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Interinstitutional Employer Attractiveness in Portuguese Central Public Administration

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PhD Program in Business Administration

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Interinstitutional Employer Attractiveness in Portuguese Central Public Administration

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“Entry is prohibited to whom does not walk afraid of existing”

José Gomes Ferreira In “Johnny With No Fear”

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To my family,

For believing in me without hesitation, for standing beside me with patience and love, and for reminding me, through every challenge, that perseverance is always worth it. This accomplishment reflects your unwavering support.

And to all public servants,

Whose commitment to the common good inspires this work. May this research contribute, even in a small way, to a more valued, motivated, and recognized Public Administration.

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Abstract

In this thesis, the concept of employer attractiveness is analyzed in the context of public institutions in the Portuguese central public administration. Modern public organizations are subject to legal limitations on external hiring and therefore can only attract already working civil servants in the public service. The tools used to evaluate and improve interinstitutional employer attractiveness stem from private-sector literature and are based on assumptions that have never been tested before. The following three studies fill this gap.

Study 1 assesses the five-factor Employer Attractiveness Scale (EmpAt) with a sample of 490 civil servants by means of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. It is found that the original construct is inadequate. The improved six-factor scale better reflects the reality of the public sector, in which the Application factor is divided into civic and knowledge, and Economic value plays a secondary role because of pay regulations in the sector.

Study 2 employs interviews with ten leaders in the sector and uses thematic analysis. Both leaders and employees agree on intrinsic, civic, knowledge-based, and developmental aspects. Two important results stand out. Work-life balance, defined by the geographical aspect of the job, works as an additional attraction factor outside the original model. And leaders invest in Social value through daily relational management, yet give it low motivational weight when ranking the factors explicitly.

Study 3 explores a sequential mediation model using a sample of 431 civil servants. The effect of employer attractiveness on organizational affective commitment occurs mainly through the person-organization fit and job satisfaction, thus accounting for 74% of commitment variation. Work-life balance does not play the mediating role between these variables.

The research concludes that affective commitment in the public administration sector is grounded in value congruence and meaningfulness rather than financial or geographic aspects of the job.

Keywords

Employer attractiveness scale, public administration, employer branding

Resumo

Esta tese analisa a atratividade enquanto empregador entre instituições da administração pública central portuguesa. As organizações públicas enfrentam atualmente limites rígidos ao recrutamento externo e precisam de atrair funcionários públicos que trabalham dentro do setor público. Os instrumentos usados para medir e gerir a atratividade, porém, provêm da investigação no setor privado e assentam em pressupostos não testados. Três estudos interligados respondem a esta lacuna.

O Estudo 1 testa a escala de atratividade do empregador (EmpAt), de cinco fatores, com 490 funcionários públicos, através de análise fatorial exploratória e confirmatória. A estrutura original não se ajusta. Um modelo refinado de seis fatores ajusta-se melhor ao contexto público, dividindo o fator Aplicação numa vertente cívica e numa vertente de conhecimento, e mostra que o valor económico tem um papel marginal porque a remuneração é regulada centralmente.

O Estudo 2 baseia-se em entrevistas a dez dirigentes superiores, analisadas tematicamente. Líderes e trabalhadores convergem em fatores intrínsecos, cívicos, de conhecimento e de desenvolvimento. Destacam-se dois resultados: o equilíbrio trabalho-vida pessoal ligado à localização surge como fator de atração fora do modelo original, e os líderes investem no valor social na prática mas atribuem-lhe baixo peso motivacional quando classificam explicitamente os fatores.

O Estudo 3 testa um modelo de mediação sequencial com 431 funcionários públicos, usando SEM. A atratividade do empregador influencia o compromisso afetivo organizacional sobretudo através do ajuste pessoa-organização e da satisfação no trabalho, explicando 74 por cento da variância do compromisso. O equilíbrio trabalho-vida ligado à localização não opera por esta via.

Em conjunto, os estudos mostram que o compromisso na administração pública assenta no alinhamento de valores e no trabalho com significado, e não em condições materiais ou de localização, e oferecem um instrumento validado e orientações práticas para o employer branding no setor.

Contents

Acknowledgement vi
Abstract vii
Keywords vii
Resumo viii
Contents ix
List of Tables xv
List of Figures xvi
List of Acronyms xvi

GENERAL INTRODUCTION 1
1. Context 2
2. Research Problem 3
3. Research Gap and Objectives 4
3.1. Gap 1: The EmpAt structure has not been validated for CPA 4
3.2. Gap 2: The leadership perspective on employer attractiveness in CPA remains unexplored 5
3.3. Gap 3: The effectiveness of employer attractiveness in producing positive workplace attitudes is untested in CPA 6
4. Research Summary 6
5. Thesis Structure 9

STUDY 1 REFINING AND VALIDATING THE EMPLOYER ATTRACTIVENESS MEASUREMENT IN THE PORTUGUESE CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION 11
1. Introduction 12
2. Literature Review 16
2.1. Employer Attractiveness 17
2.2. Strategic Employer Branding 20
2.3. Public Service Motivation 24
2.4. Public versus Private Sector Employment 25
2.5. Research Question and Hypotheses 27
3. Method 28

3.1. Research Design 28
3.2. Procedure 28
3.3. Measures 30
3.4. Sample 33
3.5. Data Analysis Strategy 35
3.6. Benchmark 36
3.7. Psychometric Quality of EmpAt 38
3.8. Construct Validity 38
3.8.1. EmpAt 1st order solution 39
3.8.2. EmpAt 2nd order solution 40
3.8.3. Adjusting for the public administration population 41
4. Discussion 45
4.1. Population and Sample Means 45
4.2. Psychometric Quality - Construct Validity 46
4.3. A View on EmpAt as a General Construct 48
4.4. Implications for Portuguese Public Administration 49
4.5. Limitations 50
5. Conclusion 51

