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Research Article

# Managers, Engagement and Political Behaviors: A Nonlinear Relationship

Gestores, Engajamento e Comportamentos Políticos: Uma Relação Não Linear



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## ABSTRACT

**Context:** usually linked to power and decision making, managers are much closer to the effects of the Perceptions of Organizational Politics, a counterproductive phenomenon, but inherent in the very existence of institutions. **Objective:** the purpose of this paper is to investigate how managers from different companies and with different Work Engagement levels face the presence of political behavior in their organizations. **Method:** we performed cluster analysis with data from 1498 managers; The hypotheses were tested using multiple linear and nonlinear regression analyzes. The methodology includes descriptive statistics and ANOVA. **Results:** in most cases, resilience, involvement and concentration, mitigates the perception of political behavior in the organizations. However, there was a paradigm shift among the highly engaged: Engagement impacted on the increase of Perceptions of Organizational Politics. **Conclusions:** work Engagement and Perceptions of Organizational Politics has a curvilinear relationship, indicating that they are not necessarily antagonistic. The study indicates that emotionally and cognitively structured managers tend to increase their engagement even in the face of a heightened perception of a political ambience, revealing a positive perspective on management practices: fostering greater understanding and connection with the organizational environment will possibly yield more effective results than trying to restrain or neglect political behaviors.

**Keywords:** work engagement; perception of organizational politics; organizational behavior; nonlinear relationship.

**JEL Code:** D72, G32, C2.

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## RESUMO

**Contexto:** normalmente ligados aos centros de poder e tomada de decisão, os gestores encontram-se mais próximos aos efeitos da Percepção de Política nas Organizações, um fenômeno considerado contraproducente, porém inerente à própria existência das instituições. **Objetivo:** este estudo investiga como gestores de diversas empresas, com diferentes níveis de Engajamento no Trabalho encaram a presença de comportamentos políticos em suas organizações. **Método:** dados de uma *survey* com 1498 gestores foram submetidos a análise de *clusters*; regressões múltiplas lineares e não lineares subsidiaram testes de hipóteses. **Resultados:** na maioria dos casos analisados, a resiliência, o envolvimento e a concentração mitigaram a percepção de comportamentos políticos na organização. Entretanto, constatou-se uma quebra de paradigma entre os altamente engajados: o Engajamento impactou no aumento da Percepção de Política. **Conclusões:** Engajamento no Trabalho e Percepção de Política na Organização relacionam-se de forma curvilínea, indicando que não são necessariamente antagonísticos. O estudo indica que gestores emocionalmente e cognitivamente estruturados tendem a aumentar seu engajamento mesmo diante de uma elevada percepção de um ambiente político, revelando uma perspectiva positiva às práticas de gestão: fomentar um maior entendimento e conexão com o ambiente organizacional possivelmente trará resultados mais eficazes do que tentativas de coibir ou negligenciar os comportamentos políticos.

**Palavras-chave:** engajamento no trabalho; percepção de política na organização; comportamento organizacional; relacionamento não linear.

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## INTRODUCTION

Postmodern organizations are eminently political environments, influenced by flows of change and uncertainties in a system composed on the one hand of activities for common results and on the other by an arena disputed by groups with different interests (Brass, 2017; Jackson & Grace, 2018; Mintzberg, 1985). Managers of different levels are inserted in this panorama in which, from the power relations involved, there takes places games and tactics to influence, change, obtain and ensure interests inherent in the very existence of institutions (Kimura, 2015; Mintzberg, 1985).

In recent decades, politics has been reported as a common phenomenon in the organizational world and even necessary to the survival of the institutions (Allen, Porter, & Angle, 2016; Buchanan, 2008; Hochwarter, Ferris, Laird, Treadway, & Coleman Gallagher, 2010). At the same time, the daily life of organizations, policy-related behaviors are perceived as unsanctioned activities, from backstage maneuvers and self-interest actions. As a consequence, the Perceptions of Organizational Politics (POP) are considered an ambiguous, stressful and dysfunctional aspect of the work environment, impacting team productivity (Abbas, Raja, Darr, & Bouckennooghe, 2014; Bedi & Schat, 2013; Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009).

Considering the almost inexorable presence of politics in the life of organizations, this study, from the perspective of Positive Organizational Behavior (Luthans, Luthans, & Luthans, 2015), addresses the need to identify how positive factors relate to POP and thus support managerial actions and Human Resource Development research aimed at minimizing the negative aspects of POP and broadening the understanding of its intricacies. For this purpose, we will use the concept Work Engagement (WKE) at: a state in which professionals connect to their work activities through energetic, emotional and cognitive dimensions (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006).

