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Decent work and healthy employment: a qualitative case study about Colombian millennials

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to show how a group of Colombian millennials perceive different aspects of working life and how their ideas about job satisfaction, professional expectations, and levels of autonomy are related to contemporary demands about inclusion, diversity, equity, autonomy, and control. With this objective, 167 semi-structured interviews were conducted with millennials who work at 10 Colombian companies from the manufacturing and service sectors, located in the 5 main cities of the country. With a qualitative approach in the interviews, the research team used a strategy inspired by the technique of generating visual structures associated with grounded theory. It is concluded that new generations of Colombian workers know of the importance of rewards and autonomy in work and are more critical and less passive in the face of unhealthy working conditions. At the same time, their conduct and speeches are the consequence of the characteristics of the Colombian labour market. The document responds to the need to deepen the debates on welfare and happiness in organizations and to include the demands of millennials in the reflective and political horizon of the ideas of healthy employment and decent work. In practice, this article seeks to demystify ideas about millennials in Colombia and critically contribute to reflection on intergenerational relations in organizations and salary and welfare models. As a Latin American case, it is an original contribution that avoids the common places and the frivolity with which the insertion of the new generations into the working world has been analysed.

Keywords

Millennial workers, job satisfaction, employee involvement, Colombia.

JEL Classification

J28, M12, M54, C25

1. Introduction

Thinking of decent work as healthy means that a healthy job is one that meets the criteria of work organization (intensity, stability, wage); inclusion, diversity, and equity; and autonomy, freedom of association, and possibility of collective bargaining. These criteria, that describe a healthy work, gather the decent work concepts and indicators proposed by Dharam Ghai (2003) and are framed by the proposals of the International Labour Organization (ILO) (Somavia, 1999). They are also consistent with the medical evidence on the increase in mental disorders as a result of poor working conditions, job instability, insufficient wages, labour outsourcing, subcontracting, flexible working patterns, social inequality, lack of opportunities, income inequality, social stratification, work intensification, reduction of vacation and private time, among other aspects related to work organization (Schnall et al., 2009).

An extensive academic literature has demonstrated the psychological effects of unemployment (Blustein, Olle, Connors-Kellgren, & Diamonti, 2016); however, psychological burden is not limited to unemployment. Research on job precariousness around the world has made it possible to strengthen criticism of material production conditions by demonstrating that its chronicity is a source of continuous stress and that labour market instability increases physical and emotional exhaustion, given that workers skip the necessary breaks for fear of losing their job (Blustein et al., 2016). In this way, 'insecurity [has caused a negative impact] on well-being, self-esteem, and social recognition, all of which [being] as damaging […] as […] insecurities linked to unemployment' (Blustein et al., 2016, p. 4).

In line with this literature and that which evidences the changes and precariousness of work in different places of the world (Abenza et al., 2017), this research poses the question about the relation between the behaviour of millennials in the organizations and the characteristics of employment in Colombia. Initially, the purpose was to reflect on the meaning and the relation that the Colombian millennials establish with work and the organizations[1]. However, analysing the interviews systematically, rereading them, and problematizing them show a significant similarity between the expressions and arguments of the millennials interviewed and the discussions about the employment crisis in the contemporary world. Hence the question about the connection between health and work in the discourse of millennials. The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to evaluate the job satisfaction and dissatisfaction expressions, the employment ambitions and projections, the professional expectations, and the levels of autonomy of this group of millennials in order to demonstrate that they—consciously, implicitly, or explicitly—demand *decent* and *healthy* forms of employment. The paper is also an answer to the need to go deeply into the debate on organizational well-being and happiness and include the millennials' demands in the reflective and political horizon of labour and social rights, at a time when the future of labour does not seem very promising.

The essence of this paper can be found in the *Decent work and healthy work: results of a case study with Colombian millennials* section, which assesses the connection between the dimensions of healthy work and the responses of the interviewees about their employment ambitions and projections; professional expectations; autonomy and self-management; and leadership and authority. These so-called motivational factors are problematized in the light of current debates on the connection between decent work indicators and employment conditions and their relation to psychological health and well-being (Benach & Muntaner, 2010; Benach,

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[1] The results of other questions about millennials posed by the research team are currently evidenced in the following publications: Gonzales-Miranda, Gallo, Román Calderón, García-Cruz, & Giraldo-Arango (2019); Roman-Calderon, Gonzales-Miranda, García, & Gallo (2019).

Muntaner, & Solar, 2010; Benavides et al., 2002; Blustein et al., 2016; Gómez Ortíz & Juárez García, 2016; Schnall et al., 2009; Vives, González, Moncada, Llorens, & Benach, 2015).

However, this would not be comprehensible without first explaining the term *millennials*, presenting the theoretical dimensions of occupational health, and describing the generalized precariousness of the Colombian labour market and the possible relations to the health of employees.

For the purpose of this paper, the terms millennials and Generation Y refer to those individuals born between 1981 and 2000, in contrast to baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) and Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980). Baby boomers were protected by strict labour laws and a solid social protection system; Xers, on the contrary, joined the working world amid a crisis of the Welfare State. Employment conditions for Generation Y are more precarious because they are less collectively represented and less socially protected, and, although they are more qualified than previous generations, they are nicknamed 'baby losers' (Méda & Vendramin, 2013).

Since the 1980s, changes in production models and the consolidation of neoliberalism have encouraged social and human sciences to reflect on how subjects construct and reconstruct their identities in these contexts of organizational change and management boom. Thus, the core of the sociology of work encompasses, on the one hand, the individual and social impact of the restructurings, mergers, acquisitions, and privatizations of organizations, as well as the peripheral capitalism of Latin America with its forms of labour precariousness, the rise of semi-skilled jobs, or the forms of modern slavery; and, on the other hand, it encompasses the effects of the permanent search for competitiveness and employability or for creativity and autonomy in working hours that fluctuate between rigidity and flexibility.

Indeed, the production of subjectivities in the management era seems to have no limits. The 'productive subject' is now responsible for the production of well-being, pleasure, and happiness. The ascetic performance corrodes the social bonds and strengthens detachment and indifference. Flexibility and polyvalence force the productive subject to excessive positivity (never say no to work) and, as a consequence, a culture of anxiety seems to be established (Antunes, 2015; Durand, 2011; Han, 2012, 2012, 2014; Laval & Dardot, 2013, 2015; Le Goff, 2009; Rifkin, 1996).