STUDY 2 COMPARING WHAT LEADERS PRIORITIZE AND WHAT EMPLOYEES VALUE: EMPLOYER ATTRACTIVENESS IN PORTUGUESE CENTRAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION 54
1. Introduction 55
2. Literature Review 58
2.1. EmpAt, Public Service Motivation, Public versus Private 58
2.2. Psychological States as Mechanisms 60
2.3. Vertical Alignment as a Key Driver 61
2.4. Location-Based Work-Life Balance Theories 64
3. Method 66
3.1. Research Design 66
3.1.1. Qualitative 66
3.1.2. Interviews as the chosen technique 67
3.1.3. Interview protocol 68
3.1.4. Triangulation with Survey and Alignment of Perspectives 70

3.2. Sampling and Participants 73
3.2.1. Type of sampling 73
3.2.2. Eligibility criteria 73
3.2.3. Procedure 73
3.2.4. Participants 74
3.3. Data Processing and Coding 76
4. Results 78
4.1. Interview Findings by Question 78
4.2. Block 1: Factors That Make a Public Organization Attractive as an Employer 78
4.2.1. Factors of employer attraction 78
4.2.2. Importance of job security and stability 82
4.2.3. Importance of professional development and career progression 86
4.2.4. Importance of innovation and creativity 90
4.2.5. Importance of pay and benefits 93
4.3. Block 2: The Role of Mission and Purpose 98
4.3.1. Importance of society and citizen-orientation 98
4.3.2. Importance of the public mission 101
4.4. Block 3: The Role of Organizational Culture 106
4.4.1. Importance of organizational culture and climate 106
4.5. Block 4: Recognition, Satisfaction, and Commitment 112
4.5.1. Importance of leaders' recognition 112
4.5.2. Level of satisfaction with the organization 115
4.5.3. Level of organizational commitment and belonging 120
4.6. Block 5: Location, Commuting, and Work-Life Balance 125
4.6.1. Importance of location and commuting time 125
4.7. Block 6: Leadership-Employee (Mis)Alignment 130
4.7.1. Ranking the six factors 130
4.7.2. Overall strengths and weaknesses 133
5. Discussion 138
5.1. Economic Constraints and Compensatory Employer Value Propositions 139
5.2. The Conditionality of Mission and Civic Meaning 142
5.3. Organizational Culture as an Asymmetric Retention Mechanism 145
5.4. Recognition, Satisfaction, and Commitment Under Resource Constraints 147

5.5. Location-Based Work-Life Balance as an Additional Factor 149
5.6. Convergence and Divergence of Leader and Employee 151
5.7. Theoretical Contributions 153
5.8. Practical Implications for Portuguese CPA 154
5.9. Limitations 155
6. Conclusions 156
6.1. Answering Research Questions 156
6.2. Relationship to Study 1 and Connection With Future Studies 158
6.3. Final Synthesis 159

STUDY 3 EMPLOYER ATTRACTIVENESS, WORK-LIFE BALANCE, AND COMMITMENT: SEQUENTIAL MEDIATION MODEL 163
1. Introduction 164
2. Literature Review 167
2.1. Employer Attractiveness 167
2.1.1. Concept and theoretical foundations 167
2.1.2. The Berthon, Ewing, and Hah (2005) Five-Factor Model 168
2.2. Person-Organization Fit 170
2.2.1. Definition and conceptualization 170
2.2.2. The role of P-O fit in shaping work attitudes 170
2.3. Job Satisfaction 171
2.3.1. Definition and theoretical foundations 171
2.3.2. Work design and satisfaction 171
2.3.3. Job satisfaction in public organizations 172
2.4. Organizational Affective Commitment 172
2.4.1. Definition and measurement 172
2.4.2. Theoretical mechanisms underlying affective commitment 172
2.5. Work-life Balance and Commuting 173
2.5.1. Conceptual Foundations 173
2.5.2. Commuting as a work-life balance determinant 174
2.5.3. Work-life balance in public organizations 174
2.6. Linking the Constructs 175

2.6.1. Job satisfaction mediates the positive relationship between P-O fit and OAC 175
2.6.2. Employer attractiveness and person-organization fit 176
2.6.3. Employer attractiveness and organizational affective commitment 177
2.6.4. EmpAt connection to P-O fit, Job satisfaction, and commitment 178
2.6.5. Work-life balance connecting to P-O fit, Job satisfaction, and commitment . 180
2.7. Summary 181
3. Method 182
3.1. Research Design 182
3.2. Procedure 182
3.3. Sample 184
3.4. Data Analysis Strategy 186
4. Measures 187
4.1. Employer attractiveness 188
4.2. Person-organization fit 190
4.3. Job satisfaction 191
4.4. Organizational affective commitment 192
4.5. Commuting and Work-Life Balance 193
4.6. Sociodemographic variables 194
5. Measurement Model and Common Method Bias 195
5.1. Comparison of Competing Measurement Models 196
5.2. Results 5-198
5.3. Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlation 5-198
5.4. Bivariate Statistics 200
6. Hypotheses Testing 202
6.1. Supplementary Analyses 206
7. Discussion and Conclusion 206
7.1. Discussion of Results 206
7.2. Supplementary Interpretation of First-Order EmpAt Effects 210
7.3. Interpretation of Control Variables 211
7.4. Limitations 211
8. Conclusion 212

