

Original Article

## A relational model for assessing internal communications and organizational bonds: the importance of affective relations and the role of the immediate supervisor

Modelo relacional para avaliação da comunicação interna e vínculos organizacionais: a importância das relações afetivas e o papel do líder imediato

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose** – To analyze the factors related to the internal communication process that influence the organizational bonds (commitment, entrenchment, and consent) between workers and their employing organizations.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Qualitative and quantitative research instruments were employed in a sample field consisting of four large organizations in Brazil. Findings emerged from Content Analysis, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The qualitative phase involved the participation of 23 respondents. The quantitative phase sample comprised 401 respondents. A scale was developed to assess workers' perceptions of communication processes.

**Findings** – A relationship between communication processes and organizational bonds was confirmed. Immediate leader communication proved to be a highly significant factor in the internal communication process, as well as affective communication, which directly impacts commitment and acts on engaging communication, which in turn influences commitment. It was observed that the consent bond, through the subordination, directly impacts commitment, albeit in a negative manner.

**Originality/value** – The study contributes to the field of organizational communication by introducing the IOCS (Internal Organizational Communication Scale) and paves the way to further the still nascent debate on the forms of interaction between organizations and their employees resulting from new management models, labor contracts, as well as organizational value and purposes, stemming from the changes brought about by the Covid-19 health crisis.

**Keywords:** Organizational communication; Organizational bonds; Commitment; Affective communication; Immediate supervisor

## RESUMO

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**Objetivo** – Analisar os fatores relacionados ao processo de comunicação interna que influenciam os vínculos organizacionais (comprometimento, entrenchamento e consentimento) entre trabalhadores e suas organizações empregadoras.

**Design/metodologia/abordagem** – Foram empregados instrumentos de pesquisa qualitativa e quantitativa em um campo amostral formado por quatro organizações de grande porte no Brasil. Os achados emergiram da Análise de Conteúdo, Análise Fatorial Exploratória (AFE) e Modelagem de Equações Estruturais (MEE). A etapa qualitativa contou com a participação de 23 respondentes. A amostra da etapa quantitativa foi composta por 401 respondentes. Foi desenvolvida uma escala para avaliação sobre a percepção dos trabalhadores sobre os processos comunicacionais.

**Resultados** – Comprovou-se a relação entre os processos comunicacionais e os vínculos organizacionais. A comunicação do líder imediato demonstrou ser um fator de grande importância no processo de comunicação interna, assim como a comunicação afetiva, que impacta diretamente o comprometimento e atua sobre a comunicação engajadora, que por sua vez influencia o comprometimento. Observou-se que o vínculo do consentimento, pela dimensão subordinação, impacta diretamente o comprometimento, porém de forma negativa.

**Originalidade/valor** – O estudo entrega ao campo da comunicação organizacional a ECOI (Escala de Comunicação Organizacional Interna) e abre caminho para aprofundar o debate, ainda incipiente, sobre as formas de interação das organizações com seus empregados que resultaram dos novos modelos de gestão, contratos trabalhistas, além do propósito e valores organizacionais, a partir das mudanças trazidas pela crise sanitária da Covid-19.

**Palavras-chave:** Comunicação organizacional; Vínculos organizacionais; Comprometimento; Comunicação afetiva; Líder imediato

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, interest in organizational bonds (Rodrigues & Bastos, 2010) has stood out because of the emergence of the theme within the current context of flexibility and precariousness in the world of work. With the increase in complexity in labor relations in the field of Organizational Communication, scientific research has begun to redefine communication as a process of creating meaning by way of the relational perspective with workers (Marques & Mafra, 2018). This article presents an alignment between the evolution of studies on internal communication within organizations with the research that has taken place in the field of organizational commitment (Rodrigues & Bastos, 2010), seeing how interaction at work has changed with the use of new technologies and management models, and has resulted in new

forms of interaction and new modes of relationship with workers.

The relational perspective of communication (Marques & Mafra, 2018), due to its ability to act as an internal producer of meaning, is aligned with the factors that favor the bond of Commitment, by interposing activities that bridge personal and organizational goals. The need to ensure that employees are committed, with a sense of organizational belonging, integrated and informed of what happens in the organization, made internal communication a very important mechanism in the management of organizations (Sanchis & Bonavía, 2017). Other organizational bonds, such as Consent and Entrenchment, can emerge in environments in which the communication process is supported by a functionalist perspective, one which is concerned simply with the transmission of information, or with serving as an instrument of control and management at the service of organizational interests (Deetz, 1992).

Whereas Organizational Commitment is understood as an Affective bond (Mowday et al., 1982), the bond of Entrenchment usually evokes feelings of entrapment in the worker because of the financial and professional losses severance from the organization can entail (Rodrigues & Bastos, 2015). In turn, Organizational Consent explains the worker's bond with the organization as arising from a feeling of obligation or subservience to the immediate superior (Silva & Bastos, 2015).

While the theoretical elaboration of organizational bonds is well established in psychology, administration, and sociology, there is still much research to be done to develop and consolidate the concept within Organizational Communication in Brazil, mainly because of the overuse of the term 'commitment', and all too often without conceptual support. This assertion is based on a research carried out in the CAPES Catalog of Theses and Dissertations (2013 - 2018) and by articles appearing in *Revista Organicom*, the main Brazilian journal in the field of organizational communication and public relations, which since its creation in 2004, until 2018, has evinced the theoretical paucity of the concept of organizational bonds (Videira, 2021). This leads us to surmise

that the field of Organizational Communication has epistemological and conceptual gaps to fill, specifically on the relationship between communication and organizational bonds, since a lack of theoretical benchmarks in the scientific production of a given field can instigate scientific fragility.

This article aims to investigate the following question: How does communicational process correlate with the organizational bonds of Commitment, Entrenchment, and Consent between workers and their employing organizations? To answer this question, a model will be proposed and validated that will relate constructs and their respective dimensions emerging from the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), and which represent the internal communication processes and the organizational bonds under study.

