

## Validation of Meritocratic Organizational Behavior as an Innovative Instrument

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### Abstract

*The present study aims to validate the proposal to build Meritocratic Organizational Behavior with the application of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), capturing the perspective of institutional managers in relation to organizational behavior (OB) from a triple meritocratic bias: transparency, equity and recognition. The CFA was used to identify whether the proposed model is parsimonious, well adjusted and which observable variables are most influenced by the latent factor. The data from this study were collected in Mato Grosso, Brazil, using a questionnaire. The administration of the research involved nineteen campuses of the Federal Institute of Education geographically dispersed. The data collection obtained a return of 60%, thus composing a sample with a non-probabilistic characteristic, which also favored the operationalization of inferential multivariate statistics. This study successfully tested the empirical relationship between organizational behavior and the principles of meritocracy on campuses. The CFA corroborated the statistical evidence for the adequacy of structural modeling. It was confirmed that the model is parsimonious and with adequate internal adjustment indexes, with emphasis on the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation with a value equal to 0.00. The instrument had an internal reliability, the standardized regression coefficients ( $\beta$ s) are expressive, greater than 0.64, and it still obtained adequate variance of errors and correlations of variables. The study contributes to knowledge about meritocratic principles in organizational behavior analysis, making it possible to recommend the construct in a structured format, adding new insight in academic research.*

**Keywords:** organizational behavior; meritocracy; people management; institutional policies; organizational philosophy.

### 1. Introduction

The contemporary moment has demonstrated unceasing transformations in the economic, social, technological and cultural fields, impacting the lives of people and organizations. In the administration this dynamic movement that has provoked new views on the traditional paradigms. Organizational behavior is a discipline that emerged in administrative science, but strongly influenced by psychology, anthropology, sociology and political science, which do not propose a consensus on exactly which variables are decisive in relation to the human phenomenon in organizations, however, it presents a diversity that is characteristic of the incident in organizations due to its multiplicity of contexts and endogenous and exogenous factors that are interacting. Studies on the relationship between the behavior of man in the context of work is of fundamental value to understand the human needs in organizations, as well as to identify the objectives of these two links, which greatly contribute to the maximization of forces and the increase of the possibility of common success.

Over the past century to the present, organizational behavior has become empowered, having several studies in the scope of organizations, since it is peaceful both in specialized literature and in organizational relations, the impact that individuals have on groups and vice versa, without disregarding the influence of the organization's structure. Organizational behavior has been the focus of research since the time of the industrial revolution, but applied studies of its structure date back more intensely in the 1960s, a time when more specific discoveries and theses about human relations in organizations emerged and the manager's leadership role in "catalyzing" results (Keskes, 2014).

If, in one aspect, work provides a vision of ennobling and appropriate activity to raise the status, providing those who work with an identity, in the other aspect, it is an activity also perceived as unwanted, meaningless, tiring and routine, which brings inconveniences to full social life (Barbosa et al., 2016). To this question, researchers and managers have been looking for answers or strategies that are able to harmonize the coexistence between man and the organization. Consequently, the idea of organizational justice as a balance mechanism in the work environment, due to the perceptions that the decision-making process may provoke in this relationship between people and the organization.

The perception of justice induces the motivation of workers, due to the perception of having been treated fairly, and consequently influencing the behavior of individuals (Jesus & Rowe, 2014).

Among the management models, the meritocratic has been conceived from a systemic perspective for the public sector, in order to involve all phases of the individual's relationship with the organization, envisioning broad people management policies such as: aggregate, apply, maintain, develop and recognize or even exonerate. As for such policies, there is a consensus on the need to apply meritocratic criteria to guide the process (Chang, 2020). The current axiom is that performance should be the factor that indicates organizational merit (Guimarães & Marconi, 2017; Young, 2017).

Bringing this thought to the fore, several instruments for performance evaluation emerge over time, paving the way for meritocracy as a way of thinking about organizational justice strategies, which would originate from the reflection on the functionality of performance in a meritocratic environment (Guimarães & Marconi, 2017).