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS 215
REFERENCES 230
Appendix A- Survey Study 1 249
Appendix B - Interview Study 2 253
Appendix C- Informed Consent Study 2 255
Appendix D - Illustrative excerpts supporting identified themes 256
Appendix E - Survey Study 3 270
Annex - Statement on the Use of Artificial Intelligence in the Elaboration of the Thesis 281

List of Tables

Table 1- Research Summary 6
Table 2 - EmpAt Empirical Studies Reporting Psychometric Quality 14
Table 3- EmpAt 31
Table 4 - Factor-mean Benchmark 37
Table 5 - Means for EmpAt items 38
Table 6 - Rotated Component Matrix for EmpAt 41
Table 7 - Factor Loadings, Convergent Validity, and Reliability 42
Table 8 - Interview Script, Central Theme, and Key Theorists 71
Table 9 - Sample Characteristics 75
Table 10 - Frequency of Attraction Themes by Organization 80
Table 11 - Frequency of Stability-Related Themes by Organization 84
Table 12 - Frequency of Development and Career Progression Themes by Organization 87
Table 13 - Frequency of Innovation Themes by Organization 91
Table 14 - Frequency of Compensation and Financial Incentive Themes by Organization 95
Table 15 - Frequency of Public Impact and Societal Contribution Themes by Organization 99
Table 16 - Frequency of Mission and Values Themes by Organization 104
Table 17 - Frequency of Organizational Culture Themes by Organization 107
Table 18 - Frequency of Recognition Themes by Organization 113
Table 19 - Frequency of Employee Satisfaction Themes by Organization 117
Table 20 - Frequency of Commitment and Belonging Themes by Organization 122
Table 21 - Frequency of Location and Accessibility Themes by Organization 126
Table 22 - Value Rankings by Organization 131
Table 23 - Distribution of Value Rankings Across Organizations 132
Table 24 - Summary of Value Rankings: Mean Rank and Placement Frequency 132
Table 25 - Frequency of Employer Brand Strengths and Weaknesses Themes by Organization 134
Table 26 - Comparison models 196
Table 27 - Descriptives and bivariate statistics 199
Table 28 - Direct, indirect, and total effects in the structural model 204
Table 29 - Attraction Themes 256
Table 30- Stability Themes 257

Table 31 - Development and Career Progression Themes 258
Table 32 - Innovation Themes 259
Table 33 - Compensation and Financial Incentive Themes 260
Table 34 - Contribution Public Impact and Societal Themes 261
Table 35 - Mission and Values Themes 262
Table 36 - Organizational Culture Themes 263
Table 37 - Recognition Themes 264
Table 38 - Employee Satisfaction Themes 265
Table 39 - Commitment and Belonging Themes 266
Table 40 - Location and Accessibility Themes 267
Table 41 - Employer Brand Strengths and Weaknesses Themes 268

List of Figures

Figure 1 - CFA 1st order EmpAt 39
Figure 2 - CFA 2nd order EmpAt 40
Figure 3 - CFA 1st order Revised EmpAt 43
Figure 4 - CFA 2nd order Revised EmpAt 44
Figure 5 - CFA for EmpAt 2nd order 189
Figure 6 - CFA for P-O fit 190
Figure 7 - CFA for Job Satisfaction 191
Figure 8 - CFA of Organizational Affective Commitment 192
Figure 9 - CFA of Commuting Based Work-Life Balance 194
Figure 10 - SEM Coefficients 202

List of Acronyms

AET - Affective Events Theory

AIC - Akaike Information Criterion

ASA - Attraction Selection Attrition framework

AVE - Average Variance Extracted

CFA - Confirmatory Factor Analysis

CFI - Comparative Fit Index

CI - Confidence Interval

CPA - Central Public Administration

CR - Composite Reliability

DGAEP - Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público

DGAV - Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária

DGLAB - Direção-Geral do Livro dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas

DGT - Direção-Geral do Território

EFA - Exploratory Factor Analysis

EmpAt - Employer Attractiveness Scale

EVP - Employer Value Proposition

GDPR - General Data Protection Regulation

HRM - Human Resource Management

HTMT - HeteroTrait-MonoTrait ratio

ICNF - Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas

IGF - Inspeção-Geral de Finanças

IMPIC - Instituto dos Mercados Públicos do Imobiliário e da Construção

INA - Instituto Nacional de Administração

INE - Instituto Nacional de Estatística

KMO - Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy

OAC - Organizational Affective Commitment

P-O fit - Person-Organization fit

PSM - Public Service Motivation

QUAR - Quadro de Avaliação e Responsabilização

RMSEA - Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

SD - Standard Deviation

SEM - Structural Equation Modeling

SGMSAUDE - Secretaria-Geral do Ministério da Saúde

SGMTSSS - Secretaria-Geral do Ministério do Trabalho Solidariedade e Segurança Social

SIADAP - Sistema Integrado de Avaliação do Desempenho na Administração Pública

SRMR - Standardized Root Mean Square Residual

TLI - Tucker-Lewis Index

URBACT - European Territorial Cooperation Program for Urban Development

VIF - Variance Inflation Factor

WLB - Work-Life Balance

General Introduction

1. Context

In Portugal, there are more than 700,000 workers employed in the public sector. In ten years, about half will retire. On top of that, the population ages, thus increasing the need for public services. This creates a greater need for the recruitment and retention of qualified personnel, which will face a difficult task within the salary grids imposed by law, career guidelines prescribed by legislation, and mission defined by law rather than by the organization's market position.