To deal with the dimensions of our inquiry, the selected methodology includes qualitative and quantitative approaches. In the qualitative stage, managers and professionals from the area of organizational communication were interviewed, and, subsequently, employees of administrative sectors of four large organizations operating in Brazil responded to questionnaires. The quantitative stage uses multivariate statistical techniques and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with SmartPLS software (version 2.0) to interpret and assess subjective numerical scales of three organizational affective factors — namely, Commitment, Entrenchment, and Consent — based on data culled from structured interviews.

The article is divided into five sections. The first consists of a conceptual investigation of the themes and their integration into a theoretical-relational model. The research methodology is presented next, followed by the presentation and analysis of the data using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The discussion section analyzes the results in light of the theoretical foundations. Final considerations close the article and integrate the study's contribution to the field of organizational communication.

## 2 CONCEPTUAL REFERENCES AND PROPOSED RELATIONAL MODEL

The multidisciplinary origin of communications and the studies on communication within organizations arises from a need within the world of work. The academic model that emerged was supported by the production of publications aimed at specific publics and by the need to transmit information (Marques & Oliveira, 2015). This gave rise to a functionalist bias to the field and defined communication as an instrument of control and management at the service of organizational interests. It was deemed “corporate colonization” by Deetz (1992), as the work of organizational communication which served to promote a discourse from top management on the role that the organization should play in people’s lives.

The informational perspective of communication fulfills what Frederic Taylor (1970) presented as scientific management, to wit, ensuring that the organization’s objectives, defined by top management, were followed without quarrel. Against this perspective, Hallahan et al. (2007, p. 7) advance that strategic communication acts in a way that the organization attains its purpose as a social actor so that “the emphasis is on the strategic application of communication and how an organization functions as a social actor to advance its mission”.

According to Hallahan et al.’s (2007) conceptualization, strategic communication must act as constitutive of the organization. The Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO) concept which originated in the Montréal School (Taylor, 2005) defined communication as organization, and organization as communication. In this perspective, organizations emerge from interactions that occur transversally across levels – from bottom to top, from top to bottom, and horizontally – implying that organizations are products of continuous processes of communication and result from the generation of meaning.

According to Heide et al. (2018), as organizations become increasingly complex, the content of communication becomes more complex and ambiguous. “Managers at

all levels need to be able to translate messages and invite coworkers to discuss complex issues” (p. 461), and must act as meaning makers because they have “a pivotal role as communicators, as they translate, inform, make sense, support, and give feedback to employees in order to coordinate actions towards organizational goals” (Heide et al., 2018, p. 461).

Based on the CCO concept, we can define organizational communication as the process that aims to obtain a sustainable balance between the objectives of vision, mission, and purpose established by top leadership and the expectations of those who make up the organization. As such, it reconciles internal and external interests “in the search for a systemic network that allows satisfaction on both sides, public and organization” (Ferrari, 2016a, p. 146, our translation). Thus, communication formats that encourage dialogue and the internal participation of workers in the construction of this systemic network of meaning production are those that best articulate the CCO concept.

Communication initiates the process of relating by establishing common ground, sharing information, and fostering meaningful exchanges. Within the corporate organization, communication serves as the conduit for expressing emotions, thoughts, and needs, nurturing empathetic connections that extend beyond personal relationships to broader societal and organizational contexts (Sias, 2008). It also enables effective conflict resolution and adaptation to changing circumstances (Rout & Omiko, 2007). As such, communication is the heartbeat of the ongoing relational process within corporate organizations, encompassing interpersonal connections and the broader interactions shaping the corporation over time.

Within the internal communication process, the approach to communication as constitutive of the organization is in line with the evolution of concepts that surround the theme of organizational bonds in reference to the study of communication as “a process that is completed as people construct, share and exchange meanings while developing a collective narrative as a result of their relationships” (Ferrari, 2016b, p. 69, our translation).

Information establishes the fundamental ideas and connections within an ontology, whereas communication serves as the means to convey this framework to users and stakeholders. From a functionalist and transmissive perspective, internal communication emerges as a set of messages that circulate in the context of a given organization. It exists prior to relationships, and is generally determined by specific organizational and managerial processes (Marques & Mafra, 2018).

The Transmission Model of Internal Communication is in line with the functionalist approach, which according to Rebechi, (2008, *apud* Marques & Mafra, 2018, p. 4) consists of “a set of communication actions that must be planned according to the organization’s guidelines with the purpose of managing the communication processes between these principles (as articulated by senior management) and the workers”. This perspective emphasizes the function of communication as a strategic management tool, where “strategic” signifies contributing effectively to the achievement of organizational objectives: “From this point of view, communication is a device that, if appropriately used, could supposedly achieve enchantment and control” (Marques & Mafra, 2018, p. 5, our translation).

Aiming to keep workers motivated and committed, some Brazilian organizations often resort to the use of management policies, financial rewards, and motivational campaigns by altering the affective climate of the corporation. This refers to introducing structural and organizational changes that seek to revamp the prevailing atmosphere or mood that characterizes the workplace environment by engineering the collective affective state of the organization’s members, including employees, leaders, and other stakeholders. However, these devices are not always effective in eliciting a true commitment to the organization: financial perks or persuasive communication devices are not always capable of prompting the creation of an affective bond between worker and organization. In order for communicational processes to act in a way that will create relational environments and spaces, communication must act towards this purpose. Specifically, it must

act to create environments that are open to listening, dialogue and recognition (Marques & Mafra, 2018).

Relational connections within a corporate entity hold immense significance, exerting influence on multiple facets of its structure and operations (Rutherford et al., 2023). Within a corporate organization, the relations among its members have a profound impact. These connections, which include interpersonal, professional, and hierarchical bonds, play a crucial role in the organization's success. They enable effective communication, promote teamwork, and facilitate conflict resolution (Ross, 2021). Moreover, these relationships encourage knowledge sharing and contribute to employee development and retention. It's important to note that the qualities and characteristics related to the organization's existence are diverse but function together cohesively. These bonds form the core of the organization's functionality and effectiveness.

