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Meaning of work, organizational ties, and engagement: proposing an integrated theoretical model

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Abstract

This article aims to advance the possibilities of theorization about the meanings of work, organizational bonds (commitment, entrenchment, and consent), and engagement by connecting these constructs in an integrative model. Therefore, it is assumed that the meanings attributed to work are an antecedent variable to commitment, entrenchment, consent, and work engagement. This proposition is considered timely and contributes to the theoretical field as it allows identifying possible associations between the constructs, which helps to understand certain behaviors at work. After analyzing the relationships between the concepts, an integrated model proposal is presented, not yet empirically tested. Finally, a research agenda is suggested.

Keywords: Work directions. Organizational links. Engagement at work.

Sentidos do trabalho, vínculos organizacionais e engajamento: proposição de um modelo teórico integrado

Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo consiste em avançar nas possibilidades de teorização sobre sentidos do trabalho, vínculos organizacionais – comprometimento, entrincheiramento e consentimento – e engajamento com base na articulação desses construtos num modelo integrativo. Para tanto, parte-se do pressuposto de que os sentidos atribuídos ao trabalho é uma variável antecedente a comprometimento, entrincheiramento, consentimento e engajamento no trabalho. Essa proposição é considerada oportuna e contributiva no campo teórico, uma vez que permite identificar possíveis associações entre os construtos, o que ajuda a compreender determinados comportamentos no trabalho. Após a análise das relações entre os conceitos, apresenta-se uma proposta de modelo integrada, ainda não testada empiricamente. Por fim, sugere-se uma agenda de pesquisas.

Palavras-chave: Sentidos do trabalho. Vínculos organizacionais. Engajamento no trabalho.

Sentidos del trabajo, vínculos organizacionales y engagement: proposición de un modelo teórico integrado

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es avanzar en las posibilidades de teorizar sobre los significados del trabajo, los vínculos organizacionales (compromiso, atrincheramiento y consentimiento) y *engagement* a partir de la articulación de estos constructos en un modelo integrador. Para ello, se asume que los significados atribuidos al trabajo son una variable previa al compromiso, atrincheramiento, consentimiento y *engagement* en el trabajo. Esta propuesta se considera oportuna y aportadora en el campo teórico ya que permite identificar posibles asociaciones entre los constructos, lo que ayuda a comprender determinadas conductas en el trabajo. Tras analizar las relaciones entre los conceptos, se presenta una propuesta de modelo integrado, que aún no ha sido probada empíricamente. Finalmente, se sugiere una agenda de investigación.

Palabras clave: Sentidos del trabajo. Vínculos organizacionales. Compromiso en el trabajo.

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INTRODUCTION

This essay is based on a theoretical proposal that articulates three constructs, namely meanings of work, organizational ties (commitment, entrenchment, and consent), and engagement in the scope of organizations, so as to shed light on these topics. The purpose is to advance the theory on organizational behavior by analyzing the relationships between the constructs or adapting theoretical and measurement models to the work context of certain groups of employees.

Some of the primary references for research on the meanings of work have been the studies developed by the Meaning of Work (MOW) working group, which aimed to identify and describe characteristics attributed to work (A. L. Rodrigues, Barrichello, Irigaray, Soares, & Morin, 2017). Three epistemic matrices have influenced the discussions on this theme, namely the functionalist matrix, which has been adopted in this essay and relates well-being at work with the need to attribute meaning to activities (Morin, 2001, 2008); the critical matrix, which problematizes the tensions and contradictions of capital-labor relations (Ferraz & Fernandes, 2020); and the interpretivist matrix, which is grounded on work clinics (Bendassolli & Gondim, 2014).

In turn, studies on organizational ties and engagement have also been conducted in the field of human behavior. While the former have been studied for more than four decades, the latter is relatively new and emerged in the 1990s (Kahn, 1990). Since then, they have gradually spread through local, regional, and multicultural studies, and discussed along with assorted topics (Hansen, Fabricio, Rotili, & Lopes, 2018; Pereira & Lopes, 2019).

A reading of empirical research points to the existence of a theoretical convergence between meanings of work, organizational ties, and engagement, such as A. L. Rodrigues et al. (2017), who found a relationship between meanings of work and affective commitment; and May, Gilson, and Harter (2004), who associated work meanings with engagement. These works were identified through a review of articles published between 2000 and 2020, in the Scientific Periodicals Electronic Library (Spell), the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), the Electronic Psychology Journals (PEPSic), and the Journal Portal of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes).