The available research on the attractiveness of employers can provide some pointers. The Human Resources policy influences the way in which organizations differentiate themselves as employers based on such dimensions as job design, training, reward justice, and workload (Srikanth & Jomon, 2020). In addition to material factors, symbolic values should not be overlooked either. Membership in a prestigious organization increases personal self-image due to the compatibility inferred from the organizational status (Christiaans, 2013). Such phenomenon is explained by person-organization fit theory that states that identification with the organization leads to greater loyalty (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Social Identity Theory by Tajfel and Turner, (1986) provides a similar perspective and posits that perceived similarities between the individual and the organization increase subjective attractiveness (Devendorf & Highhouse, 2008).

Employer branding became a pivotal concept within Human Resources Management (HRM). According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), it is an attempt by the organization to develop a coherent image of what distinguishes it and makes it attractive in dealing with people both inside and outside the organization. In turn, Ambler and Barrow (1996, p.187) defined it as "the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company". The conceptualization of employer branding gave rise to a set of related constructs and measures; in particular, Berthon et al. (2005) developed the Employer Attractiveness Scale (EmpAt) that is now the one of the most commonly used instruments in this field. It includes five dimensions: Interest, Social, Economic, Development, and Application value.

The Portuguese central public administration (CPA) is quite unique within the scope of the discussed literature. First, the reasons why people become civil servants in Portugal go far beyond remuneration. However, the organizations that are responsible for managing such

personnel do not have tools that would help to determine the motives of people to consider the CPA as an attractive employer. Under the current policy, the situation becomes even more challenging since external recruitment is limited, and CPA resorts to the interinstitutional market where civil servants move from one organization to another within the public sector.

2. Research Problem

This thesis examines a certain contradiction in the field of CPA. Firstly, considering Employer Attractiveness Theory (Berthon et al., 2005) framework, the measurement of employer attractiveness has been developed and mostly used in non-public organizations settings. This is treated as universally valid. However, Public Administration has specificities that would advise otherwise or at least guaranteeing that the current measures are able to capture those specificities. This is mostly observed in the civic contribution dimensions which, at the light of the Public Service Motivation theory (Perry & Wise, 1990), should take a central role on its own. Secondly, this theoretical issue is also echoed in the empirical literature on employer attractiveness in the public sector, which is not only under-developed as there is indication that EmpAt (Berthon et al., 2005) may not have yet proven its factorial stability when used with civil servants. This is mostly concerning because it affects its last dimensions, Application, which fuses civic contribution with professional knowledge. Its psychometric validity is mostly based on the use of Cronbach's alpha and lack the robustness that a confirmatory factorial analysis would provide, and they mostly are conducted with small samples or are based on the assumption that the original five-factor structure remains valid without any further scrutiny. In cases when psychometric tests have been conducted, the Application factor has convergence issues or is excluded from the solution (Caputo et al., 2023; Grigore et al., 2023).

This is significant for two reasons concerning CPA. First, the Napoleonic approach to administration influences public administration in Portugal through statutory pay scales, career structures, and centralized promotions (Painter & Peters, 2010). As such, the economic value that plays an important role in the use of EmpAt in the private sector is significantly diluted. Second, although civic contribution and professional knowledge are fused in EmpAt measurement (Berthon et al., 2005) the Public Service Motivation theory (PSM, (Perry & Wise, 1990)) supports the interpretation of the civic contribution component of Application value as a public service oriented motivational dimension. However, the professional knowledge component, namely applying and transferring acquired knowledge, is better understood as a

distinct professional or functional orientation, closer to professionalism and competence use than to PSM itself (Kim & Vandenabeele, 2010; Perry & Wise, 1990; Vandenabeele, 2007).

More importantly, CPA does not know what attitudinal outcomes the employer attractiveness is expected to achieve. Recruiting people is one thing while establishing commitment and fit associated with retention and productivity is quite another. Yet not enough research has been done in the area to investigate the attitudinal outcomes of employer attractiveness from either employee or management perspectives. This creates a situation where practitioners work with tools developed outside the field and with several untested assumptions.

Lastly, from a practical viewpoint, CPA is facing restrictions in hiring externally (i.e., in the job market) new civil servants due to budgetary constraints and higher demand for operational efficiency, and this trend has been too stable to be taken as episodical. This puts enormous pressure on the CPA leadership that needs to provide enough workforce to comply with their mission but must target the interinstitutional market so to attract from within public sector, those that are willing but need to be signaled about what to expect from a mobility decision.

3. Research Gap and Objectives

Three connected gaps emerge from the literature review where each gap defines a distinct objective addressed by one of the empirical studies in this thesis.

3.1. Gap 1: The EmpAt structure has not been validated for CPA

EmpAt was originally constructed and validated using ratings by final-year university students in Australia about hypothetical private employers (Berthon et al., 2005). There is a limited amount of cross-cultural and cross-sector empirical validation of the psychometric properties of the measure, and there is virtually no comprehensive research on its application in public administration. No study has examined how well the original five-factor model applies to Portuguese CPA employees, or whether a revised model is required based on the unique characteristics of statutory pay, career structures, and mission orientation. Two reasons can be put forward for why the original model should not apply. First, as stated, under the Napoleonic Administrative System, Economic Value cannot function as a differentiator, because pay is centrally regulated (same function, same pay) and as a rule no one is allowed to pay for performance.

Secondly, according to theory that sustained EmpAt scale (Berthon et al., 2005), The original Application factor combines two contents that may operate differently in Portuguese CPA: civic contribution and professional knowledge application. The civic component is theoretically close to Public Service Motivation, whereas the knowledge component is better interpreted through competence use, professional identity, and work design. However, this is in need for further psychometric testing, namely its validity and reliability within the CPA setting, and, if required, to create and validate a new model of motivation.