The argument developed here was not only focused on the positive versus negative relationship, because despite the predominance of results indicating the policy perceived as a stressor, the addition of other approaches fills gaps and expands research perspectives: studies indicate that, at the individual level, which appears as an obstacle for some, it can be seen as an opportunity by others, with different nuances, resulting in groups with different behaviors facing the same factor (LePine, Podsakoff, & LePine,

2005; Lu, Wang, Lu, Du, & Bakker, 2014; Meisler & Vigoda-Gadot, 2014; Perrewé, Rosen, & Maslach, 2012). Recently, the relationship between WKE and counterproductive aspects has still yielded inconclusive results (Reijseger, Peeters, Taris, & Schaufeli, 2017). Similarly, it is possible to identify inconsistencies regarding the negative effect of POP on labor factors (for a meta-analysis see Miller, Rutherford, & Kolodinsky, 2008).

Specifically regarding the study of organizational policy, most investigations in this area took place in Europe and the United States (Bedi & Schat, 2013; Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010). However, in emerging economies such as Brazil, Russia, India and China, there is a tendency to create informal arrangements that converge with the interests of specific groups, and to overlap with sanctioned norms (Ardichvili, Jondle, Kowske, Cornachione, Li & Thakadipuram, 2012). In the present research, the scenario is Brazil, where historically there is a context strongly affected by political behaviors (De Moraes, 2017; Mansur & Sobral, 2011; Torres, Alfinito, Galvão, & Tse, 2015).

The purpose of this article is to investigate how managers of different companies with different levels of engagement face the presence of political behavior in their organizations. For further analysis, we explore the multidimensional characteristic of WKE and consider the hypothesis of curvilinear relationship.

In a context where the study of policy strength in the organizational environment is still taboo or approached in a secondary way (Mansur & Sobral, 2011; Miranda, 2009), this research contributes as an alternative to the negative generalization of the phenomenon by conducting a nonlinear approach in its analysis and considering that politics can be perceived either as an obstacle or as an opportunity. The results of the WKE action against the POP also help to define the boundaries between promotion and mitigation of these two factors. The findings present a positive perspective on management practices, because they point out that fostering greater connection with the organizational environment will potentially yield more effective results than trying to curb political behavior or neglect it.

## WORK ENGAGEMENT

In the Academia, WKE is a relatively new concept in human resource management research and has an identified approach in the field of Positive Organizational Behavior, which highlights

the uplifting and positive aspects of the human personality, thus seeking to maintain the optimal functioning of the individual and, consequently, organizational management in this light (Gagné, 2014; Luthans et al., 2015; Schaufeli, 2012).

It is a state of mind composed of three dimensions: Vigor, Absorption, and Dedication. The Vigor dimension is characterized by high levels of mental energy, strong resilience at work and a persistent willingness to put effort into tasks even in adverse situations, allowing the individual to deal with problems, overcome obstacles or resist everyday pressure (Gagné, 2014; Schaufeli, 2012; Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). The emotional factor Dedication refers to being strongly involved in one's task, thus experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge (Gagné, 2014; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Finally, the cognitive dimension Absorption is characterized by a state in which one is fully concentrated and pleasantly absorbed in one's work (Gagné, 2014; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Under this condition, the degree of absorption causes the individual to experience the sensation that time passes quickly, fluidly and cannot seem to easily disconnect from work (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Schaufeli, 2012).

Important implications of WKE are linked to high level of commitment, job satisfaction, low absenteeism and strong motivation to learn (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008, 2017; Rich et al., 2010). All of the characteristics described above allow us to infer that by their very nature, engaged individuals have enough positive emotions, energy, and personal resources to cope with the tension and stress of everyday life, allowing them to minimize their problems or face a challenge which is usually considered an obstacle (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010; De Moraes & Teixeira, 2017).

## PERCEPTIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS

This study approaches the POP from the following perspective: perception of actions whose result will bring own benefit or for a group and that, from the social and organizational aspect, are considered illegitimate mainly because they do not consider the resulting negative to the other parties (Lepisto & Pratt, 2012; Mintzberg, 1985).

In a seminal survey, Madison, Allen, Porter, Renwick and Mayes (1980) pointed out that managers perceived political activity related to

power and uncertainty, but also considered it as an important issue for organizations and individuals. The presence of politics as a system of influence inherent in the various types of institutions is recurrently investigated from the perspective of employees' dysfunctional perception of the phenomenon and its negative impacts (Allen et al., 2016; Bedi & Schat, 2013; Miller et al., 2008). Regarding those resulting from the POP, we can highlight: strong negative relationship with job satisfaction and affective commitment; restrictive effect on task performance; reduction in employee dedication (Chang et al., 2009; Mansur & Sobral, 2011; Miller et al., 2008).

In the Brazilian context, there are indications that the presence and effects of organizational policy are known and practiced at various levels of organizations, as the cultural values of the country in many cases strengthen the position of individuals from the policy and, at the same time, soften its characterization as a negative phenomenon (Chu & Wood, 2008; Torres et al., 2015), enabling managers involved in institutionally sanctioned political activities to bring benefits to the groups with which they relate and to the organization as a whole (Fedor, Maslyn, Farmer, & Bettenhausen, 2008).

However, politics can be perceived in different ways: as a result of emotional or cognitive variations, depending on how one looks at opportunity or obstacle, or cultural differences (Meisler & Vigoda-Gadot, 2014; Perrewé et al., 2012; Vigoda, 2001).