The search terms were “meanings of work,” “organizational ties,” and “work engagement,” separately, in Portuguese and English. Upon their identification, the studies were organized, read, and analyzed, and revealed that the commitment, consent, and entrenchment ties have been more frequently discussed than the other topics. Given the readings, this essay brings as a novel theoretical element the study of the influence of work meanings on these organizational ties and work engagement, as well as the influence of ties on engagement.

The analysis of these relationships can contribute to the understanding of human behavior in organizations, insofar as it addresses a specific work context and/or group of workers, checking the influence of one phenomenon on another. Furthermore, by reviewing the theoretical models validated in previous research, empirical research can verify whether the assumptions are valid for a given work context or not, which, in turn, allows the incorporation of new biases for the theories employed.

To this end, in addition to this introduction, this article was divided into four other sections, namely theoretical framework, model proposition, suggestions for future empirical research, and final remarks, which, summarize the proposal without exhausting the discussions raised here.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section includes a discussion about the meanings of work, which in this study is addressed from a functionalist perspective, especially based on Morin (2001, 2008) and A. L. Rodrigues et al. (2017); the organizational ties of commitment (Bastos & Aguiar, 2015), entrenchment (A. C. A. Rodrigues & Bastos, 2015) and consent (Pinho, Bastos, & Rowe, 2015); and work engagement (Kahn, 1990; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), as will be verified in the following subsections.

The meanings of work

Stemming from a long tradition of research encompassing different disciplines, the national and international literature on the meanings of work has shown a diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches, pervading across different areas of knowledge, such as sociology of work and employment, political economy, and management (S. D. M. Costa, Marques, & Ferreira, 2020). Researchers investigating the topic have considered the factors that may have an impact on the construction of work meanings, which range from individual attitudes and organizational values to the numerous ways people perceive work (Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010).

The discussion of work meanings has resulted in domains of studies that are relatively independent of one another (Rosso et al., 2010), as well as various theoretical frameworks. Some works consider critical approaches (Rohm & Lopes, 2015), dealing with the concept beyond capital; others have a functionalist focus, which leads the discussions in the managerial field, such as the studies conducted by Morin (2001, 2008) and A. L. Rodrigues et al. (2017), in which the meaning of work can lead to personal and, above all, organizational consequences, hence influencing, among other things, one's motivation to work (Hackman & Oldham, 1975); and finally, some of them are interpretivist in nature (Bendassolli & Gondim, 2014).

Management research tends to emphasize the organizational consequences associated with different perceptions of work meanings. Some studies have shown associations between the meanings of work, satisfaction, and absenteeism (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997), motivation and satisfaction (Morin, 2001), workplace behavior (Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton, 2010), and pleasure and suffering (S. D. M. Costa et al., 2020). Others have dealt with the issue based on comparisons by employee hierarchical level and work environment characteristics (Graebin, Matte, Larentis, Motta, & Olea, 2019; A. L. Rodrigues, Barrichello, & Morin, 2016).

Meaningful work leads to identified regulation, which refers to one's degree of identification with the activities they perform, giving rise to an idea of value for them (Gagné et al., 2010). The construction of meanings can vary according to individual differences and factors present in the work context. Among them are the possibility of executing a purposeful task that allows the exercise and development of one's skills, has a certain margin of autonomy, allows one to know their performance, and fosters a sense of belonging (Morin, 2008).

The studies by Morin (2001) suggest that some characteristics can assign meaning to work. According to the author, to achieve meaning, work must be done efficiently, generating results and allowing intrinsic satisfaction; it must be morally acceptable, promoting relationships, human experiences, and allowing some margin of autonomy to ensure the safety of the worker; and, finally, it must keep workers busy (Morin, 2001). Therefore, when work has meaning and employees identify with it, they are likely to perceive an alignment of their values and goals, thus engaging and committing to the activity in question (A. L. Rodrigues et al., 2016).

Empirical results found by studies on the meanings of work indicate that job enrichment and one's suitability to perform the role in question contribute to meaningful work and work engagement (May et al., 2004). Another study with nursing professionals has revealed that out of the six characteristics of meaningful work identified by Morin (2001), four (autonomy, opportunity for learning and development, recognition, and moral rectitude) showed a high correlation with the general dimension "meanings of work" (A. L. Rodrigues et al., 2016).