The psychometric results, besides being scarce, are inconsistent across cultural and organizational settings, and studies of its use in public administration are limited. Portuguese CPA, as a representative of the Napoleonic Administrative System, is a suitable setting to conduct the research on the appropriateness of the five-factor structure, and to eventually develop a refinement of extant model so to reflect the unique features of the context such as regulated pay, career structure, and public law mission.

Without ascertaining to which extent the current employer attractiveness model does apply to this CPA setting, theory building and empirical research are relying too much on the transferability of the original model to CPA and also on the robustness of the empirical findings.

3.2. Gap 2: The leadership perspective on employer attractiveness in CPA remains unexplored

Employee surveys reveal how civil servants themselves perceive employer attractiveness, but they leave out how senior managers understand the same construct. They also leave unexamined whether leadership intentions align with employee experience. Internal employer branding depends on such alignment, because an employer value proposition works only when what leaders signal matches what employees value and experience (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Mercer, 2024). The lack of information from the side of the leadership creates a gap in CPA evidence base. Not much is known about how Portuguese public sector leaders perceive the attractiveness and retention of employees, which dimensions of the construct are prioritized, whether the differentiation between the civic dimension and the knowledge dimension is made, and what other dimensions besides those originally previewed in employer attractiveness exist.

Therefore, the second goal of this thesis is to analyze the perceptions of the senior officials in CPA institutions regarding the dimensions of employer attractiveness and where they coincide or differ from the perspective of employees.

3.3. Gap 3: The effectiveness of employer attractiveness in producing positive workplace attitudes is untested in CPA

Given the structure of attractiveness and its interpretations that underlie its management, there is an often-assumed belief: better employer attractiveness necessarily conducts better outcomes, among which more positive attitudes. However logic this may sound, it requires empirical testing. Therefore, a third open question remains unanswered. Is it possible that employer attractiveness influences positive attitudes toward the workplace related to performance? Of all the attitudes known to be related to retention and effort, the literature suggests person-organization fit (Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), job satisfaction (Agho et al., 1993), and affective organizational commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991) as those most consistently associated. Will this apply to CPA, or does it require a CPA adapted EmpAt questionnaire so to corroborate these expectations via these psychological mechanisms? Another component, location-based work-life balance, appears in the first two studies as an element of employment offered in CPA but not included in the original structure of EmpAt. Its influence on the chain of attitudes deserves investigation.

Therefore, the third purpose of the thesis is to investigate a sequential mediation effect from employer attractiveness in CPA via person-organization fit and job satisfaction to organizational affective commitment, where location-based work-life balance serves as an additional predictor.

4. Research Summary

Table 1- Research Summary

Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
Research Problem		
The EmpAt scale was developed and validated with Australian university students rating private-sector employers. Its psychometric structure has not been tested in Portuguese central public administration (CPA), where statutory pay, rule-bound career progression, and a public-law mission challenge the original market-based assumptions.	Employee-based survey evidence from Study 1 captures workforce perceptions but does not reveal how senior leaders interpret attractiveness, attraction, and retention, nor whether their implicit theory of attractiveness aligns with employee priorities in CPA organizations.	Empirical evidence is missing on whether employer attractiveness (in its CPA-adapted six-factor form) and location-based work-life balance shape organizational affective commitment through a sequential attitudinal pathway involving P-O fit and job satisfaction.

Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
Research Context		
Evaluating the original five-factor EmpAt structure against a sample of CPA civil servants and testing a contextually refined specification suited to public-sector institutional features.	Triangulating Study 1 findings by examining how senior officials in ten Portuguese CPA organizations interpret employer attractiveness and detecting factors beyond the classic EmpAt structure such as location-based working conditions.	Testing a sequential mediation model linking employer attractiveness and location-based WLB to organizational affective commitment through P-O fit and job satisfaction among Portuguese CPA employees.
Literature Review		
Employer Branding and Employer Attractiveness EmpAt Scale Psychometrics Public Service Motivation Public Administration HRM	Employer Branding and Employer Attractiveness Public Service Motivation and Public Value Theory P-O Fit and Value Congruence Organizational Culture and Climate Job Satisfaction and Affective Commitment Location-based WLB	Six-factor Employer Attractiveness P-O Fit (Value Congruence) Job Satisfaction Organizational Affective Commitment Location-based Work-Life Balance Signaling Theory and Social Exchange Theory
Research Questions		
How should the EmpAt scale be specified to validly measure employer attractiveness among employees of Portuguese central public administration?	***Six guiding questions:*** *1. Which dimensions of employer attractiveness do senior leaders view as significant for attraction and retention?* *2. How do leaders rank the six EmpAt dimensions?* *3. How do leaders interpret the distinction between civic contribution and knowledge application?* *4. To what degree do leadership perceptions match employee priorities from Study 1?* *5. What factors beyond classic EmpAt do leaders recognize as relevant?* *6. What implicit theory of attractiveness guides their understanding?*	*Is there a connection between employer attractiveness and location-based WLB with OAC via a sequential attitude chain involving P-O fit and job satisfaction?*

Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
Research Contributions		
Empirical evidence that the original five-factor EmpAt does not fit Portuguese CPA; Validation of a refined six-factor structure with Application split into Civic and Knowledge facets; Demonstration that Economic value plays a marginal role in CPA settings due to centrally regulated pay; A contextually appropriate measurement instrument for inter-institutional employer attractiveness in central public administration.	Construct-level triangulation of Study 1's six-factor structure through leadership accounts; Qualitative corroboration that Economic value ranks lowest across the six dimensions (last in seven of ten organizations); Evidence of leader-employee convergence on intrinsic, civic, knowledge-based, and developmental factors; Identification of location-based WLB as an additional factor present in seven of ten organizations, outside the classic EmpAt structure; Surfacing of a leader-employee divergence on Social value, where investment is high but explicit motivational weight remains low; Practical implications for employer branding and retention strategies in CPA.	Empirical replication of the six-factor EmpAt structure in an independent sample; Confirmation that employer attractiveness shapes OAC mainly through P-O fit and job satisfaction (29% R^2 in P-O fit, 50% in job satisfaction, 74% in OAC); Evidence that location-based WLB does not operate through the same attitudinal pathway (H5, H6, H7 not supported); Demonstration that affective commitment in CPA rests on symbolic and value-based mechanisms rather than location-related conditions; Practical implications for HR strategies prioritizing value alignment, mission clarity, and meaningful work over locational benefits.
Research Design		
Quantitative Positivist, hypothetico-deductive approach. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), second-order CFA. Online survey using a seven-point Likert scale. Sample: 490 Portuguese CPA civil servants. Benchmark comparison with Berthon et al. (2005).	**Qualitative** Interpretivist approach. Semi-structured interviews with 14 questions across six thematic blocks. Thematic analysis with hybrid (deductive plus inductive) coding. Sample: 10 senior officials from CPA organizations (aggregate workforce of 3824, around 8.4% of CPA). Saturation reached at interview 8, plus 2 additional for organizational diversity.	**Quantitative** Positivist, hypothetico-deductive approach. SEM with sequential mediation analysis. Online survey using a seven-point Likert scale. Sample: 431 Portuguese CPA civil servants. Comparison of nine competing model specifications to establish discriminant validity.

5. Thesis Structure

Each of the following three studies is written as an independent document with its own literature review, methodology, results, and discussion but connected by the research questions. This approach corresponds to the cumulative nature of this research.

Study 1 covers the psychometrics of the EmpAt scale in the Portuguese context of CPA. The literature review establishes the conceptual ground for the expected structural non-equivalence based on the principles of the PSM theory, Napoleonic bureaucracy, and scale-transportation experience. The method outlines the survey design, sample features, and analytical procedure. Results include the step-by-step sequence of performing the CFAs, EFAs, and second-order modeling analysis. The discussion emphasizes the interpretation of the final six-factor structure in terms of employer branding, PSM, and signaling theory. This finding invites for a qualitative exploration of the dimensions from another key informer involved in the employer attractiveness dynamics, leaders.

Study 2 is based on leadership interviews. Literature review is provided concerning the three theoretical streams of knowledge directly related to the current study design: the modified structure of EmpAt based on Study 1, person-organization fit as the mediating mechanism between organizational characteristics and employee attitudes, and WLB of a location-based nature as the structural characteristic of attraction and retention. Method comprises the description of the qualitative research design, interview protocol, sampling strategy, and coding procedure. Results are represented by the findings from thematic analysis presented according to interview blocks and systematically compared with the employee survey findings of Study 1. Discussion focuses on the discrepancy in leadership-employee perceptions of Social value, the importance of location within the employer value proposition, and the implicit theory of attractiveness behind the leadership explanations. With a consolidated view of the construct's dimensionality and emerging constructs from leaders' narratives, a quantitative-based study is called for testing an explanatory model linking employer attractiveness to desirable attitudinal states that are known to relate to mobility decisions.

Study 3 deals with the structural model. Literature review elaborates on the theoretical justification for each construct involved and each path under consideration, treating the six-factor EmpAt structure and the location-based WLB construct as established inputs without justifying them again from the ground up. Method describes the sample variables used,

measurement strategy, and analytical technique including the competitive model analysis aimed at confirming discriminant validity prior to hypothesis testing. Results comprise structural model outcomes reported in terms of the employer attractiveness route and the location-based WLB route. Discussion considers the hypothesis support pattern and its implications for the understanding of the commitment formation process in Portuguese civil servants.

Accordingly, the thesis progresses from measurement validation in Study 1, to qualitative explanation in Study 2, and finally to structural prediction of attitudinal outcomes in Study 3.

Taken together, the three studies answer questions that public administration research has so far left largely open: what employer attractiveness means for civil servants embedded in the Portuguese institutional context, how leaders understand it, and whether it truly connects to the commitment outcomes that retention and engagement depend on.

Study 1
Refining and Validating the Employer attractiveness measurement in the Portuguese Central Administration

1. Introduction

This study opens with a measurement question rather than an assumption. Employer Attractiveness Scale (EmpAt) was developed by Berthon et al. (2005) as a five-factor instrument covering interest, social, economic, development, and application value. It was validated with a sample of 683 final-year Australian university students rating hypothetical private-sector employers, and it has since become one of the most widely applied frameworks for assessing employer attractiveness (Berthon et al., 2005). Its origin, however, creates an open question when the instrument is moved into Portuguese central public administration, where respondents are incumbent civil servants operating under statutory pay, rule-bound career progression, and a mission defined by public law. Whether the same five dimensions hold their meaning and structure in this setting is not obvious, and the present study treats the EmpAt structure as a hypothesis to be tested in CPA rather than a validated tool to be imported.

Based on the different institutional settings and the relative downplay of salary as a differentiator observed in the Napoleonic model by (Ongaro, 2010), we contend that the EmpAt factor framework needs reevaluation to enhance the measurement of attractiveness in the CPA. We posit that the initial five-factor structure may not replicate with the same clarity, item relevance, and construct distinctness as observed in the contexts of EmpAt's initial validation. Furthermore, a CPA-oriented specification, informed by empirical item performance and conceptual alignment with CPA work realities, may provide a more precise representation of attractiveness.