The bonds that individuals establish with organizations have been the subject of investigation by international researchers since the last century. In this context, bonding is understood as that which binds, connects or brings two objects together (Rodrigues, 2011), and as such, this article focuses on three bonding patterns that can exist between workers and their employing organizations: Commitment, Entrenchment, and Consent.

Organizational Commitment was initially conceptualized by Mowday et al.(1982) based on a unidimensional perspective that emphasizes the affective nature of the bond. They define it as a state of identification of the individual with the objectives and values of the organization that encourages the worker to remain within it as a member. Considering the relational aspect at this level is pivotal to shaping organizational culture, with the potential to profoundly influence employee morale, engagement, and overall organizational performance as key elements of emotional climate (Gamero & González-Romá, 2020).

In the early 1990s, Meyer and Allen (1991) proposed a three-dimensional model of Organizational Commitment and described it as a psychological state of connection

between individuals and the organization based on three distinct components: Affective, Continuance (calculating or instrumental), and Normative. According to the authors, emotionally committed individuals remain in the organization because they want to; instrumentally committed individuals stay because they have to; and those who are normatively committed remain in the organization because they feel obligated or indebted to it.

Despite guiding scientific production in the area for three decades, Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-dimensional model of Commitment was not adopted unreservedly by authors because ambiguity and imprecision in the construct elicited conceptual and empirical problems. The problem lies in trying to correlate quantitatively an affective entity and a relational bond. Because affect is not quantifiable or objectively measurable (Freeman et al., 2008), it is essential to pinpoint the attributes that signify and define emotional intensity and their implications for communication within corporate entities, spanning both individual and organizational scales (Rutherford et al., 2023). In Brazil, Rodrigues and Bastos (2010) criticized the three-dimensional model basing their analysis on the premiss that the three components represent bonds between the individual and the organization, generated by specific precedents resulting in different impacts on behaviour at work. However, commitment by an employee is an indeterminate affective disposition whose cause, intensity, implications, ramifications, or absolute quantification are impossible to totally define, delimit, or locate within organizational communication: its multiplicitous nature has a subjective intensive existence that is palpable, in that it is "real", causal, and operative, but is not readily quantifiable or measurable — making it affective through and through (Gibson, 2020). As such, the correlational mapping of affective organizational bonds to communication processes represents one of the innovative methodological initiatives of this paper.

Various researches, taken as a group, advocated the resumption to a more restricted definition of the Organizational Commitment construct, returning to understand it as a unidimensional bond as proposed by Mowday et al. (1982).

Organizational Commitment would come to be defined exclusively as an affective bond which manifests itself in the belief and acceptance of values and norms, through the effort focused on established objectives, and by active contribution towards the attainment of goals. The Organizational Commitment scale as an exclusively affective bond was validated in Brazil by Bastos and Aguiar (2015).

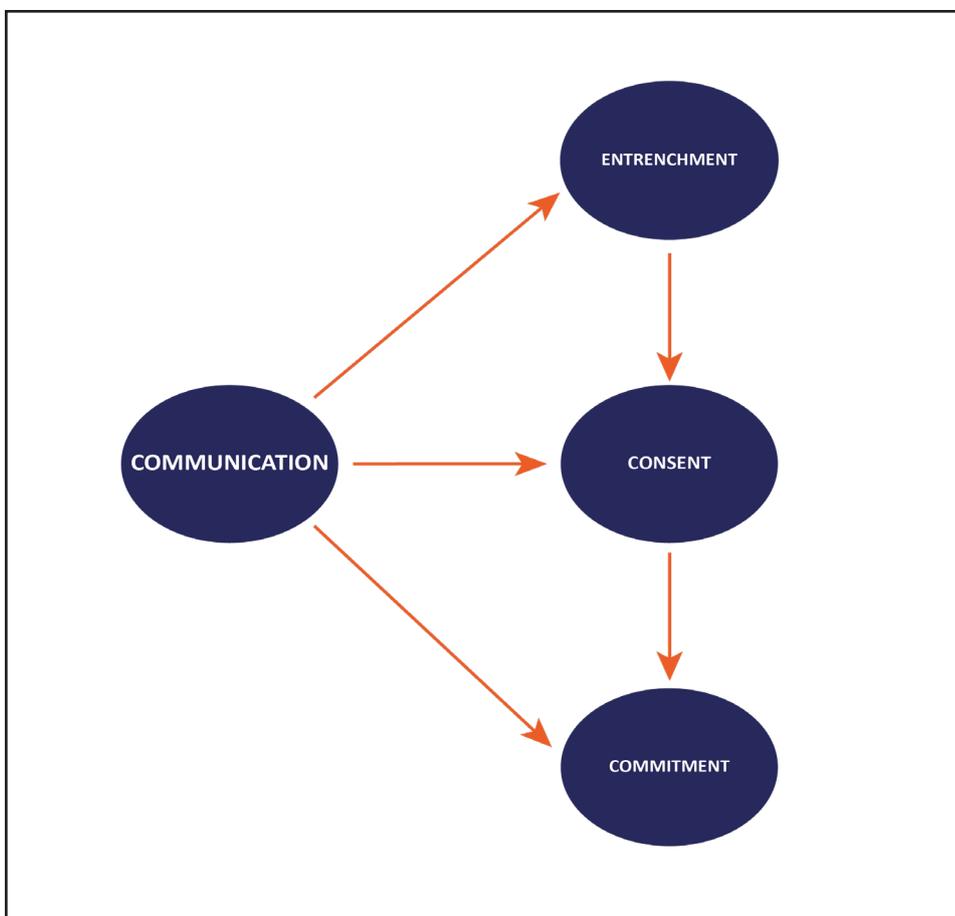
Based on studies by Becker (1960) and Mowday et al. (1982), Rodrigues (2011) proposes the theoretical concept of Organizational Entrenchment. She explains that the transposition of the concept of entrenchment to the organizational context represents the individual's search for a "trench" within the organization which would serve as a form of protection. The perceived security would guarantee certain stability, safeguard professional status, and shelter the worker from financial losses resulting from severance from the organization. As such, the Entrenchment bond between the individual and the organization does not express desire, but need. The Organizational Entrenchment scale was developed and validated by Rodrigues and Bastos (2015).