In yet another study conducted with criminal experts, the meaning of work was positively related to affective commitment and negatively related to psychological distress. Moreover, in the case analyzed the experience of meaning derived from the social utility and the opportunities for learning and development that this occupational group identifies in the exercise of their professions (A. L. Rodrigues et al., 2017).

These results may subsidize other studies that intend to empirically test the model presented in this essay, verifying issues that corroborate and/or disagree with these findings.

Organizational ties

More generally, organizational ties refer to the relationships between employees and the employing organization based on psychological issues (Mariano & Moscon, 2018). Therefore, the proposal of this essay is limited to dealing with commitment, based on the affective component (Bastos & Aguiar, 2015); entrenchment, which refers to the tendency to remain in the

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organization in the face of a negative perception of employability and possible losses resulting from quitting the organization (A. C. A. Rodrigues & Bastos, 2011); and consent, which refers to the obedience to an authority figure and the company rules (Pinho et al., 2015).

Indeed, organizational commitment has been one of the most debated concepts in the field of human behavior in organizations (Bastos, Siqueira, Medeiros, & Menezes, 2008). The definitions on this subject involve representations linked to an affective psychological state in which the emotional attachment of individuals to the organization and its goals and values is more closely related to the positive aspects of work (Mariano & Moscon, 2018, p. 230). The first contributions to this construct were made by Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979), with emphasis on the affective nature of this tie.

Research on commitment has relied on three primary sources, namely sociology, organizational theory, and social psychology (Bastos, 1993). Five approaches to commitment were identified, namely the affective, which is linked to identification and involvement with the organization; the instrumental, which assesses investments and rewards; the normative, which refers to the internalization of pressures and behavioral norms; the sociological, which considers a relationship of authority and subordination; and the behavioral, given the maintenance and consistency of certain individual behaviors (Bastos, 1993; Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Gradually, three of these approaches were consolidated in research developed from the 1990s on, namely the affective, the instrumental, and the normative. They were combined into a single theoretical model, which, in turn, enabled the integration of the construct by Meyer and Allen (1991). These authors identified variables that can influence behavior, considering personal, work, and organizational characteristics, as well as motivation, job satisfaction, performance, turnover, attendance, and tenure.

More recently, this three-dimensional model (Meyer & Allen, 1991) has been questioned because it contains ambiguities that may lead to conceptual problems and imprecision regarding the construct (A. C. A. Rodrigues & Bastos, 2010; Solinger, Van Olffen, & Roe, 2008;). In the analysis conducted by Solinger et al. (2008), different studies suggest that empirically separating normative and affective commitment would be highly unlikely. The multidimensionality of the construct presents a lack of conceptual precision, which results in a higher level of abstraction and, consequently, different applications (A. C. A. Rodrigues & Bastos, 2010) and theoretical impediments.

From an empirical point of view, a study conducted by Pereira and Lopes (2019) with technical-administrative servers of a federal education institution revealed a strong and significant positive correlation between commitment and the three dimensions of work engagement, namely vigor, dedication, and absorption. According to the authors, the literature still lacks studies relating commitment to work engagement (Pereira & Lopes, 2019). Thus, novel studies relating the constructs, such as the one proposed in this essay, may be appropriate to advance the previously produced knowledge.

This is the case of Tomazzoni and V. M. F. Costa (2020) when exploring the antecedents of commitment among a group of workers in the retail sector. They found that commitment is the tie that best explains the job performance construct, and is frequently associated with higher rates of productivity, motivation, and commitment at work. Among other results, the authors proved the hypothesis that "workers who establish tie patterns where organizational commitment is stronger present superior job performance" (Tomazzoni & V. M. F. Costa, 2020, p. 278). This, in turn, corroborates the importance of understanding the affective bonds between employees and employing organizations.

Based on the one-dimensional proposal for the commitment and embodiment constructs, as well as the wide adoption of this new theoretical model in research on the subject, as in the studies conducted by Pereira and Lopes (2019) and Tomazzoni and V. M. F. Costa (2020), other links are proposed, aiming to reduce the conceptual imprecision that impends commitment (A. C. A. Rodrigues & Bastos, 2010). It is in this sense that the concepts of organizational entrenchment and consent are developed, which are also part of the scope of the theoretical model suggested in this essay.

Contributions about entrenchment are grounded on a theoretical basis similar to the discussions about instrumental commitment based on reflections on one's career and the three-dimensional commitment model (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993). Tomazzoni and V. M. F. Costa (2020) and other studies refer to the contributions of authors such as K. D. Carson and Bedeian (1994), who discussed a measure of career commitment by bringing up the notion of career commitment and/or entrenchment *a posteriori* (K. D. Carson, P. P. Carson, & Bedeian, 1995).