This idea is consistent with findings from scale transport research that indicate that EmpAt dimensions exhibit contextual sensitivity and occasionally need adjustments during the validation process (e.g., Caputo et al., 2023; Grigore et al., 2023). It also fits with research (e.g., Vandenabeele & Jager (2020)) on why individuals are attracted to public sector jobs. The authors conclude that mission and prosocial meaning affect how people rate public sector organizations. This may help explain why studies of employer attractiveness in the CPA do not consistently identify the same relevant attributes. In this research, EmpAt is taken as the starting point for measuring employer attractiveness in the CPA because the original model already showed good psychometric properties (Berthon et al., 2005), while still allowing adaptations to reflect the specific features of CPA compensation, career structures, and mission.

In light of using EmpAt in the realm of public administration, it is important to note that there are some discrepancies concerning the way of applying the mentioned instrument and the quality of psychometric measurements performed. For instance, in the work of Bianchino and De Marco (2025) who conducted a study among 584 students aimed at revealing the motives of being attracted to ISTAT (the National Statistics Institute in Italy) using EmpAt, the initial instrument was not validated as a psychometric tool. One study that captures EmpAt in a non-private setting was conducted by Bekešienė and Navickienė (2025) in the Lithuanian Armed Forces. This study reports internal consistency, composite reliability, and average variance extracted, thus offering insights into convergent measurement quality in a public sector organization. However, its relatively modest sample size (N = 276) provides a limited basis for a robust assessment of the original factor structure considering the length and complexity (five factors) of the original factor solution. It also fails to report confirmatory factor analysis which would be required to test the scale's construct validity fully.

One study that has no issues regarding sample size (N = 3,457) was conducted by Položki Vokić et al. (2023). Despite the large ratio of sample size to estimated parameters, instead of reporting thorough testing the authors opted to merely report Cronbach's alpha. This study has targeted both public (state-owned enterprises) and private sector employees, being therefore less directly relevant to the CPA context examined here.

In conducting the Italian adaptation of EmpAt scale by Berthon et al. (2005), Caputo et al. (2023) found the original structure had unacceptable fit, requiring adjustments which led to the exclusion of some items while preserving the 5-factor structure. Still, the last factor, application, failed to meeting minimum criteria for convergent validity (insufficient AVE, according to Fornell & Larcker, 1981). These studies are briefly characterized in Table 2.

Table 2 - EmpAt Empirical Studies Reporting Psychometric Quality

Paper title	Authors	Year	Public admin or public sector setting	Country	Sample (employees or applicants)	N	EmpAt usage	Psychometric quality reported	Construct validity handling
Captivating company: dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding	Berthon, Ewing, and Hah	2005	Baseline scale development (not public sector)	Australia	Potential applicants (final-year university students)	683	EmpAt, 25 items, 5 dimensions; development paper	EFA and CFA in development; reliability and validity evidence reported	Construct validity tested in scale development
Strategic internal communication for effective internal employer branding	Pološki Vokić, Tkalac Verčič, and Sinčić Ćorić	2023	Multi-organization employee sample includes state-owned organizations.	Croatia	Current employees	3457	EmpAt, 25 items, 5 dimensions	Cronbach's alpha reported for overall and all five dimensions (Overall 0.97; Interest 0.90; Social 0.89; Economic 0.85; Development 0.92; Application 0.87).	EmpAt treated as established; factor structure not retested
Employer branding in public administration: The ISTAT case	Bianchino and De Marco	2025	Central public administration case, ISTAT	Italy	Potential applicants (university students)	584	EmpAt used as a categorization framework for motives (not the full 25-item instrument)	No EmpAt reliability or factor validity reported (EmpAt used as conceptual grouping)	Construct validity for EmpAt not assessed
Attractiveness of the Lithuanian Armed Forces as an employer: An empirical perspective from the military sector	Bekešienė and Navickienė	2025	Armed forces	Lithuania	Active duty soldiers	276	EmpAt derived dimensions with adapted item counts	Alpha, composite reliability, AVE, plus discriminant validity logic reported per dimension (e.g., Interest alpha 0.84; Application alpha 0.87)	Convergent and discriminant evidence via CR and AVE
Employer Attractiveness: Two Instruments to Measure Employer Branding and Reputation	Caputo, Molino, Cerato, and Cortese.	2023	General context, validation study	Italy	Participants evaluating employer attractiveness	407	EmpAt tested via CFA and adapted; application value with issues	CFA fit indices reported (CFI 0.93; RMSEA 0.06; SRMR 0.05; TLI 0.91); subscale alphas 0.78 to 0.92; application value with insufficient AVE.	Construct validity tested; dimensional changes documented
Employer branding dimensions: An adapted scale for Eastern Europe	Grigore, Chapleo, Homberg, Alniacik, and Stancu	2023	Comparator context (not public administration), scale transport, and adaptation study	Romania	Participants evaluating employer attractiveness	310	EmpAt tested via CFA and adapted; application value removed	CFA fit indices reported (CFI 0.929; RMSEA 0.06; SRMR 0.035; TLI 0.915); subscale alphas 0.93 to 0.95; application value removed due to collinearity and fit.	Construct validity tested; dimensional changes documented

The lack of empirical evidence that the current EmpAt scale is psychometrically sound for CPA does not exclude the fact that it can indeed be suitable. Still, we contend it is most likely not suitable as it is based on the nature of the application factor. This factor comprises two meanings that are crucial in CPA: The first refers to civic duty and public value contribution, where workers try to make a difference in society by doing public missions. The second refers to using and sharing knowledge, where workers appreciate chances to use their skills, share what they know, and make a professional contribution. In the private sector or with the student sample, in which the original studies were conducted, it is possible to argue that mission-driven and knowledge-driven can be fused into the same factor considering the relatively higher relevance of remaining factors for this population.