The trivialization of well-being in the workplace is materialized in the emergence of practices such as coaching (López Gallego, 2008) and neurolinguistic programming (D. Gonzalez-Miranda, 2011), as well as in the increasing industry of happiness (Davies, 2016). In the first case, a series of New Age practices is combined with Psy discourses aimed at persuading the productive subjects (Rose, 1999) to adapt to forms of work organization and employment conditions marked by competitiveness and voluntary servitude. In the second case, positive psychology, an amalgam of Western and Eastern knowledge, promotes the creation of happiness managements, while in scenarios such as the World Happiness Summit, actions are encouraged to release emotions, identify powers, develop leadership, or understand relationships. The point is that both coaching and happy management opt to change the way in which context is experienced, instead of transforming reality or the institutions that produce pain or unhappiness.

During the last decades, several conceptual models have been proposed to measure potentially stressful working conditions: psychological demand, level of control, effort-reward balance,

and organizational justice (Benach & Muntaner, 2010). Based on these models, it has been suggested that low control of working conditions, high psychological demand, effort-reward imbalance, and organizational injustice increase the risks of developing coronary disease and psychiatric morbidity (Benach & Muntaner, 2010). Meta-analyses of psychosocial stressors and mental health show that low decision-making freedom, high demand at work, low social support, strain at work, and effort-reward imbalance were risk factors related to mental disorders. They may be additionally associated with obesity, alcohol dependence, musculoskeletal problems, coronary heart disease, diabetes, among other complications (Benach & Muntaner, 2010). Similar to these models, the Employment Precariousness Scale (EPRES) introduces six dimensions: temporariness, disempowerment, vulnerability, wages, rights, and exercise of rights. Although the scale was designed to measure employment precariousness during the recent Spanish economic crisis, in this paper, the six dimensions serve as categories of analysis, together with decent work indicators such as intensity, inclusion, diversity, equity, autonomy, freedom of association, and possibility of collective bargaining. Subsequently, a correlation was established between the healthy work dimensions obtained from the synthesis of the debates on the subject and the EPRES and the emerging categories of the systematic analysis of the information obtained during the interviews:

Figure 1. Healthy work dimensions
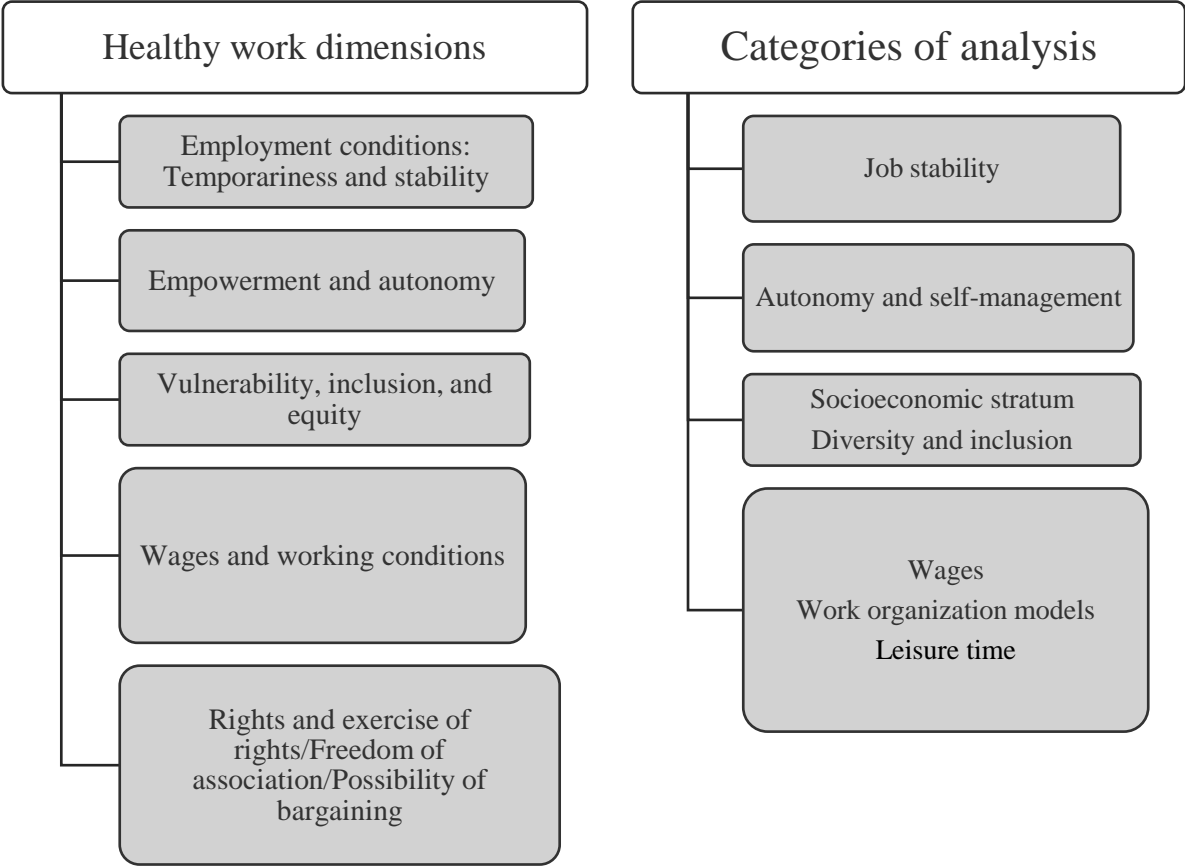
Following this introduction, Section 2 contains a brief review of labor characteristics in Colombia; Section 3 describes the data sources used in the analysis and methodology aspects; in Section 4, we present the findings on decent work and healthy work, and conclusions and the discussion are presented in Section 5.

2. Characteristics and working conditions in Colombia

The dimensions of healthy work (Figure 1), which we proposed in the previous section, make more sense in view of the characteristics of the labour market in Colombia and reflecting on the predominantly precarious situation and health condition. The purpose of this section is to indicate some contextual data on the characteristics of work in Colombia. In particular, it is important to highlight the indirect indicators of psychosocial risk factors, such as work organization models in Colombia (intensity, stability, wage); inclusion, diversity, and equity; and autonomy, freedom of association, and possibility of collective bargaining—in a similar way to the work of Viviola Gómez and Arturo Juárez (2016) in the Latin American case.