Brazil is a country that, over the past 40 years, has undergone a strong change in the governance structure of the public service, taking as a parameter the functioning and performance of the private sector and implementing a mechanism based on the principles that would lead to improved efficiency (Ortiz & Medeiros, 2017; Gurgel, 2017; Faria & Faria, 2017). There are still incongruous thoughts on the topic, but there is a tendency to link governance with meritocracy in order to be a strategy to aggregate, maintain and develop people due to the perception of their great relevance at work, as well as the need to stimulate creativity and increase performance in the activities developed.

The administrator must carefully study human behavior to arrive at some considerations about the management of an organization, whether public or private, the management needs specialists who must be competent in the area of human resources, since its vision, knowledge and idea, reasonably guide the organization in which it operates. Naturally, recognizing the influence of human behavior, public management always occurs in the understanding of its dynamisms. Other impacts were also felt in public organizations, including transcending the focus on people management, with the concepts of corporate governance that have been adapted to the public sector, since they are understood as applicable in the general sector of the State (Gurgel, 2017).

The alignment of meritocracy as a management model for the distribution of resources, awards or advantages, whose criteria to be considered are performance driven by the behavior of people at work, lead to the idea of integration as a managerial tool. Meritocracy is an essential factor of justice in modern Western societies. Wrongly, some believe that the legislation that regulates the entry and progression in the Federal Institutes of Education in Brazil may fulfill this mission. The motivation to innovate demonstrates the importance of the organization's ability to explore new ideas or knowledge (Rodriguez, 2014), in that sense, the governance of organizational behavior based on a meritocratic bias is only fully possible based on institutional policies, which, in tune and derived from the regulatory norm, tend to develop the cognitively called Organizational Meritocratic Behavior.

It is believed that organizational behavior is composed of observable indicators and that meritocracy functions as its latent factor. Thus, it is important to perform studies to verify whether organizational behavior is perceived as an instrument of meritocracy and that this relationship may interfere in this purpose, using valid and reliable instruments. In this sense, the present study aims to apply the inferential multivariate statistical technique to the constructor proposed by Nacife (2019), using the CFA, to validate the instrument model.

The adoption of CFA for the study is based on the reason for being a special modality of factor analysis, generally applied in research in the social field (psychology, economics and administration), in which it tests whether the builder's measurements are consistent with a researcher's thesis regarding the nature of the factor, where the data must fit the hypothetical model that is based on the theory (Jöreskog, 2007). In this article, we aimed to apply the CFA to validate the instrument, capturing the perspective of institutional managers in relation to organizational behavior (OB) from a triple meritocratic bias: transparency, equity and recognition. The CFA was used to identify whether the proposed model is parsimonious, well adjusted and which observable variables are most influenced by the latent factor.

## **2. Material and methods**

This research was developed on the campuses of the Federal Institute of Education of Mato Grosso (IFMT), an entity that is part of the Federal Network of Professional, Scientific and Technological Education. The IFMT consists of nineteen campuses that are geographically dispersed in the state of Mato Grosso, constituting a reference for technological professional education in the state. For the sample of this study, 52 managers from different campuses were considered, constituting the research population, justifying the option for the census survey, which had the return of 60% of the questionnaires, composing in this measure the sample, of non-probabilistic characteristic, considering the heterogeneity in a significant way the universe under study, which still favored the operationalization of statistics. Participants were selected using the intentionality criterion for inclusion, depending on the management position they held on the campuses and the exclusion criterion was disinterest or impossibility to participate in the research.

### **2.1. Instrument**

The data collection instrument was composed of 69 questions, associated with a five-point Likert agreement scale, divided into two distinct sections. The first section collected general data about the participants' profile containing 4 questions in the multiple-choice format, and the second reported the conceptions about the interaction between the principles of meritocracy (Chang, 2020; Nacife, 2019; Lucas et al., 2018) and organizational behavior (Nacife, 2019, Wefald et al., 2017; Robbins & Judge, 2014), on an ordinal scale of 1 to 5, being: (1) Irrelevant; (2) Not very important; (3) Important; (4) Very important; (5) Essential.

