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Core practices of people management for active learning in higher education

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Abstract

This article identified key *core practices* for people management to support active learning in university education. Interviews were conducted with 16 professionals using a narrative approach. The analysis combined semantic coding techniques from grounded theory. The sample consisted of organizational psychologists with at least two years' experience in people management in Chilean organizations. The functions were dichotomized into traditional and strategic using a function identification matrix based on Dave Ulrich's people management role model. Semantic content analysis was applied for category grouping using open coding, with the support of Atlas.ti software. The analysis revealed that paradox management is a distinctive component of the studied role, activating two sets of practices: sustaining strategy and managing resources. The first focuses on strategic positioning, flexibility, and energy for action. The second focuses on the effective management of resources, particularly those aimed at achieving objectives and fostering interpersonal relationships. These *core practices* bridge the gap between the educational and disciplinary functions and serve as the basis for active learning. Although *core practices* have been established in teaching and technology professions, their identification for people management functions is remains in its early stages.

Keywords *Core practices*, Personnel management, Higher education, Active learning

1 Introduction

1.1 Active methodologies in higher education

Higher education institutions are adopting teaching methods that engage students in their own learning process [1]. Evidence indicates that active learning methodologies have proven effective in university education [2]. Kozanitis and Nenciovici [3] confirm this trend demonstrating the positive impact of active instruction on learning outcomes in university programs for Psychology, Sociology, Education, and Economics, providing solid scientific evidence of the superiority of active learning practices.

Crisol-Moya [4] emphasizes that active methodologies are essential for the methodological renewal of university education. According to Prince [5], active methods enhance the effectiveness of theoretical learning and knowledge retention, contributing



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to increased student motivation, engagement, and a sense of responsibility. These factors lead to improved academic performance and a positive attitude toward lifelong learning [6]. Ruíz et al. [7] highlight their potential to foster flexible and self-structuring attitudes that enable students to learn autonomously throughout their lives.

Moreover, active learning methodologies effectively develop social skills, facilitating professional interactions by providing contexts for teamwork, collaboration, and effective communication to solve problems [8]. Gómez-Hurtado et al. [9] report that these methodologies promote relational and adaptive learning in the response to change. Active learning not only prepares students to manage uncertainty and change but also equips them to lead teams and foster a positive organizational climate [10].

Regarding active methodologies in higher education, Matsumoto-Royo and Ramírez-Montoya [11] report 49 experiential training programs aimed at teachers. The systematic review by Kozanitis and Nenciovici [3] highlights progress in defining practices for active teaching in technological professions, contrasting with the scarce literature on programs for the active development of social skills and people management.

1.2 Core practices as the focus of active training

Designing active learning requires specifying processes within real performance contexts [12, 13]. Tools such as representations, activity decomposition, and approximations to professional practice position the concept of *core practices* at the center of active learning [11, 13]. Models derived from this approach, such as key learning experiences [14] have established objectives for successfully implementing active learning programs in higher education.

Grossman et al. [13] define *core practices* as the enactment of knowledge, beliefs, and dispositions that characterize a specific professional role, translated into strategies, routines, and actions that can be broken down and learned, fostering a shared language and meaning [15].

The people management role has been studied from through the competency model [16], which focuses on operational functions but does not address strategies for adapting to the changing dynamics of modern organizations [17]. Recent research examines the effects of people management variables on workers and organizations [18], but it often overlooks identifying specific practices. Thus, the design of active learning for people management faces outdated definitions that do not reach the level of granularity required for the design of experiential learning methodologies [19].

1.3 Core practices in people management

The current context of disruptive changes challenges the adaptation of organizations and their management systems [20]. The acceleration of the fourth industrial revolution [21] demands integrating human and technological capabilities [22, 23]. These advancements impose new strategic and knowledge-based demands on people management [24], driving a continuous cycle of obsolescence and the creation of new activities and roles [25].

Concerns persist about the preparation required for individuals in people management roles, as they must address emerging challenges by shifting between roles and adapting their performance in various scenarios [26, 27]. Current approaches to the study of people management indicate a shift toward a more strategic position, developing practices to on meet new industry demands [28]. According to Corrales et al. [26],

these new practices focus on globalization, innovation, customer service, collaborative work, and technological skills. Troilo [24] suggests that the distinctive capabilities of the people management role rely on soft, strategic, and technical skills. In this changing context, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) [29] has proposed the learning compass as a set of skills for the future across a wide range of education systems [30].