Two aspects are important to understand the scope and limitations of what will be exposed. First, this work intends to describe the current trend in national and international media because this is the trend relatable to the Colombian millennials; according to a magazine article, around 70% of the leaders of the country get the news from three print or digital media (Semana, 2018), important aspect to understand the social experience and expectation of work. Second, this paper does not intend to suggest an overview of the studies about the characteristics of the labour market in Colombia; therefore, consolidated data were collected from the ILO, the Colombian Ministry of Labour, and the National Union School. More than sectoral statistics, the figures included in the Colombia employment indicators table describe the situation in the country, at least from an official point of view.

Regarding work organization, it is well known that repetitive movements, reduction of the time available to perform them, and physical exhaustion were risks commonly related to the industrial and service sectors during the twentieth century. However, in recent decades, by means of the post-Fordist production models, researchers have demonstrated that, in addition to the physiological risks, work organization in Colombia, with its flexibility and low wages, has had a significant effect on the psychological health of workers. From this perspective, work intensity, added to instability, implies a high emotional and cognitive demand; the lack of control over the content of the work, added to the imbalance between the power of the employer and the power of the employee and the low social status are factors that, combined, create an environment of high psychosocial risk (Contreras, Juárez, Barbosa, & Uribe, 2010; Garrido-Pinzón, Uribe-Rodríguez, & Blanch, 2011; Gómez & Herrera, 2013; Muñoz & Hurtado Ocampo, 2016; Parra Vargas & Pulido Moreno, 2013; Sotelo-Suárez, Quiroz-Arcentáles, Mahecha-Montilla, & López-Sánchez, 2012). This situation is aggravated because half of the Colombian population is self-employed and the informal economy rate in the cities has been close to 60% in recent years (see Table 1).

Table 1. Colombia employment indicators

Indicator	2016	2017	2018
Occupied workers	22,156,140	22,382,580	22,457,000
Men	12,872,915	13,017,451	13,131,472
Women	9,283,226	9,365,130	9,325,682
Working informality rate (according to access to healthcare, pension, and occupational risk systems)	66.7%	65.9%	65.7%
Percentage of employees no employment contract	46.4%	46.9%	47.1%
Illegal labor relations	15,0%	12,3%	9,7%
Unemployment rate	9.2%	9.4%	9,7%
Unemployment rate – women	12.0%	12.3%	12.7%
Unemployment rate – men	7.1%	7.2%	7,4%
Unemployment rate – youth (18 to 28 years of age)	16.1%	16.1%	17.1%
Unemployment rate – adults (29 to 40 years of age)	8.1%	8.3%	8.2%
Unemployment rate – adults (41 to 60 years of age)	5.7%	5.9%	6.2%
Unionization rate (% of workers with a labor contract affiliated to a union)	4.63%	4.60%	No data

Source: National Department of Statistics (DANE); Colombian Insurers Association (*Federación de Aseguradoras Colombianas* - Fasecolda) and Colombian Labor Information Source (FILCO); Labor and Trade Union Information System of the Colombia's National Union School (*Escuela Nacional Sindical*); ILOSTAT database.

The figures in Table 1 are worrying because they suggest that Colombian employees have little room for manoeuvre, and their fear of unemployment forces them to accept degrading or precarious working conditions, even if they involve dangerous work environments. The commodification of working conditions leaves little room for negotiation, and as noted by Benach and Muntaner (2010, p. 57), 'the key to understanding employment relations and their impact on workers' health is to understand the workers' bargaining power, which gives them leverage to push for […] healthier working conditions'.

The unhealthiness of employment in Colombia and the region is also reflected in the moderate growth of the stable, formal employment rate; the increase in the unemployment rate in the last five years; and the stagnation of the decline in informal employment (Salazar-Xirinachs & Chacaltana, 2018). Thus, unemployment rates decrease due to the increase in precarious work, as can be observed in the increased self-employment or informality rates. Although self-employment does not mean precariousness, the challenges of competitiveness often result in forms of 'voluntary servitude', which lead to high levels of anxiety and stress. Regarding informal employment, it is known that it produces greater musculoskeletal disorders and is devastating for the well-being of individuals and their families (Benach & Muntaner, 2010, p. 146).

It is revealing that the unemployment rate among women is higher than that among men; and the unemployment rates among young people are worrying. In the case of women, the situation becomes aggravated because they are usually worse paid. Although they work 8.6 hours, they earn a wage 20.3% lower than men do. The following figures can help evaluate this problem: in 2016, 48.7% of people employed in the country earned less than a minimum wage (the legal minimum wage in Colombia in 2016 was COP 737,242, approximately USD 245), 37.2% earned between one and two minimum wages, and only 14.4% earned more than two minimum wages. The monetary poverty rate in 2017 was 26.9%, and the extreme poverty rate was 7.4%; according to figures from 2015, 13 million people live in poverty and 3.7 million, in extreme poverty. In Colombia, 9.1% of children work; 11 out of 100 young men are unemployed, and 20 out of 100 young women are unemployed (International Labour Organization, 2017). Thus,

the mix of instability, informality, and low wage becomes a fertile ground for situations of sexual harassment to be combined with harassment at work and for what this involves: anguish, strain at work, irritability, depression, fatigue, headaches, and absenteeism. It should be noted that 'labour market inequalities correlate significantly with health outcomes. In semi-peripheral countries [such as Colombia], labour market inequalities are significantly associated with a range of health outcomes' (Benach & Muntaner, 2010, p. 225).