In order to analyze the quality of the Meritocracy builder of Organizational Behavior, the instrument was developed with questions that addressed 11 variables of organizational behavior: Perception, Attitudes, Motivation, Leadership, Communication, Politics, Conflicts, Groups, Organizational Culture, Organizational Change and Organizational Structure, under the bias of three meritocratic perspectives: Transparency, Equity and Recognition, as proposed in the literature by Nacife (2019). The questions presented an adequate internal consistency index in the format of the data collection instrument.

### **2.2. Procedures**

After obtaining the Institutional authorization, the list of all potential participants was made available. Based on the analysis of these data, a communication strategy was elaborated and a message was sent informing the objectives and relevance of the research to the members of the target population, asking them for authorization to perform the research, as well as the collaboration with the answer of the questions and in the email it contained the link of the instrument (hosted in online server elaborated in the system Lime Survey). Respondents when granting the Free and Informed Consent Term, taking note of the process, and when accepting to collaborate with the research, accessed through the link sent in the email, enabling them to complete the online collection instrument.

The validation of the data collection tool was performed by a pre-test with the research participants, about 17% of the studied population, aiming to correct flaws, writing and conceptions and improving the questions. With the assessment of inconsistencies and the necessary corrections, the online instrument, self-applicable, was made available from January to March 2017, through digital means via email, which contained a link to redirect the respondent to the Lime Survey platform that contained the hosted questionnaire. Participants received usage guidelines, in which they emphasized the academic nature of the research and the anonymity of the responses. Participants were also informed that the results would be published, but only in a grouped form, without personal identification.

### **2.3. Data analysis**

Data processing was developed in stages after collection: (a) tabulation of data; (b) preliminary analysis of the data for the descriptive measures; (c) assessment of the adequacy of the model fit; and, (d) exploring the data to format the measurement diagram using the CFA. In a preliminary analysis in the data tabulation phase, it was found that there were eight questionnaires compromised due to the excessive number of lost data, making their analysis unfeasible which were excluded from the valid database.

It was also decided to use the Maximum likelihood (ML) algorithm to estimate the parameters, as indicated by Arbuckle (2017). The structural adjustment quality indicators of the proposed model were analyzed based on the adjustment indexes suggested by the specialized literature (Table 1).

Nomeclature	Abbreviation	Reference
Quiquadrado	$X^2/df$	0,00 to 5,00**
Root Mean Square Error	RMR	next or below 0.05*
Residual Mean Square Error of Approach	RMSEA	next or below 0.05*
P-value Close - Confirmatory Factor Analysis	PCLOSE	superior to 0.50*,***
Goodness-of-fit Index	GFI	from 0 to 1, with values of 0.80 and 0.90, or superior**
Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index	AGFI	from 0 to 1, with values of 0.80 and 0.90, or superior**
Normed Fit Index	NFI	superior to 0,90*
Relative Fit Index	RFI - rho1	superior to 0.90*
Comparative Fit Index	CFI	superior to 0.90*
Incremental Fit Index	IFI - Delta2	superior to 0.90*

**Table 1.** Structural adjustment quality indices for standard model (\*Abadi, 2019 and \*\*Formiga, 2016).

IBM SPSS Statistics®, version 24.0 and Microsoft Office Excel® applications were used for measurements and tests. The multivariate analysis in this article used IBM SPSS Amos® software, version 26.0 as a platform for estimating structural correlations and analysis.

### 3. Results

The parameter estimation method applied in the database was ML, aiming to assess the latent factor and the quantitative observable variables, giving the multivariate normality of the manifest variables, considering a significance of p-value <0.01. No outliers were identified in the sample that could impair the measurement of the model. The reliability of the research instrument was analyzed in order to measure its internal consistency. For this purpose, Cronbach's alpha was calculated (Table 2).