As a construct stemming from the field of behavior, career entrenchment is not restricted to psychological dimensions, considering the perspective of continuity of individuals concerning their permanence in a given position by virtue of the rewards associated with the career in question. This is a multidimensional construct that involves career investments; therefore, leaving the organization would imply losses, emotional costs, and limited alternatives to pursue a new career (K. D. Carson et al., 1995). Indeed, this discussion applies not only to one's career but also to the organizational sphere as well.

Supported by the analysis of the side bets theory, Becker (1960) considers that the individual-organization relationship conditions the employee's behavior in a certain way, given the costs related to quitting and the need to adjust individually to certain social positions. A. C. A. Rodrigues and Bastos (2012) highlight the importance of the social roles that employees take on in their relation to entrenchment. In this case, the rewards resulting from one's behavior would be lost, should the employee leave the organization. Moreover, in a different work context, they would certainly find it difficult to restore the rewards they enjoyed before (A. C. A. Rodrigues & Bastos, 2012).

Therefore, entrenchment is built upon three dimensions, the first two of which derive from Becker's (1960) contributions, namely the individual's investments in the conditions that allow him or her to adapt to the organization (adjustment to social position); a certain degree of financial stability and benefits that may be lost when he or she leaves the company (impersonal bureaucratic arrangements); and possible labor market restrictions, considering the lack of alternatives and professional profile issues, such as age (alternative limitations) (Meyer & Allen, 1991; A. C. A. Rodrigues & Bastos, 2012).

Entrenchment begins the moment a given individual joins a company, based on expectations that may or may not be fulfilled (A. C. A. Rodrigues & Bastos, 2015). From there, workers tend to remain in the organizations in face of the losses that may follow their potential departure, such as the benefits offered to them, economic, the resources invested to adjust to the position, the network of contacts built, among other issues that limit the perception of employment possibilities that allow them to meet their needs (A. C. A. Rodrigues & Bastos, 2011).

Different studies have been conducted associating entrenchment with other elements of organizational behavior, such as engagement (Pereira & Lopes, 2019), work values (S. R. M. Silva, Paiva, & Lima, 2019), quality of life at the workplace (Milhome, Rowe, & Santos, 2018), in addition to two other organizational ties, namely commitment and consent (Pereira & Lopes, 2019; Tomazzoni, V. M. F. Costa, Antonello, & M. B. Rodrigues, 2020). These consider different work contexts, professional categories, and the individual characteristics of workers.

Regarding entrenchment and engagement (Pereira & Lopes, 2019), a low negative correlation between such constructs was identified. When this analysis is carried out based on dimensions, the limitation of alternatives is negatively correlated with the vigor, dedication, and absorption dimensions, all of which are components of work engagement. The study in question was conducted with civil servants, but when these results are compared with those found in novel studies, the work reality and the particularities of each case must be considered.

Finally, the idea of organizational consent is theoretically similar to the concept of normative organizational commitment, bearing similarities with Meyer and Allen (1991), who addressed the roles related to the organization hierarchy. The rationale for this construct is based on a sociological proposal, considering that there is an emphasis on authority control relations in the relationship between the individual and the organization, which can condition employees to obey and fulfill their role as subordinates, leaving aside emotional and psychological issues (Pinho et al., 2015).

According to Pinho et al. (2015), it is plausible to consider that the role of submission to one's boss is already internalized by workers, especially in cases where they have low education and occupy lower hierarchical positions. When employment opportunities are scarce, these factors favor subservient conduct by employees (Pinho et al., 2015). Within organizations, managers would have the ability to distinguish committed workers from those who are obedient; therefore, consent-based ties should not be involved with the notion of organizational commitment (E. E. C. Silva & Bastos, 2010).

Based on these arguments and a review of classic social psychology studies, E. E. C. Silva and Bastos (2010, p. 7) conducted research to clarify "an imprecise conceptual zone that delimits the concepts of commitment and consent or obedience." These inaccuracies emerge from the tensions between the notions of passive commitment and loyalty coined by O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) and Bar-Hayim and Berman (1992). When analyzing empirical data, E. E. C. Silva and Bastos (2010) concluded that the two-dimensional model, which integrated the blind obedience and intimate acceptance dimensions, would best explain consent.