The Organizational Consent construct emerges from the sociology of work literature (Laubach & Wallace, 2013) that identifies the relationships between employer and employees as founded on bonds of authority which discount affective and psychological elements. The term Consent is used exclusively to qualify the bond between the worker and the organization as a relationship of subordination between employer and employee. The bond of Consent has a scale proposed and validated by Silva and Bastos (2015).

According to Deetz (2001), one can conceptualize communication on three dimensions. The first focuses on the development of organizational communication as a specialization within Communication Studies. The second focuses on communication as a phenomenon that exists in organizations and is limited to the study of information transfer. The third presents communication as a constituent of organizations, as a way of describing them: through communication, employees grasp and embody the organization's values, actively contributing to its ongoing constitution.

If communication processes in practice can be said to act in accordance with the three dimensions predicated by Deetz (2001) – as disciplinary knowledge, as informational exchange, and as production of meaning – Figure 1 shows how communication can influence the bond of Commitment based on a joint analysis of how the bonds of Consent and Entrenchment occur.

Figure 1 – Conceptual structure of influence between Communication and Organizational Bonds



Source: Videira, D., 2022

Figure 1 shows that internal communication practices can impact on the various organizational bonds. Rodrigues and Bastos (2011) acknowledge that even if entrenched in the organization, the worker can identify with the organization and bond affectively with it. Silva and Bastos (2015) assert that consent also presupposes an

authentic concordance resulting from processes of identification between individual and organizational values.

Internal communication practices made up of activities that aim to bridge personal and organizational goals can encourage the creation of environments that allow open dialogue between supervisors and subordinates as well as between peers (Heide et al., 2018). From a relational perspective (Marques & Mafra, 2018), as constitutive of the organization itself (Hallahan et al., 2007), and according to the definition of organizational commitment adopted in this research (Rodrigues & Bastos 2010; Mowday et al., 1982), the availability of relational spaces within the organization produce feelings of respect in employees through the acknowledgment that their contribution is important to the attainment of organizational objectives. As such, the bond of Commitment, in theory, can be prompted by internal communication practices that provide dialogical, relational, and respectful spaces (Marques & Mafra, 2018).

Internal communication is a critical factor in employee engagement and commitment. Effective internal communication can help to build trust, create a sense of community, and ensure that employees are aligned with the organization's goals. Tavares and Limongi-França (2010) found a positive relationship between planned internal communication and organizational commitment in a Brazilian company. The study highlighted the importance of using various means, both formal and informal, and of enabling relationships with managers, peers, and subordinates. Togna (2014) found that trust in the Italian company he studied is at the center of the triadic relationship between communication, trust, and commitment, and that face-to-face communication is essential for moving from the stage of trust to the stage of commitment. Meirinhos et al. (2022) conducted a study in Angola and concluded that internal communication is a necessary management tool for any organization that seeks to increase its performance. Thus, we can appreciate that effective internal communication can help to build trust, create a sense of community, and ensure that employees are aligned with the organization's goals.

In line with the evolution of what actually defines the affective bond between workers and their employing organizations, it is apparent that commitment is always a positive attribute for both the individual and the organization, in that it is a bond that inspires contentment and motivation with regard to the employing organization. Entrenched workers, on the other hand, remain in the organization because of the apprehension of possible losses, mainly financial, concomitant with severance. In contrast, Consent represents a bond based on meeting organizational demands through a relationship of obedience and subordination to the immediate supervisor.

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

The methodology used in this research seeks to discover and analyze the factors related to the communication process that impact on the organizational bonds shown on the model of Figure 1, which relates internal communication to organizational bonds (Commitment, Entrenchment, and Consent). Firstly, it was necessary to construct and validate a scale capable of assessing which factors directly or indirectly influence the organizational bonds studied, based mainly on the relational view of communication (Marques & Mafra, 2018) and the concept of communication as constitutive of the organization (Hallahan et al., 2007; Deetz, 2001). To conduct the research, an exploratory sequential mixed method was adopted that combines characteristics of both exploratory and explanatory method design. In accordance with the protocols of the chosen methodology, data collection was carried out in two stages where qualitative data gathering preceded quantitative data collection.

The influence of communication on organizational bonds (Commitment, Entrenchment, and Consent) is the unit of analysis that frames this study. Four organizations operating in Brazil participated in the research, and non-probability sampling based on accessibility and convenience informed the selection (Gil, 1999). For the qualitative stage, communication managers and their internal communication teams composed the observation units; and for the quantitative stage, workers in the

administrative sectors of the selected organizations served as observational units for the quantitative stage, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 – Sample organizations**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Sector</b>	<b>Workers in Brazil</b>	<b>Administrative workers</b>
1	Private Capital/Multinational	Agribusiness	7,000	480
2	Mixed Capital/National	Public Service	12,800	3,924
3	Private Capital/Multinational	Energy	920	303
4	Private Capital/Multinational	Retail	40,000	4,000

Source: Videira, D., 2022

An Informed Consent Form (*Termo de Consentimento Livre e Esclarecido*) was issued to all those who took part in the qualitative stage of the study, which was duly signed and returned to the researcher.

The online questionnaire was distributed internally within the various organizations by their respective communications managers. The opening text of the form explained the objectives of the research and ensured the confidentiality of the participants and data. Before answering any questions, the participants had to agree to the terms presented on the form itself.

## **4 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA**

Because of the non-existence of a scale to assess internal perceptions of communication processes within the organizations of our sample, a qualitative stage was incorporated into the study. Thus, the first stage of the study consisted of a qualitative stage which used interviews as foundation to generate the Internal Organizational Communication Scale.

As previously mentioned, communication managers and employees from four large Brazilian organizations participated in this study. The qualitative stage saw the

participation of 23 respondents, four of which were communication managers, and nineteen employees. The four managers were on average 45 years old. They were trained professionals in Journalism, Economics, and Marketing and all held executive positions in their respective organizations. The Internal Communication teams were each composed of four or five professionals, the majority of which were trained in Social Communication and responsible for executing the internal communication processes of the organizations in the sample.