In this regard, the results of the National Survey of Mental Health of Colombia (abbreviated ENSM in Spanish) (Gómez-Restrepo, 2015) show that absenteeism and absentmindedness at the workplace are associated with both physiological and psychological factors such as panic disorder, depression, and sleep disorders. In turn, these mental disorders are connected with reduced individual and family income and, in general, with a negative impact on life. In fact, the studies analysed in the survey suggest that mental disorders are the cause of 81% of presenteeism, while 56.3% of reduced productivity is related to the loss of time in working hours due to mental causes. Beyond these aspects that should alert the companies, the ENSM shows that most of the interviewees, that is 53.4%, whose ages vary between 18 and 44, have no contracts; 27.3% have indefinite contracts; 12.5%, fixed-term contracts; and 6.7% work under service agreements. Furthermore, 72.1% of the interviewees older than 45 have no contracts; 18.2% have indefinite contracts; 6.0%, fixed-term contracts; and 3.7%, service agreements (Gómez-Restrepo, 2015, p. 54). The first age group work 46.2 hours per week, four hours more than the ones they should work. The situation is similar with those older than 45, whose weekly working hours are 46.5. Thus, as a result of the stress produced by different factors associated with work—including uncertainty and extended hours of work—10 out of 100 occupationally active people were absent from their workplace in the twelve months before the measurement. According to the ENSM report, these factors help understand why 40% of the Colombian employed population have suffered a psychiatric disorder at any moment of their lives. In other words, the ENSM report shows that four out of ten Colombian workers claim to have suffered the psychological effects of working conditions in their lifetime.

The employment instability or contractual flexibility typical of the Colombian and Latin American labour markets correlate with reduced autonomy, possibility of bargaining, and freedom of association. If unemployment leads to risky behaviours and social isolation, the fear of becoming unemployed results in reduced autonomy because, according to some studies, employees feel more coerced when it comes to complaining about the risks of their work and have less control over their working hours and lower wages; factors that in the words of Benach and Muntaner produce 'detrimental psychological and physio-pathological changes, which lead to poorer health outcomes' (Benach & Muntaner, 2010, p. 251).

In addition to the limited control over work organization, the lack of autonomy, and the harassment at work, there is the historic and efficient anti-union policy that has resulted in the current unionization rate being 4.3%. Not surprisingly, the unionization rate in Colombia is far from the 27.7% in Argentina, 30.1% in Uruguay, 18.9% in Brazil, 28.4% in Canada, and 10.3% in the United States; not to mention the countries of northern Europe with rates above or close to 80% (ILOSTAT, 2018). As some researchers suggest, from north to south there are numerous cases of employees who state that they have experienced verbal abuse, harassment, pressure, or moral harassment to diminish what has been negotiated, decline applications, or resign from a union (Benach & Muntaner, 2010; Jacquier, 2003; Neffa, 2015). In short, in Colombia and other countries in the region, employees consider that their health has deteriorated as a result of organizational discrimination and pressure due to their participation in trade union activities

(Gómez Ortíz & Juárez García, 2016), but mainly because precariousness means lower benefits at the workplace, as well as an effort-reward imbalance.

3. Methodology

As part of *Colombian Millennials: An Approach to Their Profile and Organizational Development*, research conducted by Universidad Eafit between 2017 and 2018, 219 employees from 11 companies based in the main cities of the country were interviewed[2]. The population interviewed included 167 millennials (younger than 37) and 50 Generation Xers (older than 37). The Generation Xers interviewed were fewer because the research was designed to learn the relations of millennials with the organization; however, the bosses' impressions about millennials were also an interest of the researchers. In the end, 219 interviews were analysed, of which 8,925 citations were obtained and classified into 30 categories of analysis, among existing and emerging. All the interviews were conducted with the authorization of the participants and the consent of the companies. To preserve the employees' anonymity, an alphanumeric identification code was used. Thus, throughout the results section, codes such as ARLAE or ARAAC are used when quoting interviewees.

It is worth noting that, besides the results of the qualitative component presented in this paper, 2,516 interviews were applicable to this research—focused on characterizing the profile of the Colombian millennial—of which 2,389 were selected. Furthermore, thanks to the companies providing information about 3,113 employees, it was possible to correlate different organizational aspects (wages, positions, lengths of service, promotions) with information about job satisfaction, wage satisfaction, educational level, family structure, and behaviour characteristics. It would not have been possible to obtain this information without the authorization of the senior management of the companies and, above all, without their organizational interest to learn the distinctive features of this generation in Colombia. The researchers chose the companies based on the double possibility to access trustworthy information and to freely interview the employees; yet the size of the organizations, their presence in different cities of the country, and the diversity of the sector (industrial and services) were also considered.

Each semi-structured interview lasted forty minutes approximately. Cards of different colours and marked with categories, such as organization, motivation, communication, education, politics, religion, authority, leisure time, employment projection, knowledge, leadership, technology, friends, and socioeconomic stratum, were used to encourage conversation. This technique is inspired by the Structure Generation Technique (SGT) and analysis strategies using mind maps and networks of the grounded theory (Flick, 2007). The interviewer also had a guide with open-ended questions about wages, benefits, flexibility, monotony, remuneration, stability, facilities, working conditions, employment conditions, well-being, social responsibility, values, feedback, competences, relationship with bosses, centrality, verticality, autonomy, and empowerment.

The Atlas.ti software—that supports the qualitative data analysis process and is part of the wide group of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS)—was used in its version 8.1 to systematize and analyse the information obtained in the interviews (Friese, 2019, p. XXVI). Its usefulness lies in the possibility of arranging, integrating, visualizing, and presenting the information by means of networks (Friese, 2019, p. XXVI). The advantages and

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[2] See note 1.

disadvantages of the software are still under discussion, according to the special issue of the *RISTI (Revista Ibérica de Sistemas e Tecnologias de Informação)* (Costa, Faria, & Reis, 2016). Methods of systematic analysis of texts such as hermeneutics, grounded theory, content analysis, and other practical approaches use codes and categories as their fundamental basis (Kuckartz, 2013). In this sense, they follow the systematic qualitative data analysis procedure: data preparation, coding (abstraction, generalization, synthesis and comparison, code integration), theory delimitation, data presentation using concept maps or semantic networks, and composition and verification of conclusions (Bryant, 2014; Friese, 2019; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Saldaña, 2014; Silver & Lewins, 2014).

All the interviews were transcribed and then systematically codified, which involves the exploration of data using tag clouds and term frequency lists, as well as the reading of and search for incidents, phenomena, topics, words, and phrases that may represent regularities or similarity and difference regularities. The inductive and deductive coding procedure was combined with selective or abductive coding based on the literature evidence. This coding procedure favoured the control of a large amount of data (8,892 citations) and the observation of interactions and complementarities using tools such as the co-occurrence table, the query tool, and the network.