Managers play a key role in organizational change and are very closely linked to power and its tactics (Buchanan, 2008; Hope, 2010). The search for hierarchical positions propels attitudes toward approaching the centers of power and control, where decision-making processes occur, usually susceptible to political influence (Allen et al., 2016; Atinc, Darrat, Fuller, & Parker, 2010). Few important decisions are made without key parties protecting or enhancing their interests (Kreutzer, Walter, & Cardinal, 2015). From this follows the perception that the political dimension is a phenomenon existing at the managerial levels or strongly associated with those who seek to climb positions in this direction, regardless of the means used (Allen et al., 2016; Chang et al., 2009).

As can be seen, the challenge of capturing the perception of political behavior in organizations is linked to the ambiguity, subjectivity and controversy of the subject (Allen et al., 2016;

Miller et al., 2008). Depending on each observer's previous experiences, personal career goals, gender and group of which he / she is a member, the same behavior may be considered political or not (Ferris, Frink, Bhawuk, Zhou, & Gilmore, 1996; Kacmar, Bachrach, Harris, & Zivnuska, 2011; Kacmar, Bozeman, Carlson, & Anthony, 1999) or even be seen as enabling organizational objectives and a mechanism to protect specific interests (Russo, Rodrigues, Russo, & Yu, 2018).

## HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

As reviewed earlier, although prevalent in research, negative links between POP and productive factors are not a consensus. Thus, the development of this study considers that the association of a positive state with a negative perception can generate a much less linear and generalized combination of complexity than traditional organizational research (Warr, 2011). From this nonlinear point of view and considering the importance of variability in analysis levels when dealing with complex characteristics (De Moraes & Teixeira, 2017; Nishii & Wright, 2008), the hypotheses were segmented into groups with low, intermediate and high WKE levels, as described below.

We first used the WKE dimensions in the hypothesis test, which allowed a deeper understanding of the structuring factors of this concept in relation to the dependent variable (POP), thus avoiding loss of information (Seppälä et al., 2009). This practice aims to provide subsidies for subsequent analyzes to use consolidated WKE on a non-linear basis (Schaufeli et al., 2006; Seppälä et al., 2009).

The first two groups of hypotheses adopt the Positive Organizational Behavior perspective, where the focus is on positive values and not the traditional negative/problematic approach (Luthans et al., 2015). Since engaged employees have enough attributes to focus efforts on their activities and reduce the effect of adversity (Rich et al., 2010; Schaufeli, 2012), a WKE mitigating effect can be expected from POP, thus allowing a negative association between these attributes and POP:

**Hypothesis 1:** The dimension VIGOR ( $H_{1a}$ ), DEDICATION ( $H_{1b}$ ) and ABSORPTION ( $H_{1c}$ ) are negatively related to POP in a group with low WKE score.

As an extension of the previous argument, and considering that resource stocks of those engaged have a cumulative effect on their ability to respond to recurring obstacles (Gagné, 2014; Reijseger et al., 2017), we can also propose that

with an increase in the level of WKE, the strength of the negative relationship between its dimensions and the POP is greater:

**Hypothesis 2:** In the group with intermediate WKE score, the negative relationship between the dimensions VIGOR ( $H_{2a}$ ), DEDICATION ( $H_{2b}$ ), ABSORPTION ( $H_{2c}$ ) and POP has greater magnitude than the low WKE score group.

However, highly engaged employees have sufficiently strong energetic, cognitive and emotional conditions to develop a strong connection and understanding of their environment (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011), which allows a greater perception of stressors, without prejudice to the positive characteristics they bring with them, as they treat obstacles as opportunities (Crawford et al., 2010; De Moraes & Teixeira, 2017; Kane-Frieder, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2014). This line of argument can be translated into positive relationships between WKE dimensions and POP:

**Hypothesis 3:** In the group with high WKE score, the relationship between the dimensions VIGOR ( $H_{3a}$ ), DEDICATION ( $H_{3b}$ ), ABSORPTION ( $H_{3c}$ ) and the POP is positive.

Finally, by contrasting H1 and H2 with H3, it is possible to identify that the literature supports two paths: on the one hand a traditional negative association between productive factors and stressors (Bedi & Schat, 2013; Chang et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2008) and on the other the ability of the highly engaged to deal with such adversities, resulting in a positive association in reverse (Crawford et al., 2010; Kane-Frieder et al., 2014). This contradiction leaves a gap about the explanatory power of linear approaches when confronting concepts of Organizational Behavior. Given this, we hypothesized that a curvilinear model may be more appropriate to demonstrate the general relationship between the WKE and POP constructs:

**Hypothesis 4:** WKE and POP present a positive quadratic curvilinear relationship ( $H_4$ ).

## METHOD

### Sample and procedure

The sample is represented by managers registered with a Regional Council of Administration (RCA) of a Brazilian state. Data collection was supported by RCA, which institutionally sent 9351 registered administrators an invitation to participate in the survey. In relation to the total



number of Brazilian administrators registered in the Boards, the studied RCA represents 4.23%. On the institution's website a link was available to access the electronic questionnaire. Over three months, in three RCA newsletters, the invitation was reiterated. We obtained 1498 valid answers for the study. The choice to search only RCA administrators and affiliates was for two reasons: primarily because it is a training area that, possibly by its nature, would have respondents acting at some level of management, object of this study; the second criterion was the accessibility afforded by RCA support, which potentially expanded the collection, allowing direct access to professionals

from different companies. We only use data from private sector respondents who self-declared to be positioned at some hierarchical level of management. The average time in the company was 7 years; all have an undergraduate degree and 54.2% have a degree; the average age was 34 years old. Most operate in the service sector, small and medium-sized businesses in general administration, finance, business and human resources. Table 1 presents the other data of the sample characterization.