These changing conditions have led to the emergence of concepts such as the paradox model [31]. According to this model, people management role face paradoxical tensions, such as maintaining both distance and closeness with personnel, enforcing rules while allowing flexibility, and controlling decisions while promoting autonomy [32]. Similarly, Smith et al. [33] propose that leadership is paradoxically demanded to make dynamic decisions, foster commitment while also encouraging conflict, and develop ambidexterity to optimize through exploitation while innovating through exploration, among many other paradoxes [34]. Lewis and Smith [35] has thoroughly analyzed this phenomenon, proposing an organization of contradictions and a paradoxical system.

Developing active and defensive strategies to manage these tensions constitutes a new set of practices that must be identified [36]. In line with this, Girard [37] identifies two poles in the paradoxical management of people: one of precise control and the other of openness. The latter coincides with the integrative approach to dichotomies in a broader understanding of paradox [35], serving as a resource for sustainability and the good life [38]. The coexistence of traditional and emerging roles present a challenge in identifying new [39]. The traditional people management role is operational and stable, relying on technical disciplinary knowledge, whereas the strategic role has proven to be flexible and evolving, associated with subjective attitudes and skills [40]. This strategic role involves complex and intersubjective *core practices* [13] observable in various contexts like project management, where team interactions and leadership occur [40].

This research aims to identify the distinctive practices of the people management role and analyze them using the *core practices* methodology to provide insights that guide the design of active learning tools in university education.

2 Methodology

This study aims to describe the distinctive *core practices* of the strategic people management role in Chilean organization. Employing a qualitative research design, it conducted an inquiry through critical incident interviews [41] with cross-sectional data collection [42]. The analysis combined semantic coding techniques from grounded theory [43] with disaggregation and documentation criteria specific to the construction of *core practices* [44].

Based on Edelson's [45] educational research framework, we ensured that the participants had relevant experience and were effectively performing the studied role, focusing on key steps and activities in people management processes. The sample was drawn from organizational psychologists working in people management roles in Chilean organizations for a period of at least two years. From this population, a non-probabilistic sample of 16 professionals was selected, with prior identification of their job activities. Functions were dichotomized into traditional and strategic roles using a function identification matrix based on Dave Ulrich's people management role model [46]. This matrix

was completed by the professionals and used both as a screening tool for selecting the sample group and for segmenting roles to contrast the results.

The sample size was determined by the saturation criterion, applied through constant comparison during theoretical sampling [47], continuing until no new distinctive practices emerged. The research adhered to ethical principles for studies involving human subjects, as outlined by the American Psychological Association [48], and was approved by an institutional ethics committee.

Data were collected using Flanagan's [49] critical incident interview technique, which delves into narratives to disaggregate specific observable actions or behaviors. Interview sessions were video-recorded and transcribed using the artificial intelligence software Transkriptor. Data analysis followed grounded theory's coding structure and constant comparison [50] to build substantive concepts linked to definitions found in the literature review. Open coding applied semantic content analysis for category grouping, supported by the Atlas.ti software. The analysis reached the level of open coding, which was reviewed by three researchers.

Codes and categories were grouped based on their association with either traditional or strategic role functions, identifying three groups of practices: solely traditional, shared by both roles, and exclusively strategic. The distinctive practices of the strategic role were selected and modeled by an analysis panel of university professors and educational psychologists, following Grossman et al.'s "*core practices* implementation criteria" (p. 277) [51].

Following Resnick and Kazemi [45], the identified components were described as functions or objectives of the practice, each accompanied by a definition. The syntax of their main definition was based on verb-object-condition structures, using observable behavioral verbs associated with cognitive, affective, and motor taxonomies [52].

Finally, the *core practices* were broken down using functional criteria that facilitate hierarchical modularization of training [53]. Their modeling followed a sequenced analytical structure, and the documentation methodology was based on Resnick and Kazemi's "*core practices* decomposition matrix" [45]. As a result, *core practices* were disaggregated into their components and linked to pedagogical practices.

