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# Job Design and Work Engagement in a Private Higher Education Institution

# Desenho do Trabalho e Engajamento em uma Instituição de Ensino Superior Privada

## *Diseño del trabajo y compromiso laboral en una institución de educación superior privada*

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***Abstract***

*Transformations in the world of work have imposed new challenges on human resource management and require strategies that promote employee well-being and performance. In this context, job design and work engagement have emerged as relevant constructs, as structural and relational job characteristics directly influence how individuals engage with their work activities. This study examined the relationships between job design (JD) and work engagement (WE) in a sample of 118 administrative staff and faculty members from a private higher education institution in southern Brazil. Data were collected using a sociodemographic questionnaire, the Job Design Scale, and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale. The results indicated high levels of engagement, characterizing the sample as an engaged workforce. The knowledge characteristics dimension of JD showed the highest mean score, with information processing standing out among its subdimensions. Positive and significant correlations were identified between JD dimensions (task, knowledge, and social) and WE. Regression analysis revealed that the task and knowledge dimensions explained 42% of the*

*variance in WE. These findings suggest that job design functions as a resource that promotes work engagement, providing practical implications for organizational strategies aimed at institutional sustainability and employee well-being.*

***Keywords**: job design, work engagement, higher education.*

**Resumo**

As transformações no mundo do trabalho impõem desafios à gestão de pessoas e exigem estratégias que promovam o bem-estar e o desempenho dos profissionais. Nesse contexto, o desenho do trabalho e o engajamento tornam-se construtos relevantes, uma vez que características estruturais e relacionais do trabalho influenciam diretamente a forma como os indivíduos se envolvem com suas atividades. Este estudo analisou as relações entre o desenho do trabalho (DT) e o engajamento no trabalho (ET), em uma amostra de 118 profissionais técnico-administrativos e docentes de uma instituição de ensino superior privada do Sul do país. Foram aplicados um questionário sociodemográfico, a Escala de Desenho do Trabalho e a Escala de Engajamento no Trabalho de Utrecht. Os resultados indicaram níveis de engajamento superiores, caracterizando um grupo de profissionais engajados. A *dimensão características do conhecimento* do DT obteve a maior média, destacando-se a subdimensão *processamento de informações*. Foram identificadas correlações positivas e significativas entre as dimensões do DT (tarefa, conhecimento e sociais) e o ET. A análise de regressão indicou que as dimensões de tarefa e o conhecimento explicaram 42% da variância do ET. O desenho do trabalho mostrou-se como recurso promotor de engajamento, oferecendo subsídios para práticas organizacionais voltadas à sustentabilidade das instituições e ao bem-estar de seus profissionais.

**Palavras-chave**: desenho do trabalho, engajamento no trabalho, ensino superior.

***Resumen***

*Las transformaciones en el mundo del trabajo imponen desafíos a la gestión de personas y exigen estrategias que promuevan el bienestar y el desempeño de los profesionales. En este contexto, el diseño del trabajo y el compromiso laboral se convierten en constructos relevantes, dado que las características estructurales y relacionales del trabajo influyen directamente en la forma en que los individuos se involucran con sus actividades. Este estudio analizó las relaciones entre el diseño del trabajo (DT) y el compromiso laboral (CL) en una muestra de 118 profesionales técnico-administrativos y docentes de una institución de educación superior privada del sur del país. Se aplicaron un cuestionario sociodemográfico, la Escala de Diseño del Trabajo y la Escala de Compromiso Laboral de Utrecht. Los resultados indicaron niveles elevados de compromiso, caracterizando a un grupo de profesionales comprometidos. La dimensión características del conocimiento del DT presentó la media más alta, destacándose la subdimensión procesamiento de la información. Se identificaron correlaciones positivas y significativas entre las dimensiones del DT (tarea, conocimiento y sociales) y el CL. El análisis de regresión indicó que las dimensiones de tarea y conocimiento explicaron el 42 % de la varianza del CL. El diseño del trabajo se evidenció como un recurso promotor del compromiso laboral, aportando insumos para prácticas organizacionales orientadas a la sostenibilidad institucional y al bienestar de los profesionales.*

***Palabras clave**: diseño del trabajo, compromiso laboral, educación superior.*

Transformations in the work context, intensified by advances in digital technologies and the reconfigurations brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, have required new ways of organizing, redesigning, and experiencing work (Fraccaroli et al., 2024; Parker & Knight, 2024; Wahyuni, 2024). These changes, combined with increasing competitiveness, affect all sectors, including higher education, which plays a strategic role in society.

Competition among higher education institutions (HEIs), particularly private ones, makes the definition of work structure a critical element for delivering differentiated services and ensuring organizational success (Gemelli & Closs, 2023; Silva et al., 2007). In this context, beyond the academic domain, comprising faculty, it is essential to highlight other functional areas within HEIs, such as administrative operations and back-office activities (Andric et al., 2023; Janissek et al., 2014).

Although faculty and administrative staff share the same organizational environment in private HEIs, their work experiences differ substantially. Faculty members are engaged in teaching, research, and extension activities, often managing multiple roles and academic demands, including scientific production, participation in conferences, and involvement in committees and academic units. In contrast, administrative staff perform more operational functions, with distinct routines, schedules, and control systems. These differences result in distinct job designs, influencing task execution, work organization, and working conditions (Gemelli & Closs, 2023). At the same time, both groups are managed under a shared organizational framework, guided by common institutional policies and human resource management practices (Nardes et al., 2021).

Clarity regarding responsibilities (encompassing job content, tasks, and professional roles within organizational processes and practices) is associated with key outcomes such as productivity, performance, creativity, job satisfaction, and well-being (Parker et al., 2017). This set of characteristics that structure work is referred to as job design (JD), which, from an integrative perspective, also includes motivational aspects and features of the work environment, such as the social context (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006; Parker & Knight, 2024).