The method described above includes certain underlying principles of the grounded theory, the phenomenological approach, and the content analysis. As Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña suggest (Miles et al., 2014, p. 9), it is necessary to be 'shamelessly eclectic' in qualitative research. That eclectic, fluid, flexible, and innovative nature of qualitative research is precisely what enriches the analysis with overlaps and similarities, but also with differences in the theoretical and methodological approaches of social sciences (Freeman, 2017).

4. Decent work and healthy work: results of a case study with Colombian millennials
This section presents the results of the analysis of the interviews; therefore, it is the core of the paper. In order to expand the reflection scope of the content of the interviews analysed, some parallels with the literature on the subject are established and, at the same time, the theoretical perspectives are problematized and contrasted with the experiences of millennials in the labour market and their relation with the analytical dimensions laid out in the introduction: healthy work dimensions.

As set out in the introduction, the conditions of employment contracting or job stability are important to determine if the relationship with an organization is healthy and generates well-being or involves psychosocial risks. The first thing is that, contrary to what has been disseminated by the media, the Colombian millennial aspires to belong to an organization for a long period of time. Thus, in general, it can be concluded from what was stated by the interviewees that their contractual relationship with the organization is healthy because it enables processes of learning, training, education, promotion, and career plans. This involves indefinite- or long-term contracts that ensure a greater synergy and strength among work teams, as well as a return on investment in human capital: 'The more you're trained for the company, the more you'll have to offer it' (ARLAE). The trend towards indefinite- or long-term contracts is confirmed in the survey conducted to 2,110 millennials, according to which the average length of service is 3.1 years (Gonzalez-Miranda, Gallo, García Cruz, & Román Calderón, 2017, p. 29). Similar aspects have been studied in Colombia, but not from a qualitative perspective (García, Gonzales-Miranda, Gallo, & Roman-Calderon, 2019; Roman-Calderon, Gonzales-Miranda, García, & Gallo, 2019).

The above talks about the organization's 'healthy policies', but there are other arguments that show how the attributes of the labour market put a strain on and determine the relationship that the individual establishes with the organization in the search for emotional and financial stability (ARAAQ; TEAGM). Indeed, stability is aspired to because all their previous contracts had a fixed duration or were contracts for the provision of services, and there are family responsibilities that influence the decision, such as 'I'd rather keep what is secure because I have to provide some stability for my family and myself' (COMCDO).

Although exceptional in the group of interviewees, a situation seems to show psychosocial risks:

> First, because it can be a very desirable position, so once it doesn't work out well… because before [...] they didn't fire anyone [...], but now they say: 'This one doesn't meet certain criteria so he needs to leave, and those who drop their guard will also be fired', and since my position could be of interest for many people, I don't see myself here (CEAAC).

The duration of their contracts and the interviewees' sense of job stability is an indicator of non-precariousness. However, rather than concluding that the employment conditions in these organizations are healthy, what needs to be stressed here is the individual demand for employment stability. To put it bluntly, the employment stability indicator promoted by the ILO is in line with the social and labour expectations of Colombian millennials.

According to the EPRES, working hours and control over the wage rates are considered factors of analysis, but the indicators of empowerment and autonomy according to psychosocial stressors can also be associated with psychological demands, the degree of control over the working conditions, and the degree of social support. This is probably the dimension where similarity between the organizational behaviour of millennials and the challenges regarding job insecurity promoted by the ILO is more evident.

Moreover, three cardinal matters in the organizational sphere converge in this motivational dimension: leadership, authority, and motivation. In fact, autonomy and the possibility of self-management is considered by millennials as the expression of forms of leadership opposed to 'micromanagement', a practice that overwhelms, causes panic, oppresses, and frustrates (TESMM; TENDR). In this perspective, authority is seen as an overseeing, hostile, and uncomfortable behaviour. In the light of this model that is connected to the practices of 'harassment at work' due to its high psychological demands and limited degree of control, millennials defend independence, understanding, time management, and flexibility in hours. Using other words:

> […] Regardless of where you are, I believe that people like me need to act freely. Regardless of your financial position, we all have dreams, we're all creative. Every person in universities, educational institutions, or any place, even at school, has had dreams of what we want this society to be and what we want to do. I think that being ourselves and creating is what we value most; I mean, I'd appreciate that my leader would give me a topic and that I could freely develop it as I want, and I believe the same thing would happen to a construction worker of my age who would be delivered a drawing of a building and would be asked to show what he'd do with certain room. I mean, regardless of whether they pay him a wage different from mine, being able to build, being able to create becomes a motivation and makes you feel important,

regardless of your position, because your ideas and your knowledge are important (CEDAT).

CEDAT's words express the extent of the human possibilities within an organization and go against the precariousness and the drama of work-life imbalance or the rigidity of some forms of work organization, as will be discussed later.

CEDAT, like other millennials, allows us to imply that autonomy encompasses the possibility of dialogue, fair treatment, recognition, and respect, aspects that can be associated with vulnerability, inclusion, and equity. It can be said that vulnerability is accentuated when the individual lacks personal sources of power or when the economic dependence relationship hinders any possibility of claiming rights. This is particularly evident in those interviewees belonging to different socioeconomic strata: 'Millennials belonging to the lower stratum have probably had to take on roles and positions that don't have much potential for growth[,] promotion, and better salaries' (ARMPR); 'don't have the same promotion opportunities than a millennial belonging to the upper stratum' (POLNL); and 'have to work much harder' (GOSDP).

The situations can be more or less difficult; however, the interviewees belonging to the lower stratum agree that they and their families live off their work, hence they work on 'the first thing that comes out' (CEDCG); endure more prolonged workdays: 'I used to start working at seven in the morning and left at six in the evening, and I didn't have a lunch hour' (POAMC) and '[have] to travel two hours to work' (VAIG); accept dissatisfaction with working conditions: 'So I started to work, but I was bored, super bored, [but I had to pay the rent and help my mom]'; and consider that access to work validates their humanity, makes them socially respectable, and proves their social citizenship (PONGZ). In conclusion, 'those belonging to the higher stratum can be more influenced by motivational matters: what I want, how I can be happy, how I can grow; and maybe millennials belonging to the lower stratum, although they're motivated, focus more on how I can make a living and how I manage to find the balance between what I like and what I must do to make ends meet' (ARWJV).