**Table 1.** Respondent profile.

Characteristic	Subdivision	Quantity	Percentage
Job tenure	Up to 5 years	503	33.6%
	6 to 10 years	827	55.2%
	11 to 15 years	116	7.7%
	Over 15 years	52	3.5%
Schooling	Only undergraduate	686	45.8%
	Specialization	755	50.4%
	Master's degree	49	3.3%
	Doctorate degree	8	0.5%
Gender	Female	474	31.6%
	Male	1024	68.4%
Age	Up to 30 years old	539	36.0%
	31 to 40 years old	698	46.6%
	from 41 to 50 years old	204	13.6%
	50 and over	57	3.8%
Company size	Micro enterprise	328	21.9%
	Small	460	30.7%
	Medium	554	37.0%
	Large	156	10.4%
Economic sector	Primary (e.g. agriculture, livestock, extractivism)	66	4.4%
	Secondary (e.g. industry, construction)	410	27.4%
	Tertiary (e.g. services, commerce)	1022	68.2%
Field of work	General Administration	886	59.1%
	Finances	181	12.1%
	Commercial	316	21.1%
	Human Resources	115	7.7%
Hierarchical level as manager	Initial	532	35.5%
	Intermediate	520	34.7%
	High	446	29.8%

**Note.** This table shows the profile of the managers who participated in the study. Most respondents are male, up to 40 years of age, with more than 5 years of service in the company, working predominantly in small and medium sized organizations and in the tertiary sector.

## Ethical issues

The procedures for this study were reviewed and approved by the Ifes Human Research Ethics Committee (CEP/Ifes), linked to the National Research Ethics Commission of the Brazilian Ministry of Health - CONEP/MS (Brasil, 2017). The project of this study is registered in CONEP/MS under CAAE (Ethical Appreciation Presentation Certificate) number 47091015.1.0000.5072 from September 16, 2015. The committee pointed out that in the research participants' interests were respected in their integrity and dignity and that the proposal is within scientific ethical standards.

About this process, it can be highlighted that the respondents were guaranteed: that it was voluntary participation, that responses would be anonymous and confidential, and that data processing would take place in aggregate. Participants had access to an Informed Consent Form (ICF) with the necessary information to decide whether or not to participate.

## Measures

**Work Engagement (WKE):** We use the nine-item version of Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) with three items for each dimension of the concept (Schaufeli et al., 2006), validated to Portuguese by Agnst, Benevies-Pereira and Porto-Martins (2009). It is a seven-point scale ranging from 1 ("Never/ Not once") to 7 ("Always/every day"). Examples of items are: "In my work, I feel full of energy" and "I am proud of the work I do". In this study, the internal consistency coefficients were 0.868 for vigor, 0.897 for dedication, 0.904 for absorption and 0.886 for WKE.

**Perceptions of Organizational Politics (POP):** We used the Perceptions of Organizational Politics Scale for Brazil (POPS-Br), with 6 items (De Moraes, 2017). The response format was a 5-point agreement scale, ranging from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 5 ("I totally agree"). Item examples: "Many employees use ploys to join groups" and "People are working behind the scenes to secure their space". The scale presented a good reliability of internal coherence ( $\alpha=0.812$ ).

**Control Variables:** hierarchical level as manager (1-initial; 2-intermediary; 3-high), gender (1-female; 2-male) and job tenure (in years). It was deemed necessary to include them in the regressions given the possible covariations with the variables focused in this study. In addition, previous research suggests this possibility (Kacmar et al., 1999; Kane-Frieder et al., 2014; Schaufeli, 2012).

## Analysis Strategy

Initially, to perform the analysis between the groups with low, medium and high WKE scores it was

necessary to identify in relation to the sample, the existence of groups with such characteristics. We opted for a cluster analysis in two steps (sequential grouping followed by hierarchical method), more suitable for larger samples (Garson, 2014). This process included the latent variables of the study to identify natural clusters and reduce the error of combined variability. A One-way ANOVA verified statistical significance between group mean differences. For further details of this approach, we suggest the work by Sarsted and Mooi (2014).