	Variables	Indicators	Cronbach's Alpha
Latent Factor	Meritocracy	Equity	0.89
		Recognition	0.92
		Transparency	0.89
Observable Variables	Attitude	Compromise, emotion and productivity.	0.79
	Communication	Mode, roles and barriers.	0.84
	Conflict	Sources, levels and negotiation.	0.70
	Culture	Values, philosophy and climate.	0.82
	Structure	Resources, dimension and technology.	0.79
	Group	Team, dynamics and decision.	0.57
	Leadership	Attributes, practice and coaching.	0.85
	Motivation	Necessity, dedication and expectation.	0.69
	Change	Opportunity, resistance and development.	0.65
	Perception	Creativity, attention and personality.	0.77
	Policy	Tactical, power and uncertainty.	0.64

**Table 2.** Alpha of Cronbach values among the variables of each question: principles of meritocracy and variables of organizational behavior.

From a general perspective, from what is shown in Table 2, the questions of the same measured indicator are consistent, since the vast majority of Cronbach's alpha values were above 0.75.

Cronbach's Alpha values greater than 0.75 indicate that the instrument is highly reliable and produces stable and consistent measurements. However, Cronbach's alpha presented an overall average of 0.77, which is a high value, indicating that the instrument produces stable and consistent measurements. The adequacy indexes of the tested hypothetical model were also satisfactory (Table 3).

Structural Adjustment Quality Indices	Score
X <sup>2</sup> /df	0.65
RMR	0.04
RMSEA	0.00
PCLOSE	0.82
GFI	0.97
AGFI	0.80
NFI	0.99
RFI - rho1	0.97
CFI	1.00
IFI - Delta2	1.00

**Table 3.** Structural adjustment quality indices for standard model.

Table 3 shows the adjustment indexes of the tested model. It may be seen that in relation to the main measured indices, there was a very good adequacy, considering the relation to the ideal values in the literature as a parameter (Table 1). The parsimony indices adopted (GFI, AGFI and NFI) and the adequacy indices (RFI, CFI and IFI-Delta2) approximate or equal their perfect value (1.00), while the RMSEA error index was 0.00 and the next RMS (0.04), collaborating with the evidence of the adjustment as well. These indicators, due to their fully acceptable values, demonstrate adequacy to the proposed tested model, with the scores estimated by the Confirmatory Factor Analysis fully adjusted structurally. The tests were considered statistically significant when results with a significance value lower than 0.001 ( $p < 0.001$ ).

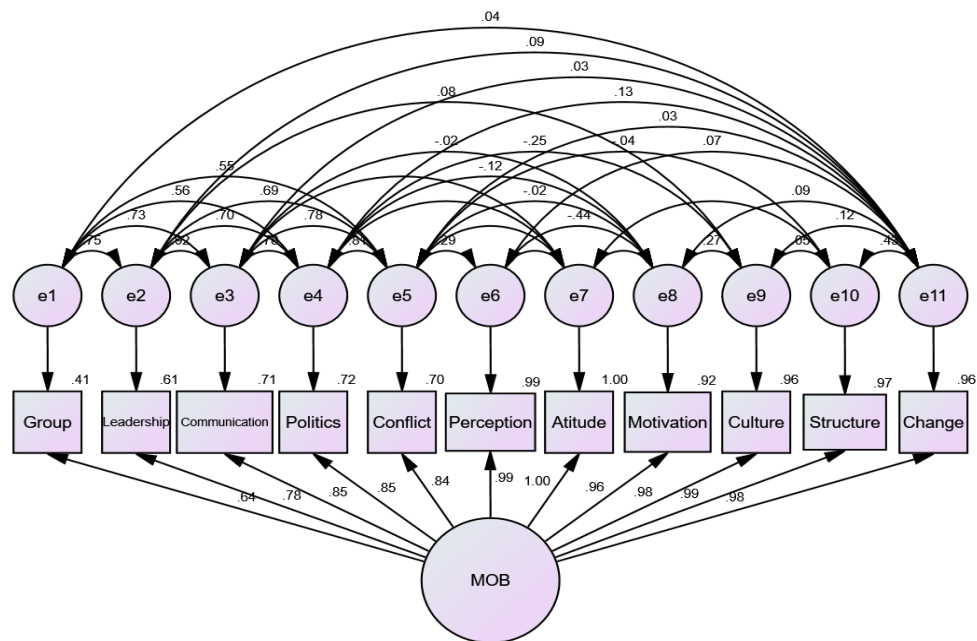
Hypotheses		$\beta$ s stander	S.E.	C.R.	p
Group	<--- MOB	0.64			
Leadership	<--- MOB	0.78	0.12	9.89	***
Communication	<--- MOB	0.85	0.13	10.60	***
Policy	<--- MOB	0.85	0.15	8.96	***
Conflict	<--- MOB	0.84	0.15	8.68	***
Perception	<--- MOB	0.99	0.17	9.66	***
Attitude	<--- MOB	1.00	0.18	9.86	***
Motivation	<--- MOB	0.96	0.18	8.80	***
Culture	<--- MOB	0.98	0.18	9.34	***
Structure	<--- MOB	0.99	0.19	9.51	***
Change	<--- MOB	0.98	0.18	9.40	***