Beyond accessing to luxury goods, interviewees belonging to the upper stratum consider that there are indeed differences between the upper and lower socioeconomic strata[3], which can be classified, according to Pierre Bourdieu, into two dimensions—in addition to the economic aspect: cultural capital and social capital (Fernández, 2012). The first can be illustrated by the recurrent mention of the level of education and the discrimination between public and private education as a mark that ensures or facilitates access to the labour market, especially in administrative roles. In this regard, AVGZH states: 'For instance, I studied in Politécnico [Jaime Isaza Cadavid], and you studied in Universidad Eafit, Universidad de Medellín, or whatever. I can pass the employment tests in a company, but just because you graduated from a good university, you make it, and I don't. That still happens a lot'. This is linked to social capital because access to the labour market depends on the family to which you belong or the 'social group with which you interact' (ARIEA), because 'nowadays, everything is about

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[3] It should also be noted that the wage level is closely related to the socioeconomic stratification existing in Colombia, which refers to a categorization into strata (from 1 to 6) based on residential properties that require public utilities. Although this official categorization is made to charge differently for public utilities—thus allowing subsidies to be assigned and contributions to be collected—it has a clear social impact that disintegrates, differentiates, marginalizes, and also unifies people in Colombia. This classification can be described as follows: lower strata (1 and 2), middle strata (3 and 4), and upper strata (5 and 6). This does not represent a minor aspect, as it openly declares a social condition that is backed by the government and, therefore, has a strong impact on people's lives.

connections. I don't know how it worked before, but today, everything is about connections' (BIJPJ). To put it bluntly: 'Even though you don't have the necessary experience, [being hired] by a company [depends] on if you are friends with the boss or owner' (ARIEA).

If we consider the interviewees' statements, discrimination and inequity situations take place in organizations different to where they work at or refer to past experiences. Whether this is true is irrelevant because, in any case, it shows that, regarding vulnerability, inclusion, and equity, the interviewees have experienced job insecurity at some point or know it through family and friends. Therefore, their behaviour in the organization submits to the competitiveness and employability needs. The aforementioned can be laid out differently: The millennials from the organizations studied are less vulnerable, but the social and labour context of the country puts a strain on the organizational relationship.

Although the wage dimension is secondary for one segment of millennials, as observed in the preliminary results of the research (Gonzales-Miranda et al., 2017, p. 29), it is also accurate that, among the interviewees and participants of the research, around 90% consider this a relevant factor. This aspect is also important because, according to the interview conducted for the referenced report, around 80% of interviewees are satisfied or very satisfied with their wage. However, what happens with the remaining dissatisfied or very dissatisfied 20%? It is the most vulnerable social group, belonging to strata 1, 2, and 3, with the worse jobs, wages, and conditions. As pointed out above, this group's fear of becoming unemployed results in reduced autonomy and less dissatisfaction manifestations even though they have less control over working hours and wages. For them, wage is 'a means to be able to have access to education, to have access to technology, to enjoy my time how I'd like, to have medical care, to have a decent home' (TESMM).

Although the formula changes, in the organizations studied, wage seems to be a motivational factor, especially, if it comes with an improvement of the working conditions. In this regard, POYGG states: 'Where I used to work, I didn't have that; I earned a biweekly wage of 600,000 pesos [USD 185], but only because every day I worked extra hours. But [here], if I work hard and do things right, I can grow at the company, earn more money, and specialize in many […], so you start to see advantages: more time for my daughter and husband'. For others, a wage makes a difference between living in overcrowded conditions in one room and living in a studio apartment with their family (POAAR).

Furthermore, the interviewees belonging to this socioeconomic stratum do not lose sight of the social context and openly question the Colombian wage policy while expressing their constant fear of having to live off a legal minimum wage, 'because some people I know earn a minimum wage and have two or three children; that's something. They barely go on vacation, and [buy] the necessary: food and clothes when possible, and of course mainly for their children' (BIJPJ). This is also a concern for those having two-year associate degrees and bachelor's degrees because they consider 'that very few [companies] pay well' (BIJPJ).

Finally, regarding the working conditions, two aspects can be emphasized considering the aim of this paper: (1) the balance between family, work, and leisure time and (2) the organization, the routines, and the working hours.

The first is probably the aspect that produces the most dissatisfaction and intergenerational conflict. It is argued that millennials lack commitment to organizations because work comes second in their lives. The employment and unemployment experiences associated with the

labour market perceptions are a key aspect to understand the loss of work predominance in life. From this standpoint, employment conditions would be decisive—not necessarily casual—factors for the appearance of a polycentric conception of existence or the absence of commitment to organizations. According to Méda and Vendramin (2013, p. 176), 'young people seem to foresee precariousness as something inevitable'. Ultimately, it is a healthy relationship with the organization or a spiritual independence strategy through which individuals, in their daily actions, deal with a corporate culture that intends to absorb all their private life:

> Living off one thing… You can't always depend on only one thing in life; you've got to have other sources, in case you have only one order tomorrow, the factory closes, or a new boss arrives; you have to leave here. I know what to do while I find a job. I can life off something: I depend on myself. That's why I use my free time in my project, as my life project, rather than in fooling around, resting. No, not me. I don't have that idea of free time anymore; free time is for when you're going to retire (BIAJP).

BIAJP is an example of functional polycentrism that goes with the idea of foreseeing job insecurity, not passively but accepting it as something inevitable. Although unusual for previous generations, this behaviour is not inconsistent with the labour market unfaithfulness or the organizational flexibility prevailing since the 1980s: '[They don't want to be] so tied to a structure; they want to be much more flexible, they want much more free time […], to be able to thrive as people, pursue their dreams, reach their goals' (ALEMP).