To test  $H_{1a,b,c}$ ,  $H_{2a,b,c}$  and  $H_{3a,b,c}$ , we sought to identify the magnitude and type of association between the dimensions of WKE (independent variables) and POP (dependent variable). Multiple regressions were conducted in each of the cluster analysis groups. Equation (1) considers the independent variables VIGOR, DEDICATION and ABSORPTION and the control variables HIERARCHICAL LEVEL, GENDER and JOB TENURE. The dependent variable  $Y_{POP}$  represents the policy perception in the analyzed group; the term  $\varepsilon$  represents the experimental error and  $\beta_0$  the regression constant.

For the test of  $H_4$ , we also consider the control variables. A hierarchical regression was applied to the total sample with WKE independent variables (consolidated score) in the first step and the quadratic component ( $WKE^2$ ) in the second step, according to the model presented in equation (2). For further details of these procedures, we suggest Cohen, West and Aiken (2014).

$$Y_{PO} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 HIERARCHICALLEVEL + \beta_2 GENDER + \beta_3 COMPANYTIME + \beta_4 VIGOR + \beta_5 DEDICATION + \beta_6 ABSORPTION + \varepsilon. \quad (1)$$

$$Y_{PO} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 HIERARCHICALLEVEL + \beta_2 GENDER + \beta_3 COMPANYTIME + \beta_4 WKE + \beta_5 WKE^2 + \varepsilon. \quad (2)$$

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Table 2 shows the standard deviations (SD) and Mean results (M) of latent variables according to the clusters resulting from cluster analysis, as well as the total sample. It can be seen from the F-statistic of the comparison between groups that the differences in cluster mean are highly significant ( $p<0.001$ ).

**Table 2.** One-way ANOVA and Descriptive Statistics.

Latent Variables	Total Sample		ANOVA	Low WKE (Cluster 1)		Medium WKE (Cluster 2)		High WKE (Cluster 3)	
	N=1498		Comparison between groups	N=409		N=791		N=298	
	M	DP	F	M	DP	M	DP	M	DP
VIGOR	4.42	1.58	1564.63 ***	2.62	0.93	4.56	1.01	6.26	0.56
DEDICATION	4.63	1.73	1947.91 ***	2.53	1.05	4.87	0.98	6.58	0.43
ABSORPTION	4.50	1.72	1788.77 ***	2.44	0.90	4.75	1.10	6.39	0.50
WKE	4.52	1.51	4808.96 ***	2.53	0.63	4.73	0.58	6.41	0.36
POP	3.82	0.78	677.12 ***	4.26	0.62	3.23	0.63	4.41	0.40

**Note.** This table presents the descriptive statistics of the data segmented by cluster analysis. Clustering has three very distinct WKE level groups. Internally these groups are homogeneous in POP and WKE (low standard deviation), providing for further analysis a reduction in the combined variability error. POP (Perceptions of Organizational Politics). WKE: Work Engagement. \*\*\* Significant at 1% level. Source: research data.

The agglomeration process identified blocks with very distinct characteristics in terms of Engagement: Cluster 1 represents 27.30% of the sample, highlighting the WKE variable with a mean ( $M = 2.53$ ) well below the midpoint of the scale (4) and still below the sample mean ( $M = 4.52$ ). At the other extreme, cluster 3, with 19.89% of the sample, had a very high medium WKE ( $M = 6.41$ ), very close to the upper limit of the scale (7), and a considerably low standard deviation ( $SD = 0.36$ ) indicating that in this group the data show homogeneity regarding this construct. With the largest number of individuals (52.80% of the sample), cluster 2 has characteristics representative of a more normal position in which the mean indicates regularly engaged respondents, tending often to ( $SD = 0.58$  and  $M = 4.73$ ). The difference between the WKE standard deviation of the total sample ( $SD = 1.51$ ) and of clusters (0.63; 0.58; 0.36), coupled with the large difference in averages, makes it possible to access critical levels of engagement, as proposed by Bakker, Albrecht and Leiter (2011).

In clusters 2 and 3 the DEDICATION variable obtained means higher than the other WKE dimensions, signaling that the emotional factor has a relevant weight in building engagement in these

groups. This finding is consistent with proposals that situate emotions as the basis for the development of intellectual and psychological factors, needed to respond to environmental demands (Meisler & Vigoda-Gadot, 2014; Smollan, 2014).

The total sample and clusters presented a high POP, considering that the maximum point of the scale is five, however, these private initiative scores were lower than those recently found for the Brazilian public sector (De Moraes, 2017; De Moraes & Teixeira, 2017). The standard deviations of POP found in the data set and in the three groups ( $SD = 0.78$ ;  $SD = 0.62$ ;  $SD = 0.63$  and  $SD = 0.40$ ) indicate a consensus reinforcing previous studies that treat politics as an inherent factor (Kane-Frieder et al., 2014; Parker, Dipboye, & Jackson, 1995) and empirically supporting the notion that in the Brazilian case the phenomenon is highly widespread (Chu & Wood, 2008; Torres et al., 2015).