Note: \*\*\*: Significant in 0.001

**Table 4.** Regression Weights: Meritocratic Organizational Behavior.

In this section, the results of the study are reported based on standardized and non-standardized regression coefficients, in order to establish analysis parameters. From the CFA diagram, the estimates and parameters were modeled to verify whether the hypotheses of relationship simulated in the theoretical model are validated or denied, the test conducted under statistical significance for the level of confidence above 99%.

For purposes of results and discussion of the hypothesis (relationship between observable variables and the one-dimensional latent factor) and consequently of the derived equations, it is necessary to establish that, for the hypothesis to be accepted, two conditions must be met: first, the value of the structural coefficient must be greater than 0.33 (Kılıç, 2017) and, second, be of statistical significance, where the p-value must be less than 0.05.



**Figure 1.** Path diagram relative to the proposed model: Confirmatory Factorial Analysis.

In the evaluation of the “Offending estimates”, the occurrence of negative variance and correlation with an absolute value greater than 1 is verified, which also gives the quality of the specified model, but also demonstrates whether the sample used was small for the application in the measurement (Dillon et al., 1987). The CFA of the measured model also showed quality in this aspect, with error 8 being the one that presented combinations of negative variance and the correlations all obtained a value less than or equal to 1.00.

#### 4. Discussion

The model was built so that the variables of Organizational Behavior were measured and estimated under the meritocracy factor, considering the principles of transparency, equity and recognition for this purpose. Based on the list of organizational behavior variables and the proposal of the 1<sup>st</sup> order latent factor, the CFA was adopted to verify the constructor's validity and for this purpose to discuss the results. The structural equation modeling process adopted demonstrated a good fit robustness of the proposed model through the adjustment indices presented through its scores and references (Table 2). Considering the dependence of the Chi-Square test against the expression of the sample size, it is frequent that researchers consider the ratio of the ratio between  $X^2$  (6.45) and degrees of freedom (10) as an indicator of better adjustment of the models, which was in a value range considered to be reliable, since the closer to 0.00 this ratio, the better (safety range is 0.00 to 5.00), once 0.65 was obtained, this index shows that it is well adjusted (Schreiber et al., 2006).

The RMR test indicates an adequacy of the theoretical model to the data, as it approaches zero (Formiga, 2016), a score of 0.04 was obtained, making an adjusted value. The RMSEA adjustment criterion obtained a score of 0.00, indicating a perfect fit. The Pclose tests the proximity of the adjustment of the RMSEA in the modeling, in the tests it reached the value of 0.82 for the proposed builder, a value that indicates excellent suitability (Schreiber et al., 2006).

To estimate the model's parsimony, the values of the GFI (0.97), AGFI (0.80) and NFI (0.99) indices were determined, determining that there is an excellent internal measure of data adherence. GFI and AGFI are equivalent to  $R^2$  in multiple regression, indicating the proportion of variance/covariance in the data explained by the model (Formiga, 2016). A model is considered parsimonious when it has an appropriate explanatory capacity and contains adjusted coefficients.