Indeed, for BIAJP and ALEMP, as well as for other millennials, leisure time is the appropriate space to make progress in processes of education and training; in other words, they want to become more employable by learning other skills. However, the availability and perception of leisure time changes according to hierarchy within the organizational structure. As Harry Braverman (1987) stated some decades ago, several work control and organization models coexist in organizations: a Taylorist model for operators and a human relational approach for employees. Currently, such coexistence is translated into dissimilar relationships with leisure time, given that employees are often autonomous to choose telework and more flexible hours, while operators lack leisure time, 'because we don't have time […]; you know at what time you leave home, but you don't know when you'll come back […]; my shift starts at six in the morning, but I don't know at what time it ends' (BIDSM). The following story describes the most common situation:

> No job in Medellín is going to give you free time to be with your family because it may be an eight-hour job but the hours change to the benefit of the company. I mean, I love my company a lot but they don't; they never have time. Since I start [working] at one [in the afternoon], I finish at ten [in the evening]. My daughter is in kindergarten, so I don't see her again until ten in the evening. The same happens with my relatives; I never have a weekend off. I mean, my days off are always during the week when all my relatives are working, and their days off are during the weekend when I'm working (PONGZ).

In any case, manager or operator millennials are aware of the importance of balancing work and family and having spaces for them and, above all, for their families. The ideal formula, described by one of the interviewees, is more responsibility, but more leisure time (CEDAT). For ARANR, getting away is essential to reach goals, find alternatives, and have great ideas. In short, the policies whose purpose is to find a balance between work and personal life are the

main motivation for everyone, and the customary practices of 'working on a Saturday, working on a Sunday, or even sleeping here' are rejected (ARVBR).

The interviews did not reveal references regarding rights, the exercise of rights, freedom of association, and possibility of collective bargaining. Without a doubt, this is a relevant aspect because it appears tied to the country's historic anti-union culture, but also because it has to do with the rejection of politics in every area of social life. Regardless of the age range, all interviewees reject any political meddling in the organizational sphere. Certain disenchantment with politics prevails in all of them, and comments regarding the country's polarization are omitted. It is worth noting that the pre-election environment during which the interviews were conducted was likely to influence the answers. It is also worth mentioning that, beyond the sources of individual power of those holding senior hierarchical positions, none of the interviewees makes use of their right to join a union and, therefore, they have limited possibilities of bargaining, and the coercive power of the organization forces them to obey for fear of unfavourable results.

In fact, the exercise of rights, freedom of association, and possibility of collective bargaining are issues that do not appear in the interviews because in the few cases when millennials talk about unions, they do it with suspicion. For instance, ARDMQ suggests that union demands are unnecessary and hinder the success of the organization, 'basically, the union doesn't benefit them at all', he states. This rejection extends to different areas of the company because, from his point of view, not accepting the collective action mechanisms means being outside 'the social reality of the working group; if I say that I don't agree with that union, my co-worker will disapprove of me' (ARDMQ). Ultimately, believing that the unionization is useless is a prejudice that can be glimpsed in the following statement: 'So don't expect that I'll be sitting there for four hours; I work, then I say hi here, drink coffee, go out and buy some fruit, come and go, and finally sit to continue working; if I haven't done my job by six [in the afternoon], I decide to stay on my own, right? A union mindset, with all due respect, I don't have one.' (ARYTL).

Considering this uneasiness and the rejection that unionization seems to cause among the millennials interviewed, the question lies in the possibility to ensure healthy and non-precarious work without a political action that considers broader social and labour rights. By the same token, there is room for asking whether, deep down, the suspicion or prejudices in this regard show instead a lack of political maturity or a poor understanding of the limits of the individual power sources.

There is no simple answer. Based on the literature that supports the reflection of this paper (Benach & Muntaner, 2010; Blustein et al., 2016), it is possible to categorically state that obtaining a decent and healthy job is not achievable without politics. In other words, having an effect on job conditions—whose impact on health is demonstrated by the studies referenced along this paper—is only attainable by changing the power relations.

In this sense, the specific challenge is how to update the didactics of the rights and to spread historical awareness that evidences the benefits of collective actions in a context where the actions limited to the organization field prevail. This is particularly difficult in the Colombian context where, besides the demonization of the social protest, there is a widespread disappointment with politics. In fact, during decades, economic sectors and governments have managed to suppress social actions in Colombia by sheer abuse of power (Gutiérrez Sanín, 2015); in addition, a distant and uninterrupted violence has been used in the media and on social

media to stir up rejection of political actions, unions, and community organizations; luckily, that has not caused their total extinction (Fals Borda, Archila Neira, Pardo, & Tercer Observatorio Sociopolítico y Cultural, 2001). Thus, the scars of the 'anomalous Colombian democracy' (Gutiérrez Sanín, 2015) deepen as a result of the disrepute of and disillusionment with everything related to politics. Although nothing seems possible and the future seems to be suspended (Laval & Dardot, 2015, p. 15) leaving the dominant forms of dominance unchanged, the outbreak of protests that marked the last months of 2019 in Latin America are (certainly, premature) proof that apathy and cynicism hit rock bottom in a context of precariousness of the labour market conditions of young people.

The interviews reveal the fear of millennials for the lack of opportunities or the instability of the country's labour market. This is not surprising since, according to some experts, Colombia is one of the countries with the highest rates of youth unemployment in the region: One out of four young people is unemployed (Sánchez, 2019). Now, it was unimaginable in 2018, during the field work for this research, that this generation of young millennials was going to take over the streets of the country to complain about the labour uncertainty[4]. The fact that the research process showed few expressions of dissatisfaction and rejection of politics may be a consequence of the limitations of the study. The interviews were conducted in non-neutral spaces using logistic support from the very companies; this could have influenced millennials to resist mentioning conflictive topics such as politics and religion. Future approaches on this matter should inquire into the reality of this rejection, since collective actions in contexts different to the one analysed mismatch this complete rejection, as it is the case of the recent manifestations against flexible work expressions in the framework of the sharing economy.

5. Final thoughts

The past transforms at the same time as people do and according to the desires and the development of experience (Bodei, 2016, p. 14). These words by Bodei about the behaviour of generations are useful to start these final thoughts since they reflect a core aspect in this paper: the intergenerational experience in the Colombian labour market is a decisive factor to understand its behaviour, organizational motivations, and labour expectations.