In the first case, compliance with orders is automatic and no evaluation is formulated about them. Even in cases where one does not understand their purpose, they are still carried out. On the other hand, in intimate acceptance, rules and norms are followed thanks to the similarity between the worker's personal and organizational vision, as they believe that these are the best procedures to be adopted for the sake of the company. In turn, when critical obedience occurs, one ponders the orders or rules, considering the demands presented by their hierarchical superiors (E. E. C. Silva & Bastos, 2010).

As research on the topic advanced, E. E. C. Silva and Bastos (2015) proposed adjustments to the conceptualization and measurement model of organizational consent, supporting it as a unidimensional construct, limited to the blind obedience dimension. The authors reviewed several studies that demonstrated the strong association between the intimate acceptance dimension and the affective basis of organizational commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Thus, the variables in this dimension were excluded from the consent scale (E. E. C. Silva & Bastos, 2015) and included in the engagement scale proposed by Bastos and Aguiar (2015).

From an empirical point of view, no studies linking consent to work meanings and engagement were identified. However, it is plausible to assume that in bureaucratic organizations where obedience and hierarchy are pillars of organizational culture (A. L. Rodrigues et al., 2017), there is a relationship between the meanings of work and consent, to the extent that patterns of submission are naturalized. When this naturalization occurs, consent can result in engagement. However, if obedience and hierarchy are not crucial elements of a given culture, employees may not necessarily engage (E. E. C. Silva & Bastos, 2015), even if they come to consent.

WORK ENGAGEMENT

Work engagement is relatively new in the literature on behavior, and the first discussions on the topic were introduced by Kahn (1990). According to the author, the employee's involvement with work possibly occurs to a greater or lesser extent. This involvement can pervade across physical, emotional, or cognitive dimensions, and can be conditioned by aspects related to the context in which the employee is inserted. It also involves a subjective dimension regarding the individual's perception, which may favor (or not) their involvement with work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Among other concepts, engagement can be defined as a positive condition or state that allows workers to use resources in a facilitated way, thus contributing to achieving the organization's objectives (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2009). It is an important indicator of employee well-being in organizations (Bakker, 2011), and that is why it has been addressed in myriad studies analyzing organizational issues (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006; Hansen et al., 2018; Pereira & Lopes, 2019; Schaufeli, Dijkstra, & Vasquez, 2013).

This construct refers to the energy that workers expend on their activities by directing them toward the organization's goals. Therefore, such studies allow managers to create strategies and formulate policies to facilitate employee engagement (Bakker, 2011). Cavalcante, Siqueira, and Kuniyoshi (2014), for example, identified a positive relationship between engagement, psychological capital, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment.

Engaged employees tend to share the feeling of being immersed and focused on their work. In certain cases, this often happens to a greater degree of intensity. Thus, employees do not notice time passing as they perform a given task, even in the face of eventual setbacks, they tend to maintain their enthusiasm and pride, thus perceiving meaning in work (Schaufeli et al., 2013). This type of behavior can be analyzed through three dimensions, namely vigor, dedication, and absorption (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Schaufeli et al., 2013).

The first involves mental resilience and high levels of energy (vigor), strength (dedication), and focus (absorption) at work, all of which encourage persistence in the event of adverse situations. The second comprises the idea of the significance of the activity, the attribution of positive meaning, and pride in one's responsibilities. Finally, the third concerns concentration, focus, and immersion in one's activities (Hakanen et al., 2006; Schaufeli et al., 2013). Together, these dimensions can result in engagement, personal growth, and learning (Kahn, 1990).

A bibliometric survey by S. D. M. Costa (2021) identified that the most recurrent themes associated with work engagement were satisfaction, well-being, psychological capital, commitment, entrenchment, and other components of human behavior in organizations; however, studies on the subject are still scarce. The last two issues concern a study conducted by Pereira and

Lopes (2019), which has been previously discussed in this paper. Such connections are also addressed in Martins, L. V. Costa and Siqueira (2015); however, they were articulated with organizational citizenship behaviors, and the possible relationships between them have not been dealt with.

It should be noted that some studies employ the terms "engagement" and "commitment" interchangeably, such as Meyer and Allen (1997) and Mowday (1998). In this regard, Hallberg and Schaufeli (2006) analyzed whether work engagement, as measured by the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, could be empirically separated from organizational commitment. Through the results of discriminant analysis, latent intercorrelations between constructs, and factor analyses, the authors concluded that employee engagement and commitment are different and reflect distinct aspects of employee attachment.