3 Results

Three groups of practices were identified, segmented according to their role type. The first group includes practices exclusive to the traditional people management role, associated with operational functions. The second group consists of practices shared by both the traditional and strategic people management roles. The third group, the focus of this research, includes practices exclusive to the strategic people management role. These practices qualify and characterize the performance of functions such as change management, project leadership, organizational development, and team and individual development.

For the third group, the information was modeled according to *core practices* criteria.

Figure 1 illustrates the groups of practices found. On the left are those that characterise operational roles, in the centre are those that are shared by both operational and strategic roles, and on the right are those that are distinctive to strategic roles. Based on the latter, the *core practices* distinctive to the strategic function of people management were modelled.

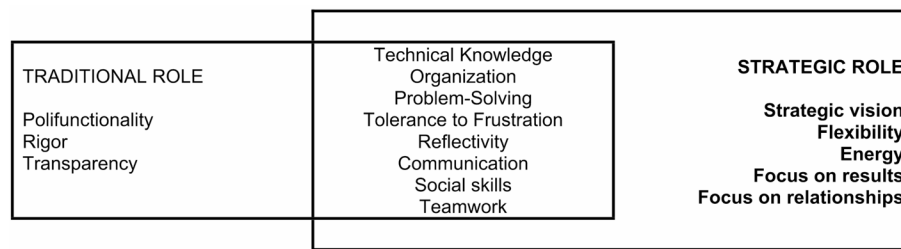


Fig. 1 Groups of practices according to the people management role. Own elaboration

The analysis and modeling of the information resulted in the documentation of the following five tables detailing the distinctive *core practices* of the strategic people management role.

Table 1 provides a definition of the *core practice* of *Strategic vision*, as well as a description of the five functions that comprise it and their respective work activities, together with recommended pedagogical actions for training. Own elaboration.

Table 2 provides a definition of the *core practice* of *Flexibility*, as well as a description of the two functions that comprise it and their respective work activities, together with recommended pedagogical actions for training. Own elaboration.

Table 3 provides a definition of the *core practice* of *Energy*, as well as a description of the two functions that comprise it and their respective work activities, together with recommended pedagogical actions for training. Own elaboration.

Table 4 provides a definition of the *core practice* of *Focus on results*, as well as a description of the three functions that comprise it and their respective work activities, together with recommended pedagogical actions for training. Own elaboration.

Table 5 provides a definition of the *core practice* of *Focus on relationships*, as well as a description of the five functions that comprise it and their respective work activities, together with recommended pedagogical actions for training. Own elaboration.

4 Discussion and conclusions

The strategic people management role in a changing context serves as an articulator of practices to address paradoxical tensions arising from the fluid context and postmodern complexity [54].

Addressing these tensions requires a continuous state of negotiation and adjustments that do not reach a single or definitive solution [55]. Dave Ulrich [56] introduces the concept of the *paradox navigator*, referring to a people manager who resolves tensions inherent in this paradoxical context. Lewis and Smith's [34] identifies four axes of challenges in their paradox system, along with cognitive and affective tools that enable integrative thinking. Berti et al. [57] report the accelerated evolution of the study of paradoxical tensions and propose multilevel responses. Girard [37] polarises the tensions of this conceptualisation into dimensions of flexibility and control, while Hersom et al. [58] propose resilience as a way of addressing the pole of control and formalisation. Fan and Tahmasebi [59] criticise its fragmentation and reflexivity, which are alien to practice, while Cuel et al. [60] question the rhetorical discourse of the strategic business partner, identifying weaknesses and heroism in the role of the people manager. On the other hand, Bogdáni et al. [61] review competency models for people management,

Table 1 Matrix of the distinctive functions of the core practice *Strategic vision***1. Strategic vision**