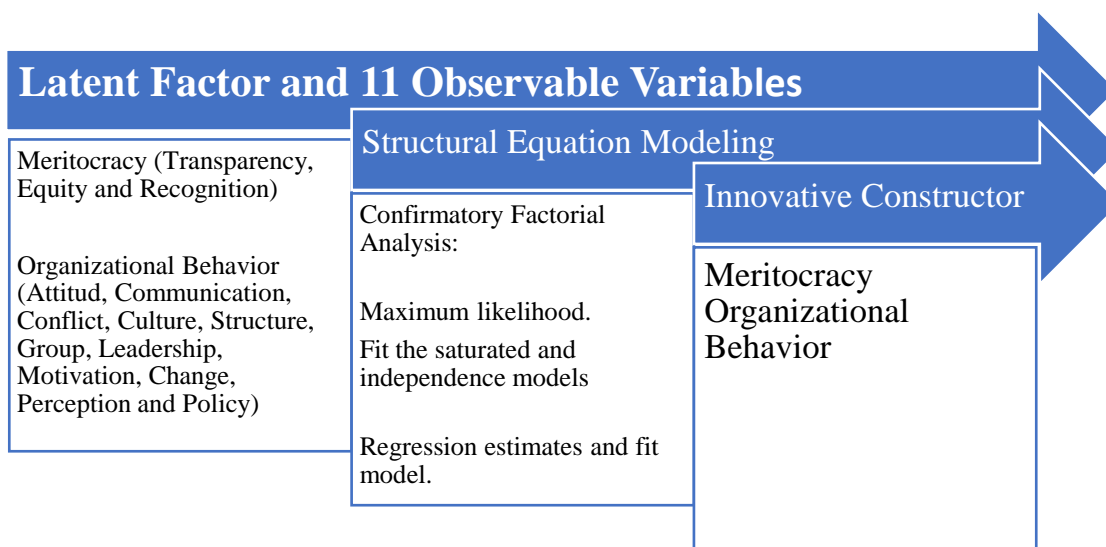
The CFI, which considers the degrees of freedom available to test the model, generally comparing the estimated model and the null model, had a score of 1.00, demonstrating a perfect degree of internal comparison of adjustment. The RFI, which measures the discrepancy and degrees of freedom for the model under evaluation, obtained a value of 0.97. The IFI obtained in this model was 1.00 (Schreiber et al., 2006). In summary, it is inferred that the proposed model as measured by the CFA, obtained an assessment of the measurement adjustment indexes verified, with robust results in relation to the quality criteria required for an analysis of *Structural Equation Modeling*.

It should be noted that when a factor load is 0.75, the observed variable explains the variance of the latent variable by 56% ( $0.75^2 = 0.56$ ). As a cutoff point, a load factor of 0.33 may be given, as it explains 10% of variance (Kılıç, 2017). The values of the standardized coefficients for determining the model ranged from 0.64 to 1.00. This indicates that the latent variable adequately predicts the transformation of the observed variables. The standardized estimated regression coefficients, in addition to being high, are also highly statistically significant ( $p$ -value = 0.01). All estimated variances, both those associated with measurement errors and that related to the latent factor, have high statistical significance.

With the application of CFA, the constructor composed of 11 direct relationships was validated, confirming the following basic hypothesis: there is a significant impact between the meritocratic factor under organizational behavior. A priori, in the analysis of structural equation, it must know how many factors and which should be used for confirmatory factor analysis (Jöreskog, 2007); this explains the adoption of the model already identified and in this study the authors opted to deepen the data of the research by Nacife (2019), in order to evaluate it based on the adoption of a confirmatory multivariate statistical technique, contributing to elucidate the challenges of managing people in organizations, which are related to changes in roles, responsibilities, competencies, and activities required for team building. These changes are essential, since high performance and multidisciplinary teams need to demonstrate greater autonomy and focus on collaboration and communication to be effective (Pinton & Torres Junior, 2020).