In total, eight interviews were conducted between October and December 2020 using semi-structured scripts, for a total of 20 hours of recorded material. All the responses gathered during the interviews with the communication managers and their teams were recorded and transcribed. The data obtained in the interviews on internal communicational functions (content, techniques and tools used in the relationship with employees) was analyzed using content analysis methods (Bardin, 2011). Based on this theoretical framework, the questionnaire that gave rise to the Organizational Internal Communication Scale (OICS) was initially designed around six constructs based on the categories found in the content analysis: (i) Immediate Supervisor Communication; (ii) Senior Management Communication; (iii) Affective Communication; (iv) Business-Linked Communication; (v) Transmissive Communication x Relational Communication; and, (vi) Home Office Communication. In turn, these six constructs were broken down into 36 assertions or variables.

The second stage of the investigation was quantitative. A structured questionnaire consisting of five parts was developed: (i) sociodemographic data (identification of the respondent's organization sector, age, gender, education, hierarchical level, length of service); (ii) the OICS developed in the qualitative stage of this study that evaluated the workers' perception of the organization's internal communication practices; (iii) a scale for assessing organizational commitment (Bastos & Aguiar, 2015); (iv) a scale for assessing organizational entrenchment (Rodrigues & Bastos, 2015); (v) a scale for evaluating organizational consent (Silva & Bastos, 2015). The questionnaire was

administered on the Google Forms platform as an online form consisting of 75 items, in addition to the sociodemographic questions. There were 36 assertions dealing with communication and 39 with organizational bonds. The questionnaire was delivered through the internal communication channels of the organizations and was made available to respondents from June 14 to July 13, 2021.

The sample for the quantitative stage consisted of 401 participants. The greatest number of respondents in the survey came from the Agribusiness sector (29.7%), followed by the Retail sector (26.7%), the Energy sector (25.2%), and finally the Public Service sector (18.5%). In terms of representativity within the total population of respondents, the largest participation came from the Energy sector with 33.3% of total respondents, followed by the Agribusiness sector with 24.7% participation. Retail and Public Service showed negligible representation in terms of total respondents, 2.6% and 1.8%, respectively. Most participants in the survey were between 26 and 35 years old (36.7%), female (57.6%), had completed a graduate degree (42.6%), and were employed as analysts (38.2%).

Once the sample was characterized, the data was interpreted using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) techniques with SmartPLS software (version 2.0) in accordance with the analysis and statistical tests stipulated in the model developed in Hair et al. (2005).

The use of multivariate statistical techniques aims to ascertain the potential effects of one or more variables on others in a given construct (Hair et al., 2010). By testing the influence and significance between Commitment, Consent, and Entrenchment as component variables of the construct of communication as phenomenon, it was possible to determine the type of grouping that best describes the relationship between them (Hair et al., 2010). The model tested in this study is of an exploratory nature in that the proposed interrelations have not been previously tested.

## Table 2 – Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) Coefficients

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Construct	Dimensions	Variables	Commonality	Cronbach's Alpha (CA)	KMO	Variance	
Organizational Communication	Immediate Superior Communication	CO1	0.722	0.907			
		CO2	0.774				
		CO3	0.692				
		CO4	0.723				
		CO5	0.529				
		CO6	0.612				
		CO7	0.592				
	Affective Communication	CO13	0.622	0.869			
		CO14	0.652				
		CO15	0.716				
		CO17	0.584				
		CO18	0.652				
		CO20	0.551				
		CO21	0.575				
	Engaging Communication	CO22	0.616	0.909			
		CO23	0.682				
		CO25	0.650				
		CO26	0.542				
		CO27	0.612				
		CO30	0.664				
		CO31	0.655				
	Home Office Communication	CO33	0.617	0.759			
		CO34	0.738				
		CO36	0.645				
						0.941	64.235

Table 2 – Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) Coefficients

Conclusion

Construct	Dimensions	Variables	Commonality	Cronbach's Alpha (CA)	KMO	Variance
Organizational Commitment	Commitment	CO37	0.735	0.960	0.943	70.379
		CO38	0.728			
		CO39	0.754			
		CO40	0.786			
		CO41	0.756			
		CO42	0.690			
		CO43	0.757			
		CO44	0.693			
		CT45	0.639			
		CT46	0.636			
		CT47	0.619			
		CT48				
Organizational Consent	Subordination	CS49	0.761	0.918	0.858	75.098
		CS50	0.806			
		CS51	0.835			
		CS52	0.814			
	Obligation	CS53	0.654	0.851		
		CS54	0.609			
		CS55	0.777			
		CS56	0.752			
Organizational Entrenchment	Impersonal Bureaucratic Arrangements	ET63	0.832	0.735	0.890	66,397
		ET65	0.769			
	Limitation of Alternatives/ Adjustment to Social Standing	ET66	0.625	0.894		
		ET68	0.575			
		ET69	0.559			
		ET71	0.635			
		ET72	0.726			
		ET73	0.600			
ET74	0.654					

Source: Videira, D., 2022

SEM consists of a set of procedures composed of statistical techniques and a causal model (Kline, 2011). Hair et al. (2005) recommend its use when a model displays multiple interrelated dependent relationships, such as those in this research. SEM

facilitates the detection and verification of relationships between multiple variables. However, because of the exploratory nature of our research, a more specific version of SEM was applied: the Partial Least Squares SEM used here is indicated when “complex models with many indicators and model relationships are estimated” (Hair et al., 2017, pp. xiii-xiv).

Initially, all the scales that make up the present study were submitted to Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) (Hair et al., 2009; Kirch et al., 2017) which resulted in a reduction in the number of variables initially proposed (a decrease from 75 to 53). The list of initial constructs was reduced from eleven to nine; Organizational Communication fell from six constructs to four; Organizational Commitment remained unidimensional; Organizational Entrenchment dropped from three to two constructs; and Organizational Consent was divided into two constructs. Table 2 presents the results of the EFA in detail.