JD is associated with employees' behaviors and attitudes in the workplace, as shaped by its core characteristics (Jesus et al., 2019). Studying JD enables the identification of psychosocial risk and protective factors across different professional categories, thereby supporting the development of strategies aimed at improving workers' psychological conditions (Christian et al., 2011; Porto et al., 2019; Schaufeli et al., 2013; Schaufeli, 2014; Vazquez et al., 2019). It also allows for modifications in work structure to make it more meaningful and rewarding (Devotto et al., 2022).

Examining the relationship between JD and work engagement (WE) contributes to the field of organizational behavior by supporting the development of more effective human resource management strategies. Such strategies can foster changes in job characteristics that enhance JD and, consequently, increase engagement levels. This issue is particularly relevant given that organizational sustainability is strongly influenced by how individuals contribute to the organization, producing high-quality outcomes and maintaining competitiveness (Cotič et al., 2025). In this regard, employees must play an active role, as higher levels of WE are associated with improved performance (Yanti et al., 2022).

Investigating positive aspects of professional practice among faculty and administrative staff represents a gap in Brazilian research, which has predominantly focused on illness-related factors and specific adverse contexts. Therefore, considering the importance of evaluating factors that contribute to workplace well-being (Vazquez et al., 2019), this study aimed to analyze the relationships between JD characteristics (task, knowledge, social, and contextual) and WE.

## Theoretical framework

### Job design

Understanding how tasks are organized and performed in the workplace is central to the fields of organizational behavior and human resource management. The concept of JD refers to how work activities are structured, carried out, and adapted, directly influencing outcomes such as employee well-being, performance, and motivation (Fraccaroli et al., 2024; Jesus et al., 2019; Parker et al., 2017).

Research on this phenomenon has evolved from the early principles of Taylorism to more recent, integrative models. Historically, the Job Characteristics Model proposed by Hackman & Oldham (1976) represented a major milestone by suggesting that five core dimensions (skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback) are essential for fostering motivation and satisfaction (Morgeson & Campion, 2003). However, this model has been considered limited in capturing the growing complexity of modern work environments, particularly with respect to social interactions and contextual conditions. More recently, the SMART model (Stimulating, Mastery, Agency, Relational, and Tolerable demands), proposed by Parker & Knight (2024), synthesizes accumulated knowledge on JD into five key characteristics: stimulating, mastery-oriented, autonomous, relational, and tolerable.

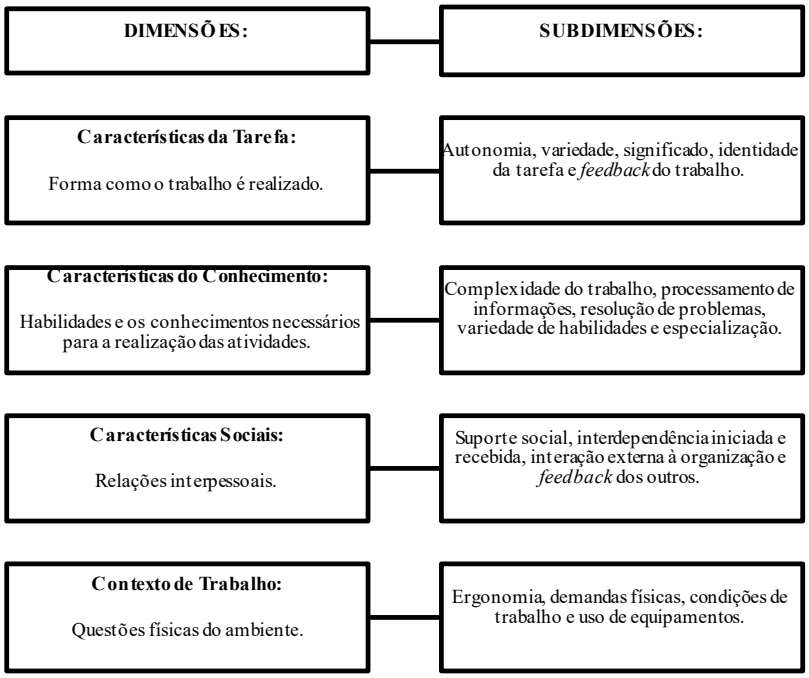
Notably, Morgeson & Humphrey (2006) expanded the analysis of JD beyond motivational aspects by incorporating cognitive, social, and contextual dimensions of work (Abbad et al., 2019; Jesus et al., 2019). Their model stands out for introducing a more comprehensive instrument, the Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ), which measures 21 subdimensions grouped into four major categories: task, knowledge, social, and contextual characteristics. This model was validated for the Brazilian context by Borges-Andrade et al. (2019) and has been widely applied in national studies (Borges-Andrade & Sampaio, 2019; Silva & Carvalho-Freitas, 2021).

The WDQ enables a more nuanced assessment of cognitive demands, interpersonal relationships, and physical working conditions. The knowledge dimension, for example, is particularly salient in information-intensive settings such as higher education institutions and complex public and private organizations (Borges-Andrade & Sampaio, 2019; Jesus et al., 2019). Characteristics such as task complexity, problem-solving requirements, and information processing demands are especially relevant for professional development, workplace learning, and organizational engagement. Evidence suggests that environments incorporating these characteristics promote active learning strategies and contribute to greater autonomy and job satisfaction (Abbad et al., 2019; Borges-Andrade & Sampaio, 2019).

Furthermore, JD also influences psychosocial aspects of the work environment. Factors such as social support, autonomy, and meaningful work have been identified as predictors of inclusion and satisfaction among underrepresented groups, including individuals with disabilities, and are essential for fostering more inclusive workplaces (Silva & Carvalho-Freitas, 2021). In this study, the four dimensions of the JD model are considered (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

Dimensions of job design




Source: Adapted from Morgeson & Humphrey (2006).