As for the multiple regressions, their assumptions and robustness tests were applied to each of the analyzed clusters, since the first three hypothesis groups were also presented in a segmented form, as shown in Table 3:

**Table 3.** Regression model analysis.

Clusters	R <sup>2</sup> Adjusted	VIF	Residual Independence: Durbin-Watson	Anova (F)	Influence of outliers: Cook Distance ( $D_i$ )	Heteroscedasticity: Breusch-Pagan (BP)
1. Low WKE	30.80%	$\leq 1.24$	1.785	33.28***	$\leq 0.052$	1.124 <sup>ns</sup>
2. Medium WKE	30.70%	$\leq 1.28$	2.043	50.99***	$\leq 0.023$	5.906 <sup>ns</sup>
3. High WKE	32.60%	$\leq 2.31$	1.962	21.53***	$\leq 0.078$	0.777 <sup>ns</sup>

**Note.** This table presents regression model robustness test results. The model is well adjusted in all clusters, with little dispersion around the regression line, no multicollinearity problems and no significant residuals influence. WKE: Work Engagement. Dependent variable: POP. Independent variables: VIGOR, DEDICATION, ABSORPTION, Hierarchical Level, Gender and Job Tenure. \*\*\* Significant at 1% level. ns: non-significant.



In the three groups the determination coefficients ( $R^2$ ) adjusted indicate a good fit of the model, as other POP antecedents are recognized, such as centralization, hierarchy and absence of rules (Allen et al., 2016; Kacmar et al., 1999). Variance inflation factors (VIF) were below 5, indicating no multicollinearity problems between the independent variables (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). With the Durbin-Watson statistic close to 2 in all clusters, it was found that adjacent observation errors are not correlated (Hair et al., 2006). For all cases Anova was

highly significant, no heteroscedasticity problems were detected (BP not significant) and, regarding the residuals, there was no significant influence of outliers ( $Di < 1$ ) in the set of predictor variables (Chatterjee & Hadi, 2015; Kaufman, 2013). The solidity of the data presented in Table 3 allows us to conduct the regression analysis that supports the hypothesis tests from the standardized coefficients ( $\beta$ ) multivariate regressions described in Table 4:

**Table 4.** Coefficients of multivariate regressions.

Independent variables	Levels of Work Engagement (WKE)					
	Low WKE (Cluster 1)		Medium WKE (Cluster 2)		High WKE (Cluster 3)	
	$\beta$	t	$\beta$	t	$\beta$	t
<b>Variables of Interest (Dimensions):</b>						
VIGOR	-0.25*** (H1a)	-6.76	-0.32*** (H2a)	-10.32	0.07 (H3a)	1.21
DEDICATION	-0.27*** (H1b)	-6.59	0.10** (H2b)	2.84	0.48*** (H3b)	6.57
ABSORPTION	-0.25*** (H1c)	-6.18	-0.37*** (H2c)	-12.2	0.21*** (H3c)	3.82
<b>Control Variables:</b>						
Hierarchical level	-0.01	-0.06	0.03	1.16	0.12**	1.98
Gender	0.06	3.37	0.05	2.13	0.06	1.24
Job Tenure	0.04*	1.38	-0.08	-2.71	-0.01	-0.10

**Note.** This table shows the result of the regressions and confirms the following hypotheses: Low WKE - VIGOR (H1a), DEDICATION (H1b) and ABSORPTION (H1c) negatively related to POP. Medium WKE - DEDICATION (H2a) and ABSORPTION (H2c) negatively related to POP and with greater magnitude in relation to the previous group. High WKE - DEDICATION (H3b) and ABSORPTION (H3c) positively related to POP. Not confirmed: H2b e H3a. Dependent variable: POP. \*\*\* Significant at 1% level; \*\* Significant at 5% level; \* Significant at 10% level.

Considering the significance levels and negative values of beta coefficients for cluster 1 regression (Low WKE), it is identified that the first hypotheses ( $H_{1a,b,c}$ ) were supported. The three independent variables matched the relative importance in predicting POP. The negative associations presented confirm, in the private sector, the mitigating force of the WKE dimensions against the POP, also identified in the public sector (De Moraes & Teixeira, 2017), as well as the ability of those engaged to face adversity (Schaufeli, 2012), reinforcing the frequent negative association between productive factors and POP (Bedi & Schat, 2013; Chang et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2008).

In the group with medium WKE, the relative influence of the variables VIGOR ( $\beta = -0.32$ ) and ABSORPTION ( $\beta = -0.37$ ) are larger than in cluster 1 ( $\beta = -0.25$  and  $\beta = -0.25$ , respectively), supporting  $H_{2a}$  and  $H_{2c}$ . Thus, in the largest study cluster, with the lowest perception of politics, there is an indication, with a high level of significance, that the resilience and concentration of those engaged significantly impact the reduction of the POP. However,  $H_{2b}$  was not confirmed by a significant beta, but positive for the DEDICATION variable. Thus, the emotional component no longer impacts POP reduction among mid-level WKE employees.

This is a relevant change regarding the transition of individuals' interpretation of politics as an obstacle and, furthermore, indicative of the reversal that will occur in the next cluster.