Definition	Early identification of changes in the environment, external opportunities and threats, and the strengths and weaknesses of the group or the organization itself, to generate and select quick responses that prioritize favorable long-term conditions for opening new opportunities. This involves articulating behaviors that enable the effective utilization of these opportunities. It includes the ability to build a supportive environment for achieving objectives.
Function	Job definition
(1) Detect new opportunities and threats	• Develop an activity while remaining alert to changes in environmental conditions, such as reductions or increases, the emergence or absence of entities or qualities. • Detect changes and interpret them based on the probability of success or failure of the ongoing activity. Pedagogical Actions: – While students engage in new activities and content, the main function is to place them in a broader context to observe risks and facilitators. Encourage them to identify factors that could impact action execution and objective achievement (for example: "Is there enough time to achieve the goal?"; "Is there information available to complete this activity?"; or "Are more resources or help needed?"; "Is there anything that could improve or fail?"). – The use of role-playing, where the teacher uses strategic questions, promotes deep reflection and the anticipation of risks and opportunities, thereby generating collaborative solutions.
(2) Identify the weaknesses and strengths of their own group or organization	• Gather diagnostic information about the group or organization through data, group meetings, and other sources. • Identify strengths and weaknesses in results, behaviors, or characteristics of the group or organization. Pedagogical Actions: – Teachers should implement collaborative activities with group discussion dynamics as a usual practice. – Create peer assessment instances focused on feedback. – Use portfolios as an evaluative tool that encourages both group and individual reflection and tracking of their learning journey. – Employ active methodologies, such as World Café, to foster conversation and community feedback.
(3) Define immediate actions and long-term goals	• Set immediate actions and long-term objectives, prioritizing them according to urgency and impact. • Define timeframes for each action and objective. Pedagogical Actions: – Use of rubrics focused on progress assessment (formative) as well as final assessment (summative). – Jointly created planning with students to model behavior of goal visualization and action prioritization. – Self-assessment process as formative evaluation focusing on the responsibility of its processes. – Create self-assessment tools for defining their own goals around the previously mentioned planning.
(4) Articulate the behaviors that need to be carried out	• Define necessary behaviors and actions to achieve proposed objectives. • Set specific tasks for the achievement of the proposed objectives. • Delegate tasks if necessary, coordinating their correct execution. Pedagogical Actions: – Conduct collaborative leadership workshops where students practice setting specific behaviors and responsibilities for each team member. – Implement self-assessment processes focused on individual reflection on behaviors.
(5) Foster a favorable work environment for achieving objectives	• Define each individuals' tasks respecting and considering the preferences, knowledge, and skills of each member. • Communicate a sense of importance, urgency, and achievement to the team responsible for the tasks. • Provide constant support for task execution. Pedagogical Actions: – Create an environment where each individual feels valued, using strategies such as team-building dynamics and positive feedback activities. – Use pre-established norms of coexistence defined by the group of students. – Build overarching agreements on students' behavioral expectations.

Table 2 Matrix of the distinctive functions of the *core practice flexibility*

2. Flexibility	
Definition	Adapt behavior to different contexts, situations, and people, involving behavioral versatility and cognitive flexibility to transform beliefs and ways of interpreting reality.
Function	Job definition
(1) Identify conditions that demand changes	• Detect the need or convenience of changing and adapting. • Interpret issues and needs from diverse perspectives. Pedagogical Actions: – Encouraging portfolio use as a metacognitive tool to promote self-assessment and critical reflection on their own progress, helping determine when it is appropriate to adapt strategies.
(2) Take adaptive actions	• Make and justify decisions considering different contexts, situations, and people. • Act by adapting to various contexts, situations, and individuals. Pedagogical Actions: – Facilitate simulations and collaborative activities where students practice decision-making and action in diverse contexts.

Table 3 Matrix of the distinctive functions of the *core practice energy*

3. Energy	
Definition	To face challenges and problems with a mindset of resilience and optimism, driving proactive initiatives in response to opportunities and obstacles.
Function	Job definition
(1) Show an attitude of openness and optimism	• Communicate optimism and confidence. • Express an open and positive disposition toward challenges. Pedagogical Actions: – Plan structured academic challenge-focused activities, where students have the opportunity to test their skills and grow emotionally through personal achievements in a protected environment.
(2) Mobilize initiatives and solutions	• Drive proactive initiatives when facing opportunities to improve. • Face setbacks with a problem-solving and hopeful attitude. Pedagogical Actions: – Use project-based learning, where students identify improvement opportunities within their environment and propose proactive solutions. – Create educational spaces that encourage and welcome an active role in problem-solving by students. – Structure activities with clear challenges, where students face real obstacles with a solution-oriented attitude, developing not only technical skills but also a positive attitude toward action and change.

concluding that they do not reflect the dynamic and multifaceted demands of the current human resources landscape.