Based on this model, the WDQ provides a comprehensive, robust, widely recognized measure of job characteristics. It has been extensively validated and applied worldwide, although its length may sometimes limit its usability for practitioners and researchers (Jesus et al., 2019; Montañez-Juan et al., 2023). As previously noted, the instrument was adapted and validated for the Brazilian context by Borges-Andrade et al. (2019).

Evidence derived from this measure indicates that JD is associated with key organizational outcomes, including performance (Bayona et al., 2020; Ramírez-Vielma & Nazar, 2019), learning (Puente-Palacios et al., 2019), professional development (Viana & Mourão, 2019), productivity (Parker et al., 2017), job satisfaction (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006; Parker et al., 2017), organizational commitment (Jesus et al., 2019), motivation (Porto et al., 2019; Yanti et al., 2022), and work engagement (Ahmed et al., 2024; Amalia & Hadi, 2019; Christian et al., 2011; Jesus et al., 2019; Forastero et al., 2018; Magnan et al., 2020; Polo-Vargas et al., 2018; Porto et al., 2019; Yanti et al., 2022).

Recent reviews highlight that JD remains one of the most prominent predictors of well-being, adaptability, and engagement in complex and technologically mediated organizational contexts (Fraccaroli et al., 2024; Parker & Knight, 2024). Although the effects of JD have been widely studied, its relationship with work engagement has been explored in contexts different from the present study (namely, higher education) considering both key groups involved: faculty and administrative staff.

## Work engagement

WE is defined as a positive, persistent, affective-cognitive psychological state, contextualized within the professional environment and aligned with available resources and demands (Vazquez et al., 2016). It represents a relatively enduring state that is not focused on a specific object, event, individual, or behavior (Salanova, 2023). This state emerges when employees identify with the organization's purpose, invest effort and energy in their work, and derive pleasure from performing their tasks (Schaufeli, 2012). WE enables employees to focus on achieving organizational goals (Bayona et al., 2020), as they develop a sense of belonging, demonstrate loyalty, and often exceed expected performance levels (Jesus et al., 2019).

From the perspective adopted in this study, WE comprises three dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption (Salanova, 2023; Schaufeli, 2012; Vazquez et al., 2015). Vigor refers to high levels of energy and resilience at work, characterized by the willingness to invest effort and persist despite difficulties. Dedication reflects the sense of significance and pride associated with work, fostering involvement and inspiration. It encompasses not only cognitive aspects but also an affective dimension. Absorption refers to full concentration and immersion in work activities, often accompanied by difficulty disengaging, with time passing quickly due to deep involvement (Salanova, 2023; Schaufeli,

2012; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Vazquez et al., 2016; Yanti et al., 2022). Together, these dimensions are predictors of well-being in the workplace (Vazquez et al., 2016).

This conceptualization of WE emphasizes the importance of analyzing work activities and job characteristics (Davcheva et al., 2024; Mezzomo et al., 2023; Schaufeli, 2012), indicating that engagement is strongly influenced by contextual work variables, including job characteristics encompassed within JD (Bayona et al., 2020; Jesus et al., 2019; Porto et al., 2019). Beyond traditional job resources, the proactive shaping of work by employees themselves has also been shown to enhance engagement (Scharp et al., 2022).

Previous research has demonstrated the influence of JD on WE. Studies focusing on Millennials (Amalia & Hadi, 2019; Forastero et al., 2018) found that employees with greater autonomy (a JD dimension) exhibit higher levels of energy and dedication, which are core components of WE (Forastero et al., 2018). Additionally, task, knowledge, and contextual characteristics have been shown to be positively associated with WE (Polo-Vargas et al., 2018). A study conducted with nurses in a university hospital in Egypt identified a strong positive correlation between all JD and WE dimensions (Ahmed et al., 2024). Furthermore, research by Cotič et al. (2025) demonstrated that autonomy, feedback, skill variety, task identity, and task significance are positively associated with engagement.

In Brazil, a study involving professionals from private and public organizations, non-governmental organizations, and cooperatives found that knowledge, autonomy, and social support are key job characteristics explaining WE (Porto et al., 2019). Another study with information technology professionals also highlighted the role of autonomy in predicting engagement (Magnan et al., 2020). Supporting these findings, a meta-analysis identified positive associations between WE and all subdimensions of task characteristics (autonomy, task variety, task significance, and feedback) as well as selected subdimensions of knowledge characteristics (problem-solving and work complexity) and social characteristics (particularly social support). Conversely, negative associations were observed between WE and physical demands, working conditions, and certain contextual subdimensions (Christian et al., 2011).

Based on the theoretical framework presented, more enriched and complex job characteristics (e.g., autonomy, variety, feedback, social support, and cognitive demands) are understood to enhance WE through motivational processes. This perspective aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which posits that intrinsic engagement is driven by the satisfaction of psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as well as with the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), which proposes that job resources foster motivation and engagement, whereas excessive demands may lead to strain and burnout. Previous studies have identified positive associations between JD dimensions and WE, particularly in contexts requiring high cognitive and relational performance, such as higher education (Abbad et al., 2019; Borges-Andrade & Sampaio, 2019; Jesus et al., 2019).

Considering Self-Determination Theory, the JD-R model, the conceptual framework of JD (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006), and its Brazilian adaptation (Borges-Andrade et al., 2019), the four dimensions (i.e., task, knowledge, social, and context) were used as the basis for formulating the hypotheses of the present study, as described below.