To evaluate the measurement model, the following model fit relations were tested: Convergent Validity (AVE) (Ringle et al., 2014); Discriminant Validity according to Chin’s (1998) and Fornell and Larcker’s (1981) criteria; Cronbach’s Alpha (CA); and Composite Reliability (CR) (Hair et al., 2014).

Three variables of the Limitation of Alternatives/Adjustment to Social Standing (LAS) construct were excluded: ET66, ET69, and ET74 were dropped because they showed low factor loadings in the model. Thus, the LAS construct was reduced from the initial seven variables to four in the adjusted model. Table 3 presents the model’s goodness of fit values.

The measurement model of this study was composed of nine constructs and 50 observed variables. The following constructs remained in the model: Impersonal Bureaucratic Arrangements (BA), Affective Communication (AC), Engaging Communication (EC), Home Office Communication (HC), Immediate Supervisor Communication (ISC), Organizational Commitment (OC), Limitation of Alternatives/Adjustment to Social Standing (LAS), Obligation (OBL), and Subordination (SUB). The AVE

analysis shows values greater than 0.50 for all constructs. All constructs also showed acceptable values for Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha (CA): values above 0.70 for CR and above 0.60 for CA. Thus, the study meets the recommended index values for goodness of fit, and we can therefore attest to the convergent validity of the model (Ringle et al., 2014);

**Table 3** – Goodness of fit of the proposed model (AVE, CR and CA)

	<b>Constructs</b>	<b>Number of observed variables</b>	<b>AVE</b>	<b>Composite reliability (CR)</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha (CA)</b>
Organizational Communication	ISC – Immediate Superior Communication	7	0.645	0.927	0.908
	AC – Affective Communication	6	0.606	0.902	0.870
	EC – Engaging Communication	8	0.612	0.927	0.909
	HC – Home Office Communication	3	0.681	0.865	0.764
OC – Organizational commitment		12	0.704	0.966	0.962
Organizational consent	SUB – Subordination	4	0.804	0.942	0.919
	OBL – Obligation	4	0.695	0.901	0.854

Source: Videira, D., 2022

The next step consisted in analyzing the model's Discriminant Validity (DV) as an indicator of the independence of the constructs of the studied phenomenon (Henseler et al., 2009). The DV was analyzed according to two criteria. First, using Cross Loading as proposed by Chin (1998) which enabled us to identify higher loadings of an indicator on its respective construct when compared with the loadings on all the other constructs. Then, Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion was applied by comparing the square roots of the AVE's with the Pearson Correlation coefficients of their respective construct. The results show that the developed model presents Discriminant Validity according to both criteria (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Chin, 1998).

Once the Discriminant Validity of the model was ascertained, the analysis of the structural model ensued. In line with Hair et al. (2014) and Ringle et al. (2014), we tested the sample's Pearson's Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ ), and measured Predictive Relevance ( $Q^2$ ), and Effect Size ( $f^2$ ). Table 4 presents the results of these tests.

**Table 4** – Pearson's Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ ), Predictive Validity ( $Q^2$ ) and Effect Size ( $f^2$ )

	<b>Constructs</b>	<b><math>R^2</math></b>	<b><math>Q^2</math></b>	<b><math>f^2</math></b>
Organizational Communication	ISC – Immediate Supervisor Comm.	0.000	0.487	0.487
	AC – Affective Communication	0.399	0.220	0.445
	EC – Engaging Communication	0.670	0.395	0.499
	HC – Home Office Communication	0.146	0.097	0.362
CT - Organizational Commitment		0.582	0.392	0.644
Organizational Consent	SUB – Subordination	0.074	0.056	0.652
	OBL – Obligation	0.169	0.108	0.492
Organizational Entrenchment	LAS – Limitation of Alternatives/Adjustment to Social Standing	0.000	0.477	0.477
	BA – Impersonal Bureaucratic Arrangements	0.023	0.015	0.338

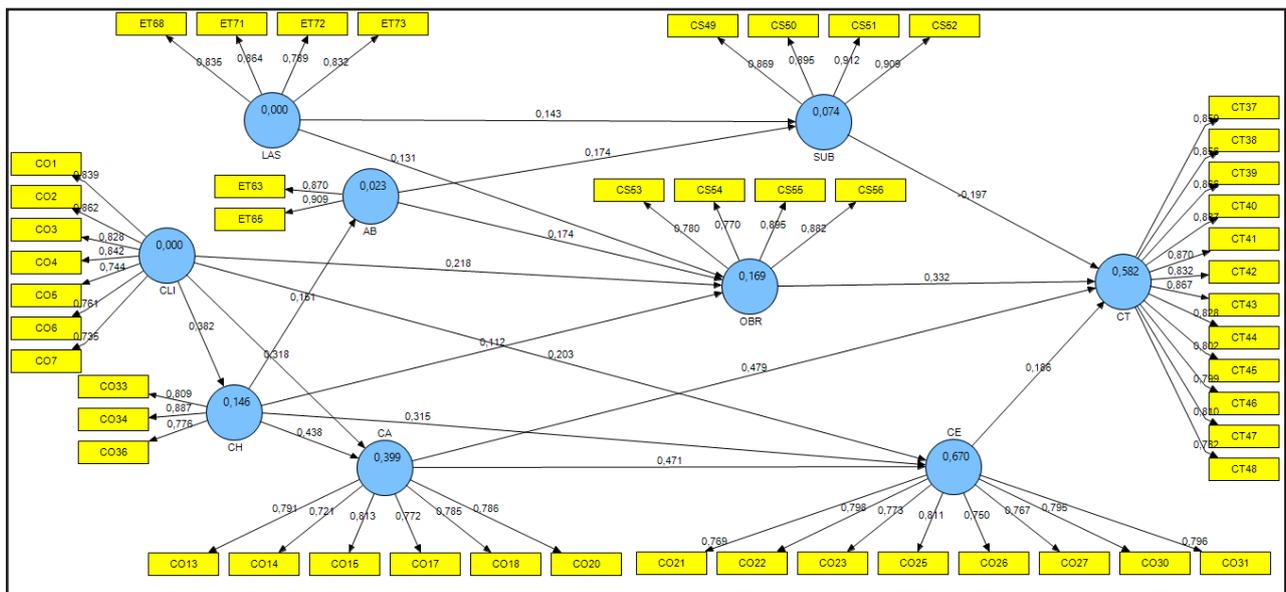
Sourch: Videira, D., 2022

According to Cohen's (1988) definition of Effect Size ( $f^2$ ), Affective Communication (39.9%), Engaging Communication (67.0%) and Commitment (58.2%) are the constructs having a large effect. Home Office Communication (14.6%) and Obligation (16.9%) are constructs with medium effect. And Impersonal Bureaucratic Arrangements (2.3%) and Subordination (7.4%) are constructs having small effect. The Immediate Supervisor Communication and Limitation of Alternatives/Adjustment to Social Standing constructs have  $R^2$  values of zero because they are exogenous constructs.