As we have finished introducing the conceptual development of each of the themes, the next section will focus on more specific conceptual aspects and present an integrative model.

RELATIONAL MODEL ARTICULATING THE MEANINGS OF WORK, ORGANIZATIONAL TIES, AND ENGAGEMENT

This essay proposes to articulate the meanings of work, organizational ties (commitment, entrenchment, and consent), and engagement. It is relevant to understand to what extent the meanings of work relate to organizational ties and engagement. Indeed, the meaning attributed to work can influence the employees' permanence in organizations, as well as the results they obtain through their work. The conceptual aspects that allow the articulation of the constructs (Box 1) are presented below.

Box 1
Conceptual aspects of the meanings of work, organizational ties, and engagement

Constructs	Related concepts	Components or dimensions	Employee behavior
Meanings of work	An idea or an image represented either through a sign or an experience (Morin, 2008).	Involves autonomy, learning and development, social utility, recognition, moral rectitude, and cooperation (Morin, 2001).	Meaningful work stimulates the employee's permanence in the organization, as well as their commitment and identification with the activity in question (A. L. Rodrigues et al., 2016).
Commitment	Concerns affection and connection with the organization, so that the employee's behavior is aligned with the proposed objectives and goals (Allen & Meyer, 1996; Meyer & Allen, 1991).	It is based on the affective component (Bastos & Aguiar, 2015).	The decision to stay in the organization is fostered by individual desire, which, in turn, derives from this affective bond (Allen & Meyer, 1996; Meyer & Allen, 1991).
Entrenchment	Refers to the employees' entrapment in an organization as they fail to perceive other work opportunities that meet their psychological needs and expectations (Mariano & Moscon, 2018).	Encompasses three dimensions, namely individual adjustment to social positions, impersonal bureaucratic arrangements, and limitation of alternatives (A. C. A. Rodrigues & Bastos, 2015).	Leaving the organization is associated with losses, emotional costs, and limited opportunities to start a new career (A. C. A. Rodrigues & Bastos, 2015).
Consent	Refers to the employee's tendency to comply with the company's demands, which are personified in hierarchical superiors (E. E. C. Silva & Bastos, 2015).	It is grounded on obedience, considering the orders established by the hierarchical superior (Pinho et al., 2015; E. E. C. Silva & Bastos, 2015).	Employees execute and comply with what is demanded from them because they feel they must do so in the context of the power and authority relations established between managers and subordinates (E. E. C. Silva & Bastos, 2015).
Engagement	Refers to one's identification with one's work and the energy devoted by employees to perform their tasks (Kahn, 1990).	Encompasses three components, namely vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).	This can imply positive organizational results, a sense of belonging, and identification with one's work (Schaufeli et al., 2013).

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

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The attribution of meaning to work involves individual and organizational factors. By organizing the bibliographic production on the theme into four axes, Rosso et al. (2010) indicate that these factors concern values stemming from cultural and personal forces; motivations, which consider one's degree of involvement in effective job performance; and beliefs, which consider the position that work occupies in one's life. In the organizational context, they can contribute to psychological states that influence personal and professional outcomes (Hackman & Oldham, 1975); that is, a positive mental state that contributes to increased productivity.

Possibly, the more workers identify with what they do, the more value and meaning work will have for them (Gagné et al., 2010), considering the six components designated by Morin (2001). Thus, the more work is charged with meaning, the more likely the employee is to develop a strong affective bond. In other words, the experience of meaning can contribute to or increase the employee's affection, commitment, and involvement with the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991; A. L. Rodrigues et al., 2016). In addition, it is assumed that the meanings of work stimulate engagement since there is identification with one's work (Kahn, 1990).

The meanings of work (Morin, 2001; A. L. Rodrigues et al., 2016) can also be associated with entrenchment (A. C. A. Rodrigues & Bastos, 2011, 2012) and consent (Pinho et al., 2015). In the first case, the lower the perception of meaning in one's work, the more employees perceive themselves as entrenched. However, the empirical study conducted by A. C. A. Rodrigues and Bastos (2015) indicates that the behavior of the "adjustment to social position" and "impersonal bureaucratic arrangements" dimensions presents significantly different results compared to the "limitation of alternatives" dimension. Therefore, it is expected that when analyzing possible relationships between the meanings of work and each of the dimensions of entrenchment, these distinctions pointed out by the authors will be observed.