Task characteristics, referring to how work is performed, constitute one dimension of JD and include autonomy, task variety, task significance, task identity, and feedback (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). These characteristics are recognized as predictors of WE, as they enhance intrinsic motivation and a sense of purpose in work activities (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Parker et al., 2017). The meta-analysis conducted by Christian et al. (2011) confirmed significant associations between WE and task-related subdimensions across different organizational contexts. Similar findings have been reported across cultural settings (Cotič et al., 2025), economic sectors (Bayona et al., 2020; Polo-Vargas et al., 2018), and Brazilian samples (Porto et al., 2019; Magnan et al., 2020), including among faculty and higher education professionals (Jesus et al., 2019; Forastero et al., 2018). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1a: Task characteristics are positively related to WE.

Knowledge characteristics, another JD dimension, include work complexity, information processing, problem-solving, skill variety, and specialization (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Activities that require analytical reasoning, continuous learning, and the application of diverse knowledge tend to be cognitively demanding, encouraging the use of self-regulation and active learning strategies (Abbad et al., 2019; Borges-Andrade & Sampaio, 2019). These cognitive demands are associated with professional development and enhanced perceptions of competence, which in turn promote WE (Bayona et al., 2020).

Empirical studies indicate that knowledge characteristics are positively associated with engagement, satisfaction, and performance (Bayona et al., 2020; Christian et al., 2011; Polo-Vargas et al., 2018). Work environments that promote skill diversity, problem-solving, and complex information processing tend to enhance dedication, vigor, and absorption—the core dimensions of WE (Schaufeli, 2012; Vazquez et al., 2016). In knowledge-intensive contexts such as HEIs, these characteristics are particularly relevant, as work involves continuous knowledge exchange, innovation, and critical reflection (Jesus et al., 2019; Montañez-Juan et al., 2023). Thus, greater cognitive demands and the use of specialized knowledge are expected to increase WE by enhancing perceptions of challenge and meaning at work (Fraccaroli et al., 2024; Parker et al., 2017). Accordingly:

H1b: Knowledge characteristics are positively related to WE.

In addition to cognitive aspects, the relational component of work also influences WE. Social characteristics refer to interpersonal interactions and the extent to which work activities involve relationships, support, and cooperation among colleagues, leaders, and other organizational actors (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). This dimension includes

elements such as social support, interdependence, external interaction, and feedback from others, which are essential for building relationships and facilitating knowledge sharing within organizations (Borges-Andrade et al., 2019; Montañez-Juan et al., 2023). Social support and positive feedback contribute to satisfaction and a sense of belonging, strengthening affective ties to the organization and enhancing dedication and vigor, which are key components of WE (Schaufeli, 2012; Vazquez et al., 2016).

Research consistently shows that social support in the workplace is associated with higher levels of WE, as it promotes cooperation, learning, and effective coping with organizational demands (Christian et al., 2011; Jesus et al., 2019). A study involving higher education professionals found that feedback from others and social support were the most strongly associated subdimensions with WE, highlighting the role of recognition and interaction in shaping meaning and enjoyment at work (Jesus et al., 2019). Similarly, research in hospital and administrative settings demonstrated that positive interpersonal relationships increase employees' energy and dedication (Ahmed et al., 2024). Work environments characterized by collaboration, trust, and open communication foster psychological safety and reciprocity, which are key antecedents of WE (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Parker et al., 2017). Accordingly:

H1c: Social characteristics are positively related to WE.

Finally, contextual characteristics refer to the physical, ergonomic, and material conditions surrounding work activities, including factors such as ergonomics, physical demands, environmental conditions, and equipment use (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). This dimension reflects the structural and infrastructural aspects that support performance and well-being in organizational settings (Montañez-Juan et al., 2023). Although more closely associated with objective working conditions than with psychological factors, these characteristics can influence perceptions of comfort, safety, and support for effective task performance (Fraccaroli et al., 2024; Parker & Knight, 2024).

Empirical findings regarding the influence of contextual characteristics on WE are mixed. Some studies report positive associations between favorable working conditions and higher levels of WE, particularly when safety and ergonomics are perceived as adequate (Polo-Vargas et al., 2018). Conversely, other studies identify negative associations between WE and high physical demands, which may lead to fatigue and overload (Christian et al., 2011). In Brazil, research involving faculty and administrative staff has shown weaker correlations between physical working conditions and WE, suggesting that cognitive and social factors have greater explanatory power (Jesus et al., 2019). Nevertheless, adequate contextual conditions are considered important organizational resources within the JD-R framework (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), as they reduce stress and support energy and persistence in task performance. Accordingly:

H1d: Contextual characteristics are positively related to WE.

## Methodological procedures

### Participants

This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative survey using a non-probabilistic convenience sampling approach. The sample consisted of 118 faculty members and administrative staff employed by a private higher education institution, all of whom had at least 6 months of direct employment and a minimum workload of 12 hours per week. Most participants were women (62.7%), aged 29-39 years (50.0%), single (36.4%), without children (50.8%), and held graduate-level qualifications, most commonly a master's degree (26.3%). Regarding occupational characteristics, the sample was predominantly composed of administrative staff (55.1%), most of whom did not hold management positions (64.4%), had monthly incomes ranging from 1 to 3 minimum wages (42.37%), had worked at the institution for 1-5 years (35.6%), and performed their work primarily in person (70.3%).

### Instruments

The following data collection instruments were used:

A socioprofessional questionnaire developed by the researchers to characterize the sample, including questions on personal, socioeconomic, and occupational data.

The Work Design Scale (WDS), composed of 71 items rated on a five-point Likert agreement scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), was used to assess how work is organized. WDS comprises 4 dimensions: i) task characteristics (α = 0.79 to 0.92; six subdimensions, 24 items; example: "My job allows me to plan how to carry out my activities"); ii) knowledge characteristics (α = 0.80 to 0.86; 4 subdimensions, 17 items; example: "My job requires the use of a variety of skills"); iii) social characteristics (α = 0.83 to 0.87; four subdimensions, 18 items; example: "I have the opportunity to build friendships at work"); and iv) work context (α = 0.70 to 0.94; four subdimensions, 12 items; example: "My work environment is clean"). Reliability indices for the subdimensions were based on the Brazilian adaptation and validation of the Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ) (Borges-Andrade et al., 2019).

