

TEACHERS PROFESSIONALS' PERCEPTION OF HIGHLY SENSITIVE PEOPLE: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

N. Albaladejo-Blázquez¹, M. Baryła-Matejczuk², R. Ferrer-Cascales¹, M. Fernández-Alcántara¹, M. Rubio-Aparicio¹, B. Costa-López¹ & N. Ruiz-Robledillo¹

¹ University of Alicante (SPAIN)

² University of Economics and Innovation in Lublin (POLAND)

INTRODUCTION

Highly sensitive people (HSP) are characterized by different aspects that include: a great awareness of subtleties, overstimulation, depth processing of information and high emotional reactivity. HSP in their work environment will show a series of characteristics that, if properly understood, can be of great benefit for the enterprise and for the rest of the workers. It is also important to understand how employers from the areas of education perceive and manage HSP at work. **The objective was to explore the perceptions and experiences of teachers' professionals with HSP.**

METHOD

A **qualitative descriptive design** was performed using a thematic approach for data analysis. A total of 14 participants were recruited in **3 focus groups**. The majority were female (n=8) with a mean age of 41.94 years old. Regarding their educational level four of them have reached the level of Master and the rest had a Ph.D. With regard to their profession, four of them were teachers from primary education and ten were university teachers and researchers. All focus groups were performed online and were recorded in audio and in video to make the verbatim transcripts. For the thematic analysis the proposal by Braun and Clarke was followed using an inductive coding procedure and integrating the codes into initial themes that were triangulated between the researchers.

RESULTS

A total of 5 main themes were identified

| Theme 1: Characteristics and management of HSP | Theme 2: Motivation of HSP | Theme 3: Importance of relations | Theme 4: Physical working conditions | Theme 5: Implications for Management |
|--|----------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Stereotypes | Assessment of the process | High social competences | Appearance of distractors | Participative style |
| Devotion | Use of praise | Preference for working with individual responsibility | Light | Task-oriented |
| Responsibility | Creative work | Emotional climate | Noise | Predisposition to work with people |
| Emotional Reactions | | | Levels of temperature | |
| Good Manners | | | | |
| Future orientation | | | | |

HSP were perceived with high responsibility, and they show strong emotional reactions to some situations at work.

Three main strategies were identified for **motivating HSP**: an assessment of the work that is based on quality-terms and is not rigid; the use of positive instructions and praise when the work is correctly done and the preference for the creative and innovative work and/or tasks.

Participants identified four main areas associated to work that may **influence the performance and effectiveness of HSP**: (1) the appearance of distractors (including small talks, the use of mobile phones, etc.); (2) light (bright and artificial light), (3) noise (especially when concentration is needed) and (4) levels of temperature.

Participants outlined the importance of **reinforce** them and to give them tools to **regulate their sensitivity**. Their emotional abilities help them to connect and establish emotional bonds with other partners.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the results of the present research highlight the main characteristics of HSP from the point of view of teachers, both in primary education and at the University. It is important that teachers may have the tools and knowledge to adequately identify this trait in their students given that some adaptation measures may be needed.

This work has been funded with the support from the European Commission through the project "PRO-MOTION. Sensitive career management" 621491-EPP-1-2020-1-PL-EPPKA3-IPI-SOC-IN.

This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.