The Learning Compass 2030 [29] points out that resolving tensions and dilemmas is a key dimension of transformative competencies for building well-being and sustainability.

Through Ulrich et al.’s [56] navigator metaphor, this study’s findings depict a manager navigating a space of changing and opposing winds and tides. This navigator employs *strategic vision* of the environment and a clear goal for where to steer. They employ practices such as *flexibility* to overcome obstacles and energy to sustain effort. This navigator moves forward using management tools as oars: *focusing on results* to the left and *focusing on relationships* to the right.

The first group of *core practices* identified includes *strategic vision*, *flexibility*, and *energy*, which constitute resources to sustain *strategy* in addressing transformation paradoxes. These have also been detected in the roles of project managers and leaders [62].

Hax and Majluf [63] propose components of strategic vision aligned with findings from this study. The analysis of opportunities and threats, as well as identifying weaknesses and strengths, helps to define the strategic framework [64].

Table 4 Matrix of the distinctive functions of the *core practice focus on results*

4. Focus on results	
Definition	Define and monitor the development of objectives and activities, ensuring their contribution to achieving the expected results.
Function	Job definition
(1) Establish objectives and expected results	• Apply methods for designing and measuring objectives. • Prioritize the established objectives based on relevance and contribution to results. Pedagogical Actions: – With clear planning and associated activities, students can learn to set concrete and achievable objectives using rubrics and checklists that guide their work towards the expected results.
(2) Define the way to achieve objectives	• Design activities and tools to enable the achievement of results. • Mobilize the execution of plans and goal-oriented activities, making evidence of results visible. Pedagogical Actions: – Teaching plans should include the creation of projects and activities designed to achieve the objectives.
(3) Monitor progress	• Continuously assess the progress of activities and objectives. • Identify issues and deviations, guiding the development of solutions and adjustments. • Provide feedback to adjust the established objectives and actions designed to ensure the achievement of expected results. Pedagogical Actions: – Use tools like dashboards and peer reviews to help students reflect on their performance and make necessary adjustments to ensure expected results. – Encourage activities with peer evaluation and/or paired work with a focus on constant and positive feedback.

Another facet observed in this practice is strategy deployment [65], defined as the simultaneous articulation of immediate actions and the setting of long-term objectives [66]. including the creation of a favorable work environment for goal achievement [67]. Both vision and strategic action coincide with the anticipation-action-reflection cycle proposed by the OECD [29] as one of the seven competencies of the future, in which it proposes the development of a process of reflective anticipation to guide more effective intervention.

Flexibility, as identified in this research must address the need for consistency in organizational norms while also considering differentiated needs. This flexibility depends on people managers’ decisions rather than management processes [68].

Gjerde and Alvesson [69] findings confirm that aligning with others’ perspectives to provide individualized support while mitigating external pressures is fundamental to flexibility in people management, emphasizing adaptive response approaches [70]. Lewis and Smith [34] in his system of paradoxes proposes dynamism as the flexible practice of continuously learning and relearning.

In line with Sumpter and Gibson [71], research revealed that people managers tackle challenges and problems with a mindset geared toward overcoming obstacles and optimism, promoting proactive initiatives in response to opportunities and hurdles. This characteristic, which we refer to as *energy*, is defined by an attitude of openness and continuous communication, fostering a team environment of optimism and trust [72]. Additionally, it manifests in a positive attitude toward challenges, as well as the ability to drive initiatives and outcomes [73], confronting setbacks with a problem-solving and hopeful attitude.

The second group of *core practices* identified refers to the *focus on results* and *focus on relationships*. These practices present a dichotomous paradox that has been examined in

Table 5 Matrix of the distinctive functions of the *core practice focus on relationships***5. Focus on relationships**