The UWES, composed of 17 items rated on a 7-point Likert frequency scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always), with an overall reliability coefficient of α = 0.95, according to the standardized Brazilian version (Magnan et al., 2016), was used to assess work engagement. UWES evaluates three dimensions: vigor (α = 0.86; six items; example: "At

my work, I feel bursting with energy"); dedication (α = 0.87; five items; example: "I am proud of the work that I do"); and absorption (α = 0.85; six items; example: "It is difficult for me to detach myself from my work") (Vazquez et al., 2015; Vazquez et al., 2016). Reliability indices for these dimensions were based on the standardization study of the Brazilian version of the UWES (Magnan et al., 2016; Vazquez et al., 2015).

### Data collection procedures and ethical considerations

After authorization was obtained from the HEI, the project was submitted to the Human Research Ethics Committee and received approval under protocol No. XXX. Participants received an individual invitation by email to take part in the online study, including a link to access the electronic questionnaire hosted on Google Forms. They were informed about the study objectives and methods, potential risks and benefits, and the voluntary and anonymous nature of participation.

To access the instruments, participants were required to read and agree to the Informed Consent Form and confirm that they met the eligibility criteria for the study. They were then directed to a second section of the Google Forms questionnaire containing the data collection instruments. The study complied with the guidelines of the Brazilian National Health Council established by Resolutions 466/2012 and 510/2016, as well as the recommendations set forth in Circular Letter 002/2021 of the Ministry of Health regarding research procedures in virtual environments (Ministério da Saúde, 2021).

### Data analysis procedures

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, version 23.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, N.Y., USA). Initial exploratory analyses and descriptive statistics (means [M] and standard deviations [SD]) were performed. The Shapiro-Wilk test indicated that the data were not normally distributed ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, Spearman's bivariate correlation analyses were conducted to examine associations between the dimensions and subdimensions of JD and the unifactorial WE measure. Correlation strength was interpreted according to Cohen's (1988) classification: weak (0.10-0.29), moderate (0.30-0.49), and strong (0.50-1.0).

Multiple linear regression analysis using the stepwise forward method was performed to identify the effect of JD dimensions (independent variables) on WE (dependent variable). Regression assumptions were met in accordance with the recommendations of Tabachnick and Fidell (2012). In addition, group comparison tests were conducted to examine differences in the dimensions of the investigated constructs according to socioprofessional characteristics, using the Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney tests. The scales demonstrated adequate reliability in the present sample: WDS (α = 0.90) and UWES (α = 0.92), consistent with the indicators reported in previous validation studies (Borges-Andrade et al., 2019; Magnan et al., 2016).

## Results

The characterization of the sample provides an overview of the participants' sociodemographic and occupational profile, which is essential for interpreting subsequent analyses on job design and work engagement. The sample comprises both faculty members and administrative staff, whose roles and work contexts present relevant distinctions. Table 1 summarizes the main sociodemographic and professional characteristics of the participants.

**Table 1**

Socioprofessional characteristics of participants

| Variable | Administrative (n%) | Faculty (n%) | Total (n%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | | | |
| Female | 41 (63.1%) | 33 (62.3%) | 74 (62.7%) |
| Male | 24 (36.9%) | 20 (37.7%) | 44 (37.3%) |
| **Children** | | | |
| Yes | 27 (41.5%) | 31 (58.5%) | 58 (49.2%) |
| No | 38 (58.5%) | 22 (41.5%) | 60 (50.8%) |
| **Age, years** | | | |
| Up to 29 | 19 (29.2%) | 6 (11.3%) | 25 (21.2%) |
| 30-39 | 26 (40.0%) | 29 (54.7%) | 55 (46.6%) |
| 40 or older | 20 (30.8%) | 18 (34.0%) | 38 (32.2%) |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Education** | | | |
| High school | 12 (18.5%) | 0 (0%) | 12 (10.2%) |
| College degree | 17 (26.2%) | 8 (15.1%) | 25 (21.2%) |
| Specialization | 25 (38.5%) | 31 (58.5%) | 56 (47.5%) |
| Master's degree | 6 (9.2%) | 18 (34.0%) | 24 (20.3%) |
| Doctorate | 5 (7.7%) | 3 (5.7%) | 8 (6.8%) |
| **Marital status** | | | |
| Single | 28 (43.1%) | 15 (28.3%) | 43 (36.4%) |
| Cohabiting | 19 (29.2%) | 11 (20.8%) | 30 (25.4%) |
| Married | 15 (23.1%) | 24 (45.3%) | 39 (33.1%) |
| Other | 3 (4.6%) | 3 (5.7%) | 6 (5.1%) |
| **Income, Brazilian monthly minimum salaries** | | | |
| 1-3 | 42 (64.6%) | 8 (15.1%) | 50 (42.4%) |
| 3-6 | 10 (15.4%) | 23 (43.4%) | 33 (28.0%) |
| More than 6 | 13 (20.0%) | 22 (41.5%) | 35 (29.7%) |
| **Management position** | | | |
| Yes | 20 (30.8%) | 22 (41.5%) | 42 (35.6%) |
| No | 45 (69.2%) | 31 (58.5%) | 76 (64.4%) |
| **Tenure, years** | | | |
| Up to 1 | 21 (32.3%) | 13 (24.5%) | 34 (28.8%) |
| 1-5 | 27 (41.5%) | 15 (28.3%) | 42 (35.6%) |
| 5-10 | 13 (20.0%) | 13 (24.5%) | 26 (22.0%) |
| More than 10 | 4 (6.2%) | 12 (22.6%) | 16 (13.6%) |
| **Work modality** | | | |
| On-site | 54 (83.1%) | 29 (54.7%) | 83 (70.3%) |
| Hybrid | 11 (16.9%) | 24 (45.3%) | 35 (29.7%) |

The sample is predominantly composed of women, young adults, individuals with graduate-level education, and employees with an established employment relationship with the HEI. The balanced distribution between faculty and administrative staff reinforces the representativeness of the main segments that make up the institution's workforce. Based on this profile, the analysis proceeds to the core variables of the study, beginning with WE.

