizable to the workers of other universities.

CONCLUSIONS

This study also highlighted that focussing on university well-being enhancement will give operational indication for the governance of the university such as:

a) to create clear pathways for an increasingly transparent and fair university;

b) to welcome, support and strengthen the university's future plans and projects through the definition of objectives and their sharing in the university community;

c) to support and promote positive relationships among academic staff, including taking into account the support and limits of technology. In fact, the impact of the recent Covid-19 has highlighted the perverse effects of new technological tools (i.e., office chats, e-mail) and the need for regulation of communications;

d) to create actions aimed at promoting hope and trust within the university contest and in its relationship with the territorial community.

All practical implications of our study are strategically

important to overcome the impact of the recent pandemic which has reduced traditional personal communication systems, has increased the need for effective technologies, but at the same time is requiring new forms of regulation of worker/co-worker interactions, and work/life balance.

The Unifg Pro.be project (see https://www.unifg.it/it/ ateneo/salute-sicurezza-benessere/progetto-benessere- probe) applied an innovative participatory methodology (Francescato & Aber, 2015) to promote university well-being. In this frame this research was a preliminary step to gather the voice of clerks and scholars emphasizing specific strengths and weaknesses specifically related to the post Covid-19 time.

Further activity will be directed to deepen students' needs and to create opportunities for shared discussions within the university and in the town of Foggia. In fact, the whole project is intended to be an example of best practice in promoting academic well-being from an ecological and systemic perspective. Its challenge is in being a participatory project aimed at the enhancement of horizontal and vertical communications among the whole community and its stakeholders. Public engagement and shared participatory actions are requested to the university management and all its members. To create a university capable of bonding and bridging for the future, cannot be a say it should be a shared strategy.

Declaration of interests: The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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