Definition	Identify the impact of personal actions on others' behavior, intervening to facilitate relationships of acceptance, commitment, and loyalty among collaborators, groups, or teams. This practice relies on three people management tools: • Direct: guide the actions of others through goal-setting and feedback. • Persuade: argue to convince others, influencing impressions, attitudes, or directed actions. • Mediate: act as an intermediary to reach agreements, make decisions, or manage interactions between people.
Function	Job definition
(1) Identify the effect of one's actions on the behavior of others.	• Detect the impact of one's actions in relationships with others. • Identify behaviors that facilitate interpersonal relationships among collaborators. Pedagogical Actions: – Teachers can facilitate self-observation and peer feedback exercises, where students identify how their actions affect others. – Using reflection journals or collaborative evaluation rubrics can help students recognize and adjust their behavior based on its impact on interpersonal relationships within their team.
(2) Facilitate favorable relationships	• Exercise facilitating behaviors, such as offering support and interactions, proposing collaborative challenges or solutions. • Create pleasant environments and favorable instances for people to get to know each other. Pedagogical Actions: – Create conversational spaces for peer discussions, guided by teachers as role models. – Organize Socratic seminars as an active method for collaborative topic discussions. – Team-building activities and group projects, where students work together to solve problems and overcome challenges, are recommended to promote relationships based on trust and respect.
(3) Guide people's actions in a specific direction	• Establish clear challenges, objectives, or goals. • Monitor and provide feedback to collaborators on their performance and goal achievement. Pedagogical Actions: – Teachers can employ collaborative leadership methodologies, where students take on leadership roles within their teams. Students can practice setting clear goals and providing feedback to their peers on goal achievement. Active methodologies may include the use of the "7 Thinking Hats" technique.
(4) Persuade to guide actions and relationships toward achieving goals	• Identify the attributes and needs of individuals or teams to find the best way to communicate relevant information. • Adapt communication to the characteristics of people or teams to guide actions toward the set objective. Pedagogical Actions: – The use debates and argumentative presentations, where students practice persuasion to motivate others toward a common goal. – Encourage students to participate in activities where they must defend their ideas or proposals, adapting their language and discourse to the needs and expectations of their audiences.
(5) Mediate relationships between people to reach agreements that favor achieving the goal	• Empathize with individuals or teams and understand their needs and requirements. • Open dialogues to reveal convergences and divergences among the people or teams involved. • Guide conflict resolution by prioritizing fairness among parties and mutual benefit. Pedagogical Actions: – Design simulations of interpersonal conflicts or organizational issues that students must resolve through dialogue and negotiation. – Students learn to act as intermediaries, using empathy and effective communication to resolve conflicts and reach satisfactory agreements.

various leadership theories, such as Hersey and Blanchard's situational model, Fiedler's contingency model, and House's Path-Goal Theory [74].

The practice of focusing on results is an essential element, aligned with the management literature, which involves defining and overseeing the progress of activities to

ensure their alignment with expected outcomes [75]. People managers are responsible for driving the execution of activities while demonstrating the results achieved [76].

In contrast to the focus on results and the idea of control, Rosa [38] proposes the concept of resonance as a dynamic and receptive relationship with the world, in which the ability to listen and respond repairs the broken relationship with the world and with others.

Continuous monitoring of progress allows for the identification of problems and deviations, which in turn facilitates the search for solutions and necessary adjustments. This process also contributes to providing feedback on the established objectives and implemented actions, thereby ensuring the achievement of the expected results [77].

On the other hand, the *core practice* of relationship orientation suggests that the impact of one's actions on the behavior of others serves as a form of influence. Its components—directive orientation, persuasion, and mediation—are fundamental for positive relationships, extensively studied in communication and leadership [78]. These practices collectively enable effectively *managing resources*.

The *core practices* of strategic people management identified in this study have been classified into two groups: *sustaining strategy* and *resource management*. These have been broken down into components that can be progressively acquired through deliberate practice [51]. Methodological recommendations for their development through active learning have been documented in the results as *pedagogical actions* that emphasize the practical integration of skills and knowledge.

These *pedagogical actions* enable instructors to promote critical reflection and experiential learning. MacDonald et al. [12] argue that cycles of practice, feedback, and reflection are essential for students to internalize professional practices. Applied to the field of people management, these methodologies could include simulations of complex organizational scenarios and the analysis of case studies, where students must navigate ethical and strategic dilemmas. This approach facilitates the transfer of theoretical knowledge to the workplace, a key practice in leadership and management roles [51].