The overall WE score showed a mean of 4.86 (SD = 0.68), indicating that the sample is above the midpoint of the scale (seven points) and can therefore be characterized as an engaged workforce. Regarding job design (JD) dimensions, knowledge characteristics presented the highest mean (M = 4.20; SD = 0.52), with particular emphasis on the information processing subdimension (M = 4.42; SD = 0.58), which reflects the cognitive skills required to perform tasks and manage data.

This was followed by task characteristics (M = 4.09; SD = 0.48), with higher scores observed for task variety (M = 4.56; SD = 0.61), referring to the diversity of activities performed, and task significance (M = 4.52; SD = 0.56), which reflects the perceived impact of work on others. In contrast, the work context dimension showed the lowest mean (M = 3.08; SD = 0.51), encompassing aspects related to the physical environment. Within this dimension, the lowest score was observed for physical demands (M = 1.94; SD = 1.01), which refers to the level of physical effort required to perform tasks.

A strong positive correlation was found between task characteristics and WE ($\rho = 0.624$; $p < 0.01$). Notably, the autonomy subdimension, which is related to decision-making and work methods, showed a moderate positive correlation ($\rho = 0.493$; $p < 0.01$), indicating that greater autonomy is associated with higher levels of energy, absorption, and connection to work.

A moderate positive correlation was also observed between knowledge characteristics and WE ($\rho = 0.366$; $p < 0.01$), with emphasis on the specialization subdimension ($\rho = 0.492$; $p < 0.01$). This finding suggests that higher requirements for specific knowledge and skills are associated with increased pride in work, as well as greater persistence and focus on tasks.

The social characteristics dimension also demonstrated a positive, moderate relationship with WE, although with lower magnitude ($\rho = 0.325$; $p < 0.01$). Within this dimension, the most notable subdimension was feedback

from others, which showed a weak positive correlation (ρ = 0.296; p < 0.01). No significant correlations were found between work context and WE.

The results of the descriptive and correlation analyses are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

Descriptive analysis of the Work Design Scale (WDS) and correlation coefficients between job design and work engagement (WE)

| WDS Dimensions | WDS Subdimensions | Mean | Standard deviation | UWES (WE) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Task characteristics** | Task variety | 4.56 | 0.61 | 0.319** |
| | Task significance | 4.52 | 0.56 | 0.376** |
| | Task identity | 4.00 | 0.75 | 0.417** |
| | Autonomy in work organization | 3.92 | 0.77 | 0.356** |
| | Autonomy in decision-making and work methods | 3.85 | 0.78 | 0.493** |
| | Feedback from the job | 3.69 | 0.90 | 0.458** |
| | **Total** | **4.09** | **0.48** | **0.624**** |
| **Knowledge characteristics** | Information processing | 4.42 | 0.58 | 0.341** |
| | Problem-solving/skill variety | 4.30 | 0.64 | 0.388** |
| | Specialization | 4.08 | 0.75 | 0.492** |
| | Work complexity | 3.65 | 1.10 | 0.023 |
| | **Total** | **4.20** | **0.52** | **0.366**** |
| **Social characteristics** | Social support | 4.51 | 0.56 | 0.270** |
| | Interdependence | 3.63 | 0.87 | 0.043 |
| | Interaction outside the organization | 3.55 | 1.05 | 0.209* |
| | Feedback from others | 3.11 | 0.99 | 0.296** |
| | **Total** | **3.70** | **0.53** | **0.325**** |
| **Work context** | Use of equipment | 3.58 | 0.78 | 0.114 |
| | Ergonomics | 3.42 | 1.20 | 0.103 |
| | Working conditions | 3.37 | 0.62 | 0.159 |
| | Physical demands | 1.94 | 1.01 | 0.022 |
| | **Total** | **3.08** | **0.51** | **0.155** |

Note. *$p$ < 0.05; **$p$ < 0.01.

The Kruskal-Wallis test indicated a statistically significant difference in WE across age groups (H = 9.01; p = 0.01), particularly between the 29-39 and ≥ 40 age groups, suggesting that professionals in the career consolidation stage exhibit higher levels of WE. The Mann-Whitney test revealed a statistically significant difference in JD by work area (U = 2194.50; p = 0.01), specifically in the work context dimension, indicating that faculty members perceive working conditions more positively than administrative staff.

Following the analysis of associations among the core study variables, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted using the stepwise method to examine the predictive relationship between JD (independent variable) and WE (dependent variable). In Model 1, the regression coefficient was significantly different from zero (F(1,116) = 75.16; p < 0.001), with task characteristics (b = 0.893; t = 8.66; p < 0.001) explaining 39% of the variance in WE.

In Model 2, two predictors were identified with adequate fit indices (F(2,115) = 43.50; p < 0.001), jointly explaining 42% of the variance in WE: task characteristics (b = 0.779; t = 7.18; p < 0.001) and knowledge characteristics (b = 0.274; t = 2.75; p = 0.007). When examining the contribution of each variable, standardized regression coefficients indicated that task characteristics represent the strongest predictor of WE in the model. However, knowledge characteristics, although weaker, were also positively and significantly associated with WE. The regression coefficients for the predictors (JD dimensions) are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Regression coefficients for predictors of work engagement*

| Model | Predictors | B | SE | β | *t* | R | $R^2$ | Adjusted $R^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Task characteristics | 0.89*** | 0.10 | 0.62 | 8.66 | 0.63 | 0.39 | 0.39 |
| 2 | Task characteristics | 0.77*** | 0.10 | 0.54 | 7.18 | 0.66 | 0.43 | 0.42 |
| | Knowledge characteristics | 0.27** | 0.10 | 0.21 | 2.75 | | | |

Note. *$p$ < 0.05; **$p$ < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

These findings suggest that autonomy in work activities and the perceived meaningfulness of tasks are among the factors most strongly associated with work engagement. In addition, performing roles that require complex cognitive skills also contributes to explaining variations in engagement levels among participants. Conversely, dimensions related to social characteristics and the physical work context did not show statistically significant associations with WE within the parameters analyzed in this study.