The secondary hypothesis was that the model is well adjusted and that some observable variables are more influenced by the latent factor, in which it was also confirmed, since the builder presented a very strong relationship between the latent factor and two sets of observable variables in particular. According to the classification prescribed by Robbins & Judge (2014), the set of classifiable variables of the individual level (perception, attitude and motivation) and of the organizational system (organizational culture, structure and change) obtained an average of equal coefficients (0.98), demonstrating a strong and optimized relationship of these two classes in comparison to the variables that are classifiable at the group level (leadership, communication, politics, group and conflict) that obtained a standardized average of 0.79  $\beta$ s. This result also allows speculation about a possible hierarchy of importance captured by the instrument, the human aspects of transition in organizational philosophies as presented in the existing literature can be broadly categorized (Pinton & Torres Junior, 2020).

The main question that was intended to answer in this article was whether the constructor "Organizational Meritocratic Behavior" is being adequately captured with the instrument. Based on the evidence presented here, the builder is confirmed by capturing the managers' perceptions, which may help to identify aspects of the relationship between human behavior in the organization and its alignment with the precepts of meritocracy and, consequently, capable of improving institutional personnel management policies, as these in general differ from the practice of personnel (Martínez-Costa et al., 2019).



**Figure 2:** Flow of operationalization of the Confirmatory Factorial Analysis.

The assessment of meritocratic organizational behavior requires an instrument adjusted to the type of organization under analysis.

Using exploratory factor analysis, Nacife (2019) was able to show that the builder of Organizational Meritocratic Behavior had very good reliability and statistical significance. Exploratory factor analysis is used to ascertain complex interrelationships between variables without having any initial assumptions about the factors. In this study, the data were reevaluated using confirmatory factor analysis, since it is an approach that allows verifying whether the variables are really associated with their respective assumed factors (Jöreskog, 2007) and the structural equations modeling, in which the results recommend that there is statistical evidence for the validation of the theoretically configured constructor.

It should be noted the scarcity of studies that address the constructor “Organizational Meritocratic Behavior”, under development, with space for additional evaluations, and this may be verified by consulting the main repositories (Google Scholar, Scielo, CAPES/MEC Journals and Scopus®), using the expression between quotation marks in English and Portuguese for research. Another fact to be considered, is in the formulation of the instrument, which considered five points on the Likert scale, staying in the good point range to meet most situations. The analysis reveals that the instrument has good internal consistency and satisfactory factor loads, in addition to theoretically addressing important aspects for the development of the theme organizational behavior (Chang, 2020; Ortiz & Medeiros, 2017; Gurgel, 2017; Faria & Faria, 2017; Robbins & Judge, 2014).

## 5. Conclusions

The study of a builder aims to explain why the variables are in a certain way and whether the model is able to predict them, just as it is also essential to be accessible. The tests indicated that the observable variables and the latent factor are strongly correlated with each other. The application of structural modeling, through the CFA, infers that due to the scores of the coefficients and the adjustment indexes obtained, the influence of the latent factor (meritocracy) elaborated under the three perspectives (transparency, equity and recognition) was fully confirmed regarding the 11 proposed organizational behavior variables.

In scientific studies, it is important to corroborate that there are limitations in the development of a research, and in this work, it focuses that even having found a consistent measurement model, it cannot be said that the only applicable model was found, since there may be other alternative models, which have not been tested and which are sufficiently good or better than the model found. The instrument demonstrated the disadvantage of being extensive, but in counterpoint that is easy to understand and reliable, therefore, it is still a challenge to motivate respondents. This limitation may imply to some extent the lack of information or lack of interest from the respondents.

The results may not be generalizable, even if the data were obtained on 19 campuses scattered geographically but are from the same federal institute. In order to generalize the statistical results, the instrument needs to be rigorously tested again in several other federal institutes of education. Further studies are recommended to be developed to deepen the structural modeling applied to the theme, as well as, in the perspective of identifying and studying new indicators that allow to improve the builder on screen, including in other organizations.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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