The digital transformation of education has further highlighted the need of innovate teaching methodologies. García-Peñalvo and Corell [10] point out that the COVID-19 health crisis not only accelerated the digitization of education but also exposed a methodological and skills crisis in higher education. In this context, active learning based on practice, with a focus on problem-solving and critical reflection, can be key to overcoming these deficiencies. Virtual teaching and the use of digital technologies can enhance the development of *core practices* in people management, enabling students to face real or simulated situations in a flexible and adaptive manner.

Likewise, teaching based on active learning should focus on methodologies that promote autonomy and strategic decision-making. Problem-based learning (PBL) has been identified as one of the most effective methodologies for fostering these capabilities, as it places students in the role of problem solvers facing complex, real or simulated situations [79]. In the context of people management, PBL would allow students to tackle organizational challenges, negotiate solutions, and reflect on the impact of their decisions on team and organizational outcomes.

Grossman et al. [51] suggest that the development of *core practices* should align with the principles of deliberate practice, where students have multiple opportunities to practice, receive feedback, and progressively improve. This is particularly relevant

for developing people management practices, as this role requires a strong capacity to navigate paradoxes by sustaining strategy and managing resources such as interpersonal relationships, conflict resolution, and adapting to a changing, tension-filled environment [31]. Critical reflection, as emphasized by Lalor et al. [80], plays a crucial role in this process, helping students integrate theoretical and practical knowledge into a cohesive and competent approach.

This research has identified five *core practices* for reflexivity and adaptation to change, which can facilitate the teaching and application of professional knowledge through practice-based learning [11; 13]. These practices reinforce professional identity by allowing students to integrate disciplinary knowledge with cross-cutting skills. The balance between academic and professional objectives enables higher education to respond to the complex challenges of postmodern organisations.

This study has sought to support higher education in integrating training experiences that deliberately develop the identified *core practices* [13]. Active learning methodologies can strengthen both disciplinary experience and transversal skills, achieving a balance between professional training and adaptability [12].

According to recent research, higher education in Chile is characterised by a competitive dynamic in which tensions exist between traditional methodologies and the need to adapt to rapid market changes and employability requirements [81]. This study contributes to the field of higher education in Chile by identifying core practices for the design of training pathways that enable professionals to manage people in complex and constantly changing contexts. The incorporation of approaches based on deliberate learning not only promotes employability but also strengthens professional identity and adaptability, which are essential skills in the country's postmodern organisations. It also fosters the integration of disciplinary knowledge with cross-cutting skills and critical reflection on the impact of decisions made.

Although this study has been descriptive and localised in scope, future research could explore the long-term impact of these practices on professional performance and institutional learning cultures. Additionally, comparative studies could highlight the intercultural similarities and differences of *core practices*, as well as the diversity of organisational environments [82, 83]. Another area for research lies in the context of future skills [29], where the rapid integration of smart digital technologies into active learning has been recognised [84, 85].

Finally, the integration of *core practices* into the curriculum framework must recognise the multiple layers and directions of learning in which students participate, including educational institutions, the home and the communities to which they belong.

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Author contributions

P.C-G: Directed the research, coordinated the production of the article, wrote the paragraphs related to organisational theory and leadership. Interpreted the results. P.V-A: Wrote paragraphs related to educational theory and decomposition of practice. A.R-V: Sorted and extracted bibliography, reviewed drafts and wrote English translation. D.S-B: Provided methodological guidance for critical incident analysis, functional behavioural analysis matrices and data curation. M.B: Conducted field interviews, transcription and first stage of content analysis.

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Data availability

The data sets generated during the research through interviews, as well as their analysis, have been anonymized and are available in the repository of Open Science Software OSF: <https://osf.io/8bqsp>. The author confirms that the data analyzed during this study are included in the tables presented in this published article.

Declarations**Ethics approval and consent to participate**

The research was conducted in accordance with the provisions of the Declaration of Helsinki, and all ethical standards for research involving human subjects were observed. The research was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee for Research at the Universidad del Desarrollo (CEII) <https://www.udd.cl/investigacion-udd/comites-de-etica-y-certificaciones/comite-de-etica-institucional-en-investigacion-ceii/>. In compliance with its regulations, informed consent was obtained from each of the participants interviewed, both for contributing data to the research and for its publication.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Informed consent

All participants were informed in detail about the purpose, risks, and benefits of the study prior to data collection, and their informed consent was obtained orally with digital video recording.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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