## Discussion

Positive and strong relationships were found between task characteristics and knowledge characteristics and WE, while social characteristics also showed a positive, albeit moderate, relationship with WE. These findings reinforce recent studies highlighting the role of JD in the contemporary economy, characterized by increased complexity, interdependence, and technological transformation (Fraccaroli et al., 2024). In such contexts, features such as autonomy, purpose, and continuous learning become increasingly important for sustaining high levels of WE (Parker & Knight, 2024).

Although prior research has demonstrated associations between JD and WE, there is no consensus regarding which dimensions exhibit the strongest relationships. Task, knowledge, and social characteristics were identified as the main predictors of WE among Millennials in Indonesia (Amalia & Hadi, 2019). Similarly, another study focusing on this generation found that job autonomy had a significant effect on WE (Forastero et al., 2018). Research conducted with professionals across different organizations in Spain identified positive and significant relationships between task, knowledge, and physical context characteristics and WE (Polo-Vargas et al., 2018).

Studies involving public university employees also found that all four JD dimensions were positively and significantly correlated with WE, with particular emphasis on task characteristics (Jesus et al., 2019). Another study examined knowledge characteristics using WE as a mediator of performance and job satisfaction outcomes (Bayona et al., 2020). A literature review further demonstrated that autonomy, task variety, task significance, feedback, problem-solving, work complexity, and social support are positively associated with WE (Christian et al., 2011). These findings align with the SMART model (Parker & Knight, 2024), which positions autonomy and meaning as central elements of stimulating work (Stimulation and Agency), capable of enhancing dedication and energy. Nevertheless, variations across studies highlight the importance of considering contextual factors such as organizational setting, sector, and job roles when analyzing JD and its influence on WE.

Work engagement is a complex construct that develops over time and results from a broad set of personal and contextual factors (Andric et al., 2023; Jesus et al., 2019; Mezzomo et al., 2023). The prominence of task characteristics, which relate to how work is performed (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006) and to the scope and nature of job tasks (Montañez-Juan et al., 2023), is consistent with prior research. This dimension is recognized as a key antecedent of WE, as it can be intrinsically motivating, influencing the extent to which individuals are willing to invest their personal energy in task execution (Bayona et al., 2020; Jesus et al., 2019; Porto et al., 2019).

Within this dimension, autonomy stands out as a central element in the literature (Campion, 1988; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Marcon et al., 2019). The subdimension autonomy in decision-making and work methods reflects the degree of freedom and independence in performing work activities (Borges-Andrade et al., 2019). Previous studies consistently indicate that WE is strongly associated with jobs that allow greater discretion in decision-making processes (Ahmed et al., 2024; Davcheva et al., 2024; Jesus et al., 2019; Vazquez et al., 2016). Higher levels of autonomy are expected in professions requiring flexibility and adaptation to complex and non-routine tasks (Montañez-Juan et al., 2023).

These findings highlight the importance of autonomy in task execution, as it enhances intrinsic motivation through the perception of responsibility (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). This result is consistent with research involving information technology professionals, which found that JD explained WE primarily through autonomy and task significance, with task characteristics playing a central role (Magnan et al., 2020). Evidence also suggests that autonomy influences levels of boredom, which in turn affect WE, while also promoting perceptions of fairness and positive organizational outcomes (Forastero et al., 2018; Chinelato et al., 2019).

Another JD dimension strongly associated with WE was knowledge characteristics, which encompass the mental demands required for job performance, including knowledge, skills, and complexity (Montañez-Juan et al., 2023). These characteristics are particularly relevant in highly dynamic environments where knowledge generation is

critical for organizational performance (Bayona et al., 2020), as is the case in the present study. The most prominent subdimension was specialization, reflecting the need for specialized tasks and domain-specific knowledge (Borges-Andrade et al., 2019; Campion, 1988).

The high mean observed for knowledge characteristics reflects employees' recognition of the complexity of their work, which is expected in higher education contexts that require continuous learning and knowledge development (Janissek et al., 2014). This aspect is further supported by evidence linking knowledge characteristics to high job performance (Bayona et al., 2020). Similar findings have been reported in studies conducted in higher education institutions with public employees (Jesus et al., 2019). In this sense, more complex jobs tend to require higher levels of education and expertise (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). These results are consistent with research involving 341 professionals, predominantly from the service sector and private organizations, which showed that autonomy and knowledge are key factors enhancing WE (Porto et al., 2019).

Similarly, Fraccaroli et al. (2024) emphasize that technical mastery and cognitive complexity have become critical dimensions of contemporary work, reinforcing the importance of knowledge characteristics for professional development and well-being. The study by Cotič et al. (2025) also confirms that skill variety and complex information processing are among the main predictors of engagement, supporting the findings of the present study.

Intrinsic task characteristics and knowledge-related demands emerge as primary sources of motivation (Yanti et al., 2022). While task and knowledge characteristics focus on the individual and the nature of the work itself, social characteristics emphasize interpersonal interactions, and contextual characteristics relate to the broader work environment (Montañez-Juan et al., 2023). The social characteristics dimension reflects interpersonal relationships at work and the extent to which tasks involve interaction, support, and interdependence (Montañez-Juan et al., 2023).