The Predictive Validity Indicator ( $Q^2$ ) assesses the fit of the model to predictive expectations; as an evaluation criterion,  $Q^2$  values should be greater than zero (Hair et

al., 2014). A  $Q^2 = 1$ , indicates a perfect model where the observations concur perfectly with no margin of error (Ringle et al., 2014). From Table 5, all  $Q^2$  values for the constructs that make up the structural model contribute to the explanation of the phenomenon in question.

Figure 2 – Adjusted structural model



Sourch: Videira, D., Smart PLS 2.0 software output, 2022

Cohen’s  $f^2$  Effect Size indicator assesses a construct’s utility towards model fit. Values of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 are referred to as small, medium and large in reference to the utility of each construct (Hair et al., 2014). The  $f^2$  values reflect the ratio between the portion explained by the model and the unexplained portion (Ringle et al., 2014). Regarding Effect Size values, only the Impersonal Bureaucratic Arrangements construct had a medium effect (0.338). All others showed a large effect, i.e.,  $f^2 > 0.35$ : Affective Communication (0.445); Engaging Communication (0.499); Home Office Communication (0.362); Immediate Superior Communication (0.487); Commitment (0.644); Limitation of Alternatives/Adjustment to Social Standing (0.477); Obligation (0.492); and Subordination (0.652).

Table 5 – Path coefficients ( $\Gamma$ ) and Student's t test values of the adjusted model →

Causal Relationships	Path Coefficients	Student's t test
Bureaucratic Arrangements → Obligation	0.174	3.190
Bureaucratic Arrangements → Subordination	0.174	3.067
Affective Communication → Engaging Communication	0.471	9.950
Affective Communication → Organizational Commitment	0.479	8.971
Home Office Communication → Bureaucratic Arrangements	0.318	2.970
Home Office Communication → Affective Communication	0.438	9.407
Home Office Communication → Engaging Communication	0.315	6.683
Home Office Communication → Obligation	0.112	2.023
Immediate Supervisor Communication → Affective Communication	0.318	6.549
Immediate Supervisor Communication → Engaging Communication	0.203	4.797
Immediate Supervisor Communication → Home Office Comm.	0.382	8.004
Communication from the Immediate Superior → Obligation	0.218	4.276
Limitation of Alternatives / Adj. Social Position → Obligation	0.131	2.657
Limitation of Alternatives / Adj. Social Position → Subordination	0.143	2.292
Obligation → Organizational Commitment	0.332	6.212
Subordination → Organizational Commitment	-0.197	3.604

Sourch: Videira, D., 2022

Next, the Path Coefficients ( $\Gamma$ ) were determined, which according to Ringle et al. (2014), are the same as the Beta values ( $\beta$ ) of simple or ordinary linear regressions. Figure 2 shows that the relationships demonstrated satisfactory statistical indices and nomological validity in the adjusted structural model. Figure 2 presents the final adjusted structural model with Path Coefficients ( $\Gamma$ ) of linear regression weights. It should be noted that all linear regressions present in the model showed significant values ( $p \leq 0.05$ ), calculated using the Student's t test. It is also possible to qualify the causal relationships in terms of positive or negative values. Positive values indicate that the relationships are directly proportional, in that as the value of one construct increases, the value of the other will also increase. A negative value indicates an inversely proportional relation. Table 5 presents Path Coefficients ( $\Gamma$ ) and Student's t test values (hypotheses) for various causal relationships between tested constructs.

The Path Coefficient ( $\Gamma$ ) evaluates causal relationships between constructs. Table 5, we shows that all but one of the Path Coefficients ( $\Gamma$ ) were positive, indicating

proportional causal relationships between constructs. The only negative  $\Gamma$  (-0.197) shows the inversely proportional causal relationship between Subordination and Organizational Commitment.

The Student's *t* test values presented in Table 5 show that the statistical significance of the regressions was tested for 17 casual relations with all values registering above the reference value of 1.96 according to the theoretical assumption (Ringle et al., 2014 ).

## 4 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

From the results obtained, we can sustain that internal processes of communication can directly influence both the Bond of Organizational Commitment and the Bond of Consent through the construct of Obligation. Additionally, the statistical tests demonstrate that the Bond of Entrenchment did not play a prominent role in the model – of the 18 initial assertions only six survived – and that it demonstrated no relationship with the Bond of Commitment. In turn, the Bond of Consent manifested itself in two ways, as Obligation and as Subordination, presenting opposing degrees of influence on Commitment.

As supported by Tavares and Limongi-França (2010), who emphasized the significance of participatory communication in decisions affecting people's work, the present study also highlights this robust relationship as a contributing factor to organizational commitment. This is particularly relevant in light of the ongoing reflection on specific variables arising from the isolation brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has impacted organizational relationships and communication within and between organizations. Additionally, our study aligns with the findings of Meirinhos et al. (2022), illustrating the vital role of communication in fostering organizational cohesion for entities seeking to enhance their performance.