In the estimation of the high WKE group, the betas were positive, but only the DEDICATION and ABSORPTION variables showed statistically significant results, supporting  $H_{3b}$  and  $H_{3c}$ . The result of this cluster provides evidence that there is a break in the negative relationship between WKE and POP when it comes to groups of managers who are highly engaged in their activities. In this grouping all dimensions of WKE and POP presented high means (Table 2) which together with the results of the regressions, supports studies such as Crawford, LePine and Rich (2010); and Kane-Frieder, Hochwarter and Ferris (2014) which indicated that highly engaged employees perceive stressors positively, turning this into a challenge or opportunity.

Regarding the positive association between DEDICATION and POP present in cluster 3, it is important to highlight that this independent variable is the emotional factor of WKE, imbued with the senses of enthusiasm, pride and challenge (Gagné, 2014; Schaufeli et al., 2002). It is argued that at the interpersonal level emotions are used strategically as a mechanism of influence and at the group level as fostering coalitions, with indications that some individuals who genuinely enjoy the political game use these practices (Allen et al., 2016; Meisler & Vigoda-Gadot, 2014). Regarding the positive relationship presented by the cognitive aspect (ABSORPTION), it is argued that managers may regard POP as a challenging requirement of their organizations, developing mechanisms for approximation and acceptance of organizational policy. This challenge can generate a defense strategy: acknowledging a threat to their well-being,

the employee engages to control or change the situation (LePine et al., 2005; Perrewé et al., 2012).

It can also be highlighted that in the high WKE grouping there was a positive relationship between the Hierarchical Level control variable and the POP, providing evidence that as the hierarchical position increases and therefore the proximity to the centers of power, policy perception is broadened without necessarily undermining engagement.

Managers who have a high degree of understanding and control over the political process are likely to see politics as an opportunity for growth, this characteristic is present in other stressors from the workplace as the ambiguity and uncertainty (Eldor, 2017; Lu et al., 2014; Perrewé et al., 2012). In this kind of reaction to adversity, approached by psychology as positive stress (or eustress), the individual goes through an activation and is compelled to adapt to a situation interpreted as a challenge, generating as a result courage, vigor, productivity and creativity (Perrewé et al., 2012).

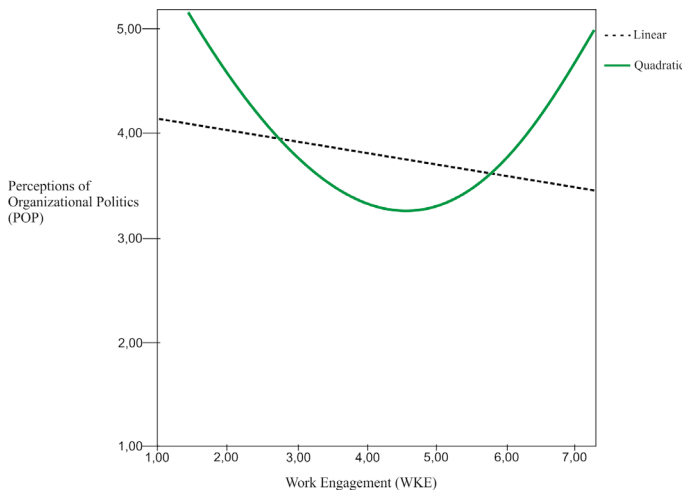
By comparing the behavior of the dimensions across the three groupings, it was shown that a homogeneous treatment, without identifying clusters, would ignore significant subgroups for analysis. From the regressions of the three clusters, it is possible to verify if the interaction between the WKE consolidated factor and the POP will be better explained as a curvilinear relationship, as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Results of quadratic component regressions.

Stages	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta F$
Stage 1 - Linear component		0.121	12.45 ***
WKE	-0.051 **		
Hierarchical level	0.080		
Gender	0.060		
Job tenure	0.050		
Stage 2 - Quadratic component inclusion		0.372	818.9 ***
WKE <sup>2</sup>	0.205 ***		
$\Delta R^2$	0.251		

**Note.** This table shows the result of hierarchical regression with confirmation of Hypothesis 4: WKE and POP present a positive quadratic curvilinear relationship. Source: Research. Dependent variable: POP. \*\*\* Significant at 1% level; \*\* Significant at 5% level.

As can be seen in the nonlinear model, the coefficient  $\beta$  (-0.051) is negative and significant while the quadratic term for WKE was positive ( $\beta = 0.205$ ) and significant, supporting  $H_4$ . In fact, the curvilinear regression model explains a larger proportion of the variance. Figure 1 illustrates this positive quadratic nonlinear association (U-shaped form):



**Figure 1.** Estimation curve WKE x POP (linear function x quadratic function).

This figure demonstrates the nonlinear relationship between WKE and POP. WKE influences the reduction of POP in most of the observation, but at high levels it contributes to the increase of the Perceptions of Politics (ascending part of the curve). Source: research data.