The subdimension most strongly associated with WE was feedback from others, which refers to receiving information about job effectiveness (Borges-Andrade et al., 2019). This feedback contributes to motivation and improved performance (Ahmed et al., 2024). A study with administrative staff in a university setting also identified feedback from others and social support as key factors in increasing WE, as peer support, information sharing, and continuous improvement processes enhance energy and dedication at work (Jesus et al., 2019). Thus, unlike findings from studies conducted primarily in service organizations (Porto et al., 2019), receiving feedback about individual performance was positively associated with WE in the present sample.

In this study, the work context dimension, which is defined as the physical and material conditions available for task execution (Montañez-Juan et al., 2023), did not show a statistically significant relationship with WE. Particularly among knowledge-based professionals, the primary drivers of engagement appear to reside in motivational resources intrinsic to the work itself, notably task cognitive complexity, perceived competence, and autonomy in task execution. These elements are directly aligned with the assumptions of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which posits that the satisfaction of basic psychological needs (e.g., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) is essential for fostering intrinsic motivation and engagement.

Furthermore, from the perspective of the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), contextual or "hygiene" factors, conceptualized as passive resources, do not act as direct enhancers of engagement. Instead, when perceived as inadequate, they may become psychosocial demands, leading to stress and disengagement. Thus, although adequate working conditions are necessary to prevent negative experiences, they are not sufficient, in isolation, to promote high levels of engagement among professionals whose motivation is strongly rooted in the intrinsic qualities of their work.

This finding is consistent with results from another study involving administrative staff at a public university, which reported low correlations between WE and work context subdimensions, with no association observed for physical demands (Jesus et al., 2019). Conversely, some earlier studies, including a literature review covering publications from 1990 to 2010, identified negative relationships between physical demands, working conditions, and WE (Christian et al., 2011). Therefore, the absence of a relationship between work context and WE in the present study, contrary to Hypothesis H1d, may reflect a context in which physical working conditions already meet a baseline level of adequacy. In such cases, these conditions neither function as motivational resources nor constitute significant demands. In contrast, the findings of Christian et al. (2011) likely reflect contexts in which physical conditions were genuinely inadequate, thereby acting as job demands and negatively impacting engagement.

In summary, Model 2, which simultaneously includes task and knowledge characteristics, proved to be more robust and explanatory than Model 1, which included only task characteristics. This greater explanatory power is consistent with findings from a study involving employees of a regional development planning agency in Indonesia, where JD explained 23.5% of the variance in WE, with task, knowledge, and social characteristics showing positive relationships with engagement (Yanti et al., 2022). Similarly, research with public employees across different levels found that the four JD dimensions collectively explained 31% of the total variance in WE.

The findings of this study also highlight the importance of recognizing differences between the two professional groups analyzed. Faculty members, whose roles involve higher autonomy and more complex cognitive demands, tended to report higher scores in knowledge-related dimensions and engagement. Administrative staff, although operating within more structured and operational frameworks, also demonstrated relevant levels of WE, which may be associated with factors such as job stability, role clarity, and organizational support. These distinctions suggest

that JD should not be approached homogeneously within institutions, and that human resource practices should be tailored to the specific realities of each group.

Accordingly, JD interventions should be differentiated within HEIs. For faculty, strategies should prioritize strengthening autonomy in decision-making and promoting cognitively challenging tasks that enhance perceptions of specialization and task significance. For administrative staff, investments in technical training and leadership development are recommended, particularly to improve the provision of continuous performance feedback, given that feedback from others was positively associated with WE. For private HEIs operating in highly competitive environments with constrained financial resources, aligning job design with engagement drivers may contribute not only to employee well-being but also to talent retention, productivity, and institutional reputation (Andric et al., 2023; Gemelli & Closs, 2023).

## Final considerations

This study aimed to analyze the relationship between JD characteristics (i.e., task, knowledge, social, and contextual) and WE. The model was tested to identify which JD dimensions have greater predictive power for WE, addressing gaps in the literature regarding factors that contribute to workplace well-being. WE was positively and significantly associated with task, knowledge, and social characteristics, confirming Hypotheses H1a, H1b, and H1c. These findings indicate that how work is performed, the skills and knowledge required, and interpersonal relationships within the workplace are key antecedents of WE. Among the JD dimensions, task and knowledge characteristics demonstrated significant predictive power, jointly explaining 42% of the variance in WE.

The results contribute to expanding knowledge on these relationships and offer practical implications for improving work management in the studied HEI. Revising job descriptions and responsibilities may enhance alignment with job design principles. Ensuring clarity of roles can foster greater autonomy, while technical training programs, particularly those related to core operational systems, can strengthen the knowledge required for effective task execution. Additionally, the development of leadership programs aimed at improving feedback delivery is recommended. Institutions may use these findings to redesign roles, structure career development plans, and promote more engaging work environments.

The generalizability of these findings should be interpreted with caution, given the use of convenience sampling, the sample size, the cross-sectional design, and the reliance on self-report measures. To address the limitations of cross-sectional designs, future studies should adopt longitudinal approaches to examine how changes in JD influence engagement over time. Additionally, qualitative approaches, such as interviews and focus groups, could provide deeper insights into the underlying mechanisms, for example, how autonomy is experienced differently by faculty and administrative staff. Since the relationship between JD and WE is mediated by psychological processes, incorporating variables such as intrinsic motivation, meaningful work, and collective efficacy in future models may help explain how JD translates into higher engagement. Expanding research to other HEIs (both public and private, across different regions and institutional sizes) would also help assess the generalizability of the findings and identify the influence of cultural and institutional factors. Finally, future research should examine potential moderators in the relationship between JD and WE, such as leadership styles, psychological safety, cultural fit, and psychological capital.

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