A number of findings which emerged from the testing stood out on account of the strong scientific evidence they put forward based on the methodological protocols and the theoretical framework. The findings primarily evidenced that communication

with the immediate supervisor is a factor of great significance within the internal communication process. As foregrounded by Marques and Mafra, “to speak of dialogic organization development does not entail the suppression of difference, dissent and self-interest” (2013, p. 84). Instead of seeing dialogue as a vehicle for reconciling divergences between parties, these authors consider it an effective space for exchange, for dealing with collective problems, and for addressing the usually contentious positionings of alleged equality between interlocutors – who, incidentally, invariably present themselves in terms of varying degrees of asymmetry.

The importance of the participation of the immediate supervisor in the communication process corroborates the research by Heide et al. (2018) that highlights it as a Constituent of Organizational Communication (COC) and validates the importance of mid-level managers as generally being highly appreciated by their teams. The impact of Immediate Supervisor Communication has also been the subject of research in the field of administration: according to Bambacas and Patrickson (2008), clear and honest communication by managers promotes workers’ commitment. This finding also corroborates Togna’s (2014) findings relating the intermediary role of face-to-face communication between the immediate supervisor and the worker in the transition from the trust stage to the commitment stage.

Secondly, the analysis foregrounded the strong influence that Affective Communication (AC) exerts on Commitment. This confirms that communication actions which seek to encourage the perception of respect, the identification with organizational values, and the pride of belonging to the organization show high potential to grow the Bond of Commitment.

The third determination emerged from statistical analysis and showed that among the various constructs, the greatest influence on Engaging Communication (EC) as revealed by the Student’s t test, was Affective Communication, which, in turn, also affected Commitment. The Path Coefficient ( $\Gamma$ ) values show that a 100% increase in Affective Communication actions increased the Bond of Commitment by 47.9%.

The same logic applies to the relationship between Engaging Communication and Commitment but according to a lower percentage: an increase of 100% in Engaging Communication resulted in an 18.6% increase in the commitment bond.

The fourth finding reveals the effect of Home Office Communication (HC) on Affective Communication. According to the Student's t test, the HC construct has the second most significant effect on Engaging Communications. The HC construct arose from changes in communication processes resulting from social distancing due to the Covid-19 health crisis. The HC construct evidenced that employees working remotely as of March 2020 understood that their employing organizations were making efforts to keep them informed of the spread of the Coronavirus. HC actions impacted Engaging Communication as demonstrated by the intensification of news from employing organizations during isolation trying to reduce social distance. The HC construct showed that workers who were physically away from their offices during the pandemic, understood that their organizations were making efforts to keep them informed about the forms of contagion and the spread of Covid-19. To a lesser extent, the HC construct affected Obligation which is related to Consent, as well as the Impersonal Bureaucratic Arrangements construct related to Entrenchment. This can be explained by the period in which the research was conducted (June and July 2021), a period of increased uncertainty and instability in labor relations due to the effects of the pandemic on the Brazilian economy.

Our last finding foregrounds the sole negative relationship that emerges from Structural Equation Modelling. The negative Path Coefficient ( $\Gamma = -0.197$ ) shows the negative effect of Subordination (SUB) on Commitment (CT), where an increase in Subordination by 100% sees Commitment diminished by 19.7%: in other words, the more the Bond of Subordination is elicited, the less the worker will feel emotionally attached to the organization.

## 5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The proposal and validation of the Relational Model posited in this paper brings theoretical and practical contributions to the field of organizational communication. The first contribution to be highlighted is that the Relational Model proves the existence of workers' bonds, based on the communication variables used in the participating organizations.

It is worth mentioning that after the Covid-19 health crisis, organizational communication began to occupy a strategic place in organizations precisely because remote work, and then hybrid work, required a different mode of interaction between organizations and their employees as a result of new management models, labor contracts, and alterations to the organization's mission and values.

Communication proved to have a direct influence on workers' commitment towards the organization as a result of dialogical, relational, and meaning-producing actions. The strong influence of immediate supervisors on internal communication processes stands out, principally because they act as communication agents due to the training and support they provide their subordinates. Our analysis substantiates the direct impact of Affective Communication on the Bond of Commitment, as well as the influence of Affective Communication on Engaging Communication – which also corroborates its direct impact on Commitment, and validates the low values of Entrenchment among workers in the sample.

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) averred possible relationships between Consent and Entrenchment – a possible wellspring for further studies. It would also be of interest to deepen the understanding of the reasons behind the division of the Bond of Consent into two dimensions (Subordination and Obligation) as a result of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), as opposed to the original one-dimensional version. Similarly, another theoretical question that arose refers to the fact that the Entrenchment scale was validated using nine assertions in EFA, but dropped to six after SEM. Further research could reveal the reasons for the scale's division into two dimensions as opposed to the three of the original version.

The analysis showed that the Bond of Consent through the Subordination dimension directly impacts Commitment negatively, i.e., the more a person becomes attached to the organization as a result of following orders thoughtlessly or without critical judgment, the less affection develops towards the organization. The influence of Obligation impinges positively on Commitment, and is revealed by the acceptance of asymmetrical power relations and the organization's rules and norms. It would be worthwhile to investigate this finding further in future research, since the very Bond of Commitment expresses concordance with the norms and rules of the organization based on willingness rather than on imposed acquiescence.

The Entrenchment Bond had no effect on Commitment as per the adjusted structural model. Perhaps this is a reflection on the relatively low age range of the workers in the sample group (between 25 and 45 years old), that most are in the early stages of their careers, and that at present they do not see better options beyond their employing organizations.

On the other hand, there is a direct relationship between the Home Office Communication construct and Impersonal Bureaucratic Arrangement – one of the dimensions of Entrenchment that enters into play when an employee fears for their job and perceives a risk to their financial stability. This dynamic also merits more study, especially now that home office work is becoming more common. Companies are realizing that this way of working can be maintained without sacrificing work quality, and it can even save them money on office and travel expenses.

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2. Development of hypotheses or research questions (empirical studies)	√
3. Development of theoretical propositions (theoretical work)	√
4. Theoretical foundation / Literature review	√
5. Definition of methodological procedures	√
6. Data collection	√
7. Statistical analysis	√
8. Analysis and interpretation of data	√
9. Critical revision of the manuscript	√
10. Manuscript writing	√

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