It is noticed that the mitigating effect of WKE against POP acts in most of the observation, however, as accompanied by the description of clusters, the concepts are not wholly antagonistic as one might suggest an exclusively linear relational form. The behavior of dimensions in hypothesis tests contributes to support this proposition. The rising segment of the curve can be explained by the remarkable presence of politics in Brazilian organizations (De Moraes & Teixeira, 2017; Torres et al., 2015), where the perception of the phenomenon can signal a stimulus for engagement for those with political skills and personal or organizational growth (Hochwarter et al., 2010; Munyon, Summers, Thompson, & Ferris, 2015). In such scenarios, political activities may be socially sanctioned or targeted, depending on cultural traits (Chu & Wood, 2008).

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on a large and heterogeneous sample of managers, this study investigated the relationship between Work Engagement and Perceptions of Organizational Politics constructs. For further analysis, the following paths were followed: first, groups with low, medium and high WKE were identified; subsequently, hierarchical regressions were conducted in each of these groups to test the effect of the WKE constituent dimensions (Vigor, Dedication and Absorption) compared to the POP and, finally, we verified with the total sample the hypothesis of a curvilinear relation between the consolidated constructs.

The WKE's path through a positive quadratic nonlinear association with the POP brings to light the existence of a turning point in the relationship between the two concepts studied and signals to what extent actors begin to adjust their organizational roles: first, in groups of managers with low and medium engagement, WKE had a mitigating role against POP. However, this does not mean that the politics inherent in organizations will necessarily be reduced, but that in most cases, with resilience, involvement and concentration it is possible to less experience this perception, typically pointed to as detrimental to performance. Subsequently, this paradigm is broken when a high association between WKE and POP has been identified in the high engagement groups, flexing the curve upwards.

By addressing the results of the Low and Medium WKE groups from the perspective of Positive Organizational Behavior, it is possible to suggest that fostering the dimensions of the WKE may have more effective consequences than attempts to curb political behavior, as it is a natural phenomenon, subject to ambiguity and viewpoint variations. It is noteworthy that already at the intermediate level occurs, even if to a lesser extent, a positive association of dedication with the POP, signaling that, emotionally, these individuals are already becoming more connected to the political game.

Among the highly engaged, the emotional and cognitive components of WKE were less typically related to POP. The third cluster analyzed presented an important characterization: extremely high levels of engagement and policy perception and a highly significant positive association between dedication, absorption and politics. There is significant evidence that emotionally and cognitively structured managers tend to increase their engagement along with the perception of stressful aspects of their work environments, characterizing that these

professionals have a greater understanding of organizational intricacies. The findings point to the ability of managers with this profile to recognize and even capitalize on POP as an opportunity to develop strategies that generate individual or organizational benefits. There is then an indication that highly engaged managers have a greater resource burden to acknowledge the inevitability of the political phenomenon and move on.

Another important consideration refers to the characterization of the studied scenario, in which historically there is a strong presence of political behavior (Ardichvili et al., 2012; Torres et al., 2015), suggesting a tacit acceptance of maneuvers and formation of unsanctioned alliances, enabling the coexistence of such high WKE and POP scores.

It is relevant to point out that the measurement instrument used in the study measured a perception about the organization and not the political activity of the interviewee. Of course, the organizational environment should be as transparent as possible, but the POP depends on different prisms that involve cultural and individual issues. Thus, the practical implications of this research suggest policies aimed primarily at strengthening managers' emotional and cognitive factors in order to connect them to the senses of opportunity and challenge.

Identified in a complementary way to the study objectives, some indications should be highlighted. First, we found that, although high,

the POP in the private sector was lower than the public sector and, conversely, the WKE had higher scores. However, this comparison lacks evidence in specific research designs. The other point is that managers' proximity to power centers impacts the increase in POP without compromising engagement, this reinforces the indications that engaged managers are able to positively instrumentalize political behaviors.

The study was limited to managers, all graduates in the area of administration and affiliated to the Class Council (RCA), leaving gaps about possible outcomes with professionals from other training areas or, as for those who perform the activity without this academic background. Compensation was not considered as a control variable, suggesting research that considers the financial influence on the two concepts discussed here. Future research on the relationship between WKE and POP with transnational comparisons may help to understand to what extent the challenges and similarities between different economies and cultural contexts extend to the behavioral issues analyzed here. This study is expected to prompt further discussion of organizational policy and its relationship to other measures of organizational behavior, in order to break the taboo on this issue inherent in the daily lives of companies.

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**1<sup>st</sup> author:** Elaboration of the research problem; literature review; data collection; definition of the method; data analysis; results' interpretation; writing the manuscript.

**2<sup>nd</sup> author:** Elaboration of the research problem; theory indication; validation of data analysis; critical review of the manuscript.

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## Data Availability



All data and materials were made publicly available through the Mendeley platform and can be accessed at: De Moraes, Romulo Matos; Teixeira, Aridelmo José Campanharo (2020). Replication Data for: "Full Data used for: Managers, Engagement and Political Behaviors: a nonlinear relationship. Published by RAC-Revista de Administração Contemporânea (Journal of Contemporary Administration)", 24(3), 2020. [Data set]. Journal of Contemporary Administration (RAC). Mendeley. <http://doi.org/10.17632/syrw7xynt.1>