At first, the meanings of work can be configured as antecedents of the "adjustment to social position" and "impersonal bureaucratic arrangements" dimensions. However, the relation with entrenchment is conditioned to the perception of limitation of alternatives, which, unlike the other two, refers to aspects extrinsic to the organization and work; these, in turn, are related to the perception of options and opportunities available in the labor market (A. C. A. Rodrigues & Bastos, 2015). Exploring the particularities of the construct allows us to understand possible differences between the relations between work meanings and the entrenchment dimensions.

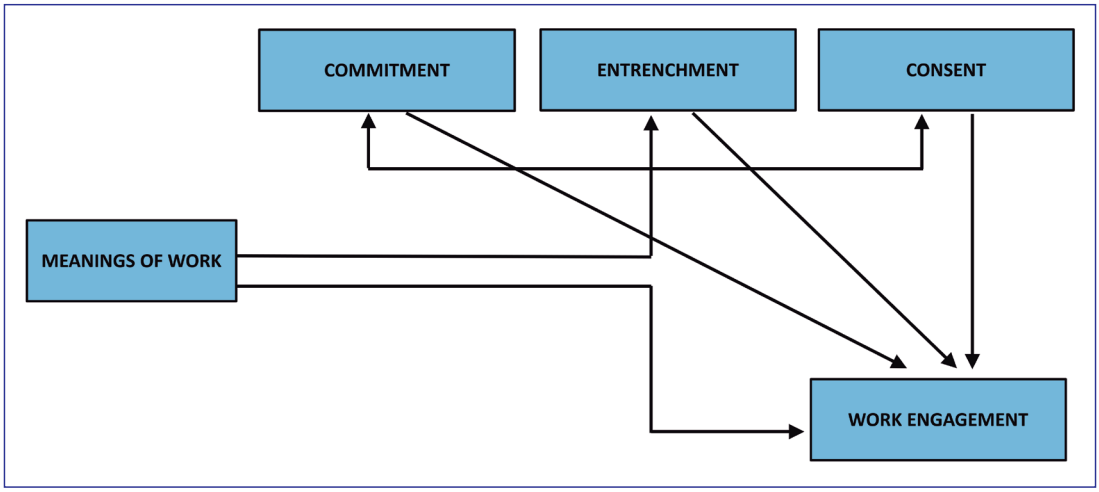
When individuals develop an affective bond with the organization by aligning their behavior with organizational goals and objectives (Allen & Meyer, 1996; Meyer & Allen, 1991), the psychological issues that imply an emotional attachment (Mariano & Moscon, 2018) can stimulate work engagement. this, in turn, results in positive organizational results and employee identification with one's work (Schaufeli et al., 2013). Thus, commitment can have a positive impact on engagement.

From a theoretical point of view, the relationship between entrenchment and engagement seems possible but it also deserves attention regarding the distinction between the adjustment to social position, the impersonal bureaucratic arrangements, and the limitation of alternatives. At first, it is plausible to suppose the existence of a negative association between the constructs since the employee's entrapment (Mariano & Moscon, 2018); that is, their permanence in a given organization, is motivated by the potential losses associated with quitting, along with the emotional costs and the limitations to start a new career (A. C. A. Rodrigues & Bastos, 2015), but not because of one's identification with the work itself or the meanings attributed to it.

In turn, consent consists of obedience to the hierarchical superior by complying with the organizational demands (Pinho et al., 2015; E. E. C. Silva & Bastos, 2015). If "an individual does that which has been established by his or her superior because he or she believes that strategically that would be the best course of action in that situation" (E. E. C. Silva & Bastos, 2015, p. 100), even if he or she does not understand its meaning and makes no judgment about it, they may show engagement arising from the deliberate action of consenting, which, in turn, raises the possibility of a relationship between consent and work engagement.

Figure 1 below illustrates the possible relationships between the meanings of work, organizational ties (commitment, entrenchment, and consent), and work engagement, based on an integrated model.

Figure 1
A model integrating the meanings of work, organizational ties, and engagement



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

In Figure 1, the meanings of work are an antecedent construct to organizational ties and work engagement. Commitment, entrenchment, and consent, in turn, may influence engagement to some extent and in diverse ways, considering the particularities previously presented. Based on this theoretical articulation and the proposal of a relational model, the next section presents possibilities for empirical studies that promote the application of the model between individuals and organizations.

METHODOLOGICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As for the type of research, the topics can be dealt with from a quantitative perspective, guided by conceptual frameworks of reference and formulation of hypotheses to be tested based on statistical procedures of intermediate complexity, such as bivariate statistics (linear relationship studies between two variables) and more robust techniques (factor analysis and structural equation modeling), which allow the discussion of connections between the meanings of work, organizational ties (commitment, entrenchment, and consent), and engagement constructs.

As for the quantitative perspective, some research instruments already validated can be used in these studies, such as the questionnaire on the meanings of work, validated by A. L. Rodrigues et al. (2016); the commitment (Bastos & Aguiar, 2015), entrenchment (A. C. A. Rodrigues & Bastos, 2015) and consent scales (E. E. C. Silva & Bastos, 2015); as well as the work engagement scale (Angst, Benevides-Pereira & Porto-Martins, 2009). The suggested questionnaires have presented satisfactory statistical indexes, meeting the criteria and parameters recommended in the literature.

Due to the complexity of the proposed model, the multivariate analysis presents itself as a more adequate alternative for the proposal. According to Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham (2009, p. 23), "the multivariate character lies in the multiple variates (multiple combinations of variables), and not only in the number of variables or observations." Furthermore, the authors explain that "to be considered truly multivariate, however, all the variables must be random and interrelated in such ways that their different effects cannot meaningfully be interpreted separately," as proposed in this essay.

To analyze each dimension of the constructs involved in more depth, it is recommended to adopt the qualitative perspective. If, on the one hand, quantitative research allows condensing the information into a smaller set of variables (factors), thus minimizing the loss of information (Hair et al., 2009), on the other hand, qualitative research allows a better understanding of the context in which a given phenomenon occurs by subjecting it to an integrated assessment (Godoy, 1995). The combination of these possibilities makes up a triangulation of methods (Collis & Hussey, 2006) which blends amplitude and depth.

Regarding data collection in quantitative studies, the use of questionnaires is recurrent. Thus, it is paramount to identify and employ the most appropriate instruments to measure the meanings of work, organizational ties (commitment, entrenchment, and consent), and engagement. However, one must be attentive to the discussions and questions that pervade across these constructs, since some of the instruments already validated and available in the literature have come to be considered inadequate, under the argument that the factors or dimensions used to measure these phenomena may lead researchers to conceptual ambiguities and inaccuracies.

As for qualitative studies, it is recommended that questions be drafted preliminarily to serve as a roadmap for conducting interviews. Depending on the type of organization and the accessibility of the researcher, these interviews can be conducted individually or in groups (focus groups). Their content must encompass topics concerning the meanings of work, organizational ties (commitment, entrenchment, and consent), and engagement. Content analysis is suggested as a method for investigating qualitative data since it allows the interpretation of words, behaviors, and expressions.

In both methodological possibilities for the operationalization of future research (qualitative, quantitative, or methodological triangulation), it is crucial to observe the recommendations outlined by the research ethics committees. Studies with the participation of workers from the same organization are advisable, having as objects of analysis, for example, issues related to responsibilities and hierarchy; employees working in different environments (public, private and third sector); employees of different age groups, including younger workers with limited experience, and older ones, who are closer to retirement, among other possibilities; outsourced workers and others working in permanent and partial schedules; and workers engaged in in-person, remote, hybrid, telecommuting, and other work modalities.

FINAL REMARKS

This article aimed to reflect on and advance the discussions about the meanings of work, organizational ties (commitment, entrenchment, and consent), and engagement, while considering possible interrelationships between them, according to their integration into a single theoretical model. Recent publications have worked with different possibilities of analysis, but a search on the main Brazilian journal platforms suggests that the articulation between the topics in line with the proposal presented here is unprecedented.

The propositions presented here are not intended to exhaust the discussions about the meanings of work, organizational ties (commitment, entrenchment, and consent), and engagement. On the contrary, they intend precisely to point out possibilities of research and articulation between the topics, by discussing to what extent each of their components or dimensions can influence human behavior in organizations. Therefore, we understand that this study contributes to operationalizing empirical research by suggesting methodologies to be adopted, as well as proposing other research possibilities at the individual and organizational levels.

More specifically, these contributions allow incorporating information about the possible influence of work meanings on organizational attachment and work engagement into the literature, as well as the influence of attachment on engagement; revisiting previously validated theoretical models by pointing out aspects that can be maintained, modified, or added when analyzing a given work context and/or group of employees; and exploring possible doubts about conceptual overlaps between constructs, such as commitment and engagement, thus making the distinctions between them clearer.

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