Ultimately, it can be concluded that millennials consciously, implicitly, or explicitly demand forms of healthy and non-precarious employment. From this perspective, the discourse of Generation Y's young people denaturalizes the forms of work organization prevailing since the 1980s; by rejecting them, millennials confront potentially stressful working situations or conditions and claim for less strains at work by reducing job demands and increasing autonomy. Likewise, they demand feedback and forms of solidarity-based work, support from bosses and colleagues, clear and coherent rules, esteem, respect, opportunities for advancement, promotions, and stability. Lastly, they expect trust as well as to be heard and valued by their bosses. These aspects intentionally emphasized here are in line with the positive values defended by the conceptual models of psychosocial risk analysis.

However, the negative effects of precarious work can be moderated when people expect that the precariousness conditions are temporary, when the collective and social support sources are superior, or when the acceptance of such precariousness is voluntary; when the condition is involuntary, dissatisfaction increases along with stress. In line with this, emphasis is placed on how social capital and cultural capital create a network that reduces psychological burden, in

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[4] On 21 November 2019, a national strike took place in different cities of Colombia. The protests extended until 23 December 2019, and the mobilization and dialogue processes were expected to continue in 2020. Corruption and possible labour and pension reforms were the reasons to organize the protest.

contrast to what occurs among employees with low educational levels, women, and ethnic groups. As analysed by the World Health Organization Commission on Social Determinants of Health, social inequality is one of the main outbreaks of the twentieth century, which is reflected in the fact that job precariousness or quality affect individuals differently depending on their social class, race, and gender (Benach, Vergara, & Muntaner, 2008).

As observed throughout this paper, especially in the second section, the millennials interviewed move skilfully in a less precarious universe, not lacking risks however. Their position, wage, or educational level favour the collective bargaining of autonomy, flexibility, leisure time, among other aspects that make their jobs doubly healthy, given that they are highly motivated. Nevertheless, this does not happen with those belonging to socioeconomic strata 1, 2, and 3 or the operation staff who are more vulnerable and sensitive to the labour market dynamics. The economic, cultural, and social capitals allow the former to negotiate; for the latter, the depoliticization hinders a social justice agenda.

At the beginning of this paper, emphasis was placed on the importance of further discussing organizational well-being and happiness and including the intergenerational demands in the reflective and political horizon of labour and social rights, at a time when the future of labour does not seem very promising. As Blustein (2016) states, 'our hope is that the psychological perspective advanced in this article […] will serve to revitalize the decent work agenda so that it can clearly and forcefully set standards for work that is safe, secure, meaningful dignified, and consistent with the best aspects of the human spirit'. In addition, labour is expected to positively meet the criteria of work organization (intensity, stability, wage); inclusion, diversity, and equity; and autonomy, freedom of association, and possibility of collective bargaining.

During the 1940s and 1950s, management theorists suggested how important it is to humanize employment relationships in the industry (Mayo, 1945; McGregor, 1994). Thus, with more or less intensity during the second half of the twentieth century, the significance of transforming labour relationships and individuals' engagement with the organization was considered in different knowledge fields. In this regard, Eric Fromm, Georges Friedmann, and Alain Touraine—quoted by Hopenhayn (2001)—lay out the importance of teamwork; work purpose; active, committed, and responsible participation in the processes and knowledge of the work ensemble; customization of activities; broadening of duties; and different-level planning to be compatible with the needs and skills of the employee.

Nowadays, it is known that actions aimed at humanizing organizations have public health implications. They go beyond the struggle against alienation of work or the perfect coordinates for efficiency and productivity. When observing the contributions to the work humanization discussion, it seems as if they had been crystallized in millennials, not as an act of rebellion, but naturally, as the belief that satisfaction, employment projection, autonomy, work stability, and wage are inherent to work.

It is not possible in the space of this article to fully explore the usefulness of the results of this reflection on decent and healthy work in the case of Colombian millennials. However, it can be highlighted as a central point that organizations should rethink the way they perceive young Colombian workers and this means problematizing the euphemisms with which the media and some speeches coming from management analyse precarious working conditions. In this sense, it is necessary to really observe the work expectations of Colombian millennials and at the same time to delve into the knowledge of the psychosocial risks associated with the forms of flexible and precarious work, which are only just beginning to be studied in the country. Finally, welfare

policies or non-monetary incentives that are promoted in organizations should be the result of deep reflection and consistent with the needs of employees. In this regard, a situation observed in the interviews may be illustrative: A company offering its employees economic support for the purchase of electric bicycles because its objective is to promote forms of clean mobility is a policy more consistent with the mythical profile of the millennial than with the needs of the employees since, in practice, this policy is functional only for employees who live within a radius of 5 or 10 km.

Finally, as mentioned above, the tumultuous months of October and November 2019 showed an unsettling regional outlook in terms of social mobilization. While drawing conclusions on the results is still premature, the massive marches (that include young populations) in various Latin American countries such as Chile, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Colombia have something in common: a middle class disappointed with democracy, worried about its future, questioning elites, and demanding increased state commitment to social rights.

Addressing the possible pension, labour, and tax reforms that led to the 'cry of youth' (Santos, 2019) would considerably extend this paper; however, it is worth pointing out three aspects, considering the approach of this article: (1) Young people cried because they know that they are trapped in a job instability cycle; (2) they expressed that, just like their parents, they also want stable jobs and a less uncertain future; and (3) they confirmed that democracy is not only exercised at the polls and that collective actions have important social results such as 'repealing contribution to social security by the hour proposed for young people'.

It is yet unclear what forces are going to crystalize in Latin America, which push the structural and deep change needed to reconstruct the intergenerational pact, as some authors demand for the Spanish context (Abenza et al., 2017). However, these young protesters unquestionably want to change politics and have an impact, among other things, on how the labour market has configured since the 1980s. As Thomas Piketty (2019, p. 40) observes, middle incomes have experienced a moderate increase since the 1980s, which means that, while 1% of the world population have had a considerable increase in their purchasing power, middle-class youth have witnessed the stagnation or shrinkage of their assets possibly inherited from their parents. In brief, this 'human capital', in the sense provided by Theodore Shultz (1902-1998) and Gary Becker (1930-2014), should conduct a series of strategic actions to strengthen the 'affective investment' of parents and obtain better income or wage (Foucault, 2007, pp. 280–281). However, the accumulated or transferred human capital is tied to the income and expenditure flow produced by the sale of the skills at work in a world where young people are caught in a job instability cycle. Maybe this explains why the national conversation in Colombia between young leaders and the government focuses on education, employment, and mental health.

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