This is strongly supported by the Grigore et al. (2023) decision to revise the "Application factor" structure as this dimension failed to perform in a confirmatory factor analysis, resulting in a restructured framework devoid of application value. Additionally, research on Public Service Motivation (PSM) corroborates the possibility of a unique civic service element in attractiveness assessments, as PSM influences individuals' evaluations of public sector employer communications (Vandenabeele & Jager, 2020).

Consequently, we contend that there is more than sufficient indication in the literature that not only the EmpAt scale may require adjustments for use in CPA but also that current empirical research casts doubt on its full psychometric robustness.

Therefore, this study is designed to test EmpAt in a CPA sample with a sufficient sample size to offer a robust confirmatory factor analysis so as to gauge its construct validity. It will likewise endeavor to test other relevant validity measures, namely its convergent and discriminant validity. Lastly, it will also provide findings concerning the reliability of each component dimension. This will be conducted by targeting the original factor structure and, should the analysis require it, exploring alternative factor solutions that offer both better model fit and better theory alignment.

The theoretical priors guiding this study were concentrated in PSM theory and the scale-transport literature. A broader theoretical reading of the findings, drawing on Social Identity, Signaling, Social Exchange, and Psychological Contract frameworks, is developed in the Discussion once the empirical pattern is in hand.

2. Literature Review

Inter-Institutional employer attractiveness represents the essence of this research due to the inclusion of instrumental and symbolic benefits linked to an employer and shaping individual decisions on entering or remaining in the organization (Berthon et al., 2005). Within a recruitment context, these benefits function as signals, specifically in those situations when individuals do not have sufficient information to judge the quality of potential jobs beforehand (Cable & Turban, 2001; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Spence, 1973).

For the Portuguese central public administration, where pay structures and career paths are institutionally limited and thus represent only baseline factors for potential attractiveness, mission significance, the nature of work content, social atmosphere, and developmental potential become crucial components that form the EmpAt value domains and match the concept of the attractiveness applied in this study (Berthon et al., 2005).

The employer branding framework creates the link between what organizations offer and what employees or potential candidates perceive. In classic conceptualizations, employer branding was defined as the bundle of functional, economic, and psychological benefits linked to employment in the firm and as the process aimed at developing the organization's value proposition (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). As a result, the concept of employer branding is not equivalent to employer attractiveness; however, employer branding may serve as the explanation of how attractiveness emerges and sustains through the construction of credible identity signals and employee experiences, including cues relevant to identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Nevertheless, public sector employer branding cannot replicate private sector examples because, in the context of the public sector, organizations are regulated, require preservation of legitimacy and trust, and need to resist marketization and commercial branding (Christensen & Lægreid, 2011; Wæraas, 2008). That is why, in our study, employer branding becomes the connection between measuring the attractiveness and the context of public sector organizations.

Public Service Motivation represents a public-sector-specific factor, which explains the motives underlying attraction to public employment and sustained commitment of employees whose work contributes to society's common good (Perry, 1996; Perry & Wise, 1990). Repeatedly referred to as a unique motivational basis, the concept of PSM represents the factor that differentiates the attractiveness of public organizations from attractiveness associated with private

sector organizations that rely predominantly on the incentives for competition (Boyne, 2002; Dahl & Lindblom, 1953; Perry & Rainey, 1988; Rainey & Bozeman, 2000). With the consideration of these connections, the purpose of the research emerges more clearly: employer attractiveness shows what is valued, employer branding illustrates how those features become visible and credible, and PSM represents a source of motivation based on such attributes.

This conceptual framework further supports expectations of the sectoral specificities concerning the structure of the inter-institutional employer attractiveness scale. According to Berthon et al. (2005), the EmpAt scale originated as a result of applying the recruitment logic in the private sector. Within such logic, firms compete for employees through differentiated reward bundles, which are used by applicants as signals regarding future employment experience (Berthon et al., 2005; Cable & Turban, 2001; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). However, the Portuguese central public administration operates under a different set of limitations and interpretative systems: salary and career rules limit differences in economic attributes, while legitimacy and public values make other symbolic and civic cues particularly salient for employees (Christensen & Lægreid, 2011; Wæraas, 2008). At the same time, PSM renders prosocial and mission-related attributes particularly significant, thus altering the interpretation of work content by employees (Perry, 1996; Perry & Wise, 1990). Therefore, it can be assumed that the structure of the EmpAt scales and dimensions that were revealed in the context of private industry may not reproduce the same pattern in the context of public organizations.

2.1. Employer Attractiveness

Employer attractiveness has emerged as a significant concept in human resource management, especially given the growing competition for skilled and motivated professionals. The concept of employer attractiveness can be seen as the benefits or values of an organization that can make it more attractive as a workplace or employer. People usually consider these attributes before deciding to apply for a job or continue to work in a specific organization (Berthon et al., 2005). Although the construct was developed and researched within the context of the private sector, employer attractiveness gains particular significance in public administration due to various factors.

As labor markets grow competitive and public institutions struggle with retaining talented workers, the idea of employer attractiveness became crucial in many areas of organizational

behavior, human resource management, and employer branding. Generally speaking, the concept of employer attractiveness refers to the set of benefits and attributes that the organization offers to prospective and existing employees (Berthon et al., 2005). Such features can include both practical aspects of employment such as salary and benefits and more symbolic values associated with an organization such as its prestige, values, and corporate culture (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003).

Berthon et al. (2005) provided one of the most influential and widely adopted definitions, framing employer attractiveness as *"the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization"* (p. 156). Their seminal work introduced the Employer Attractiveness Scale (EmpAt) which identified five core dimensions: interest value, social value, economic value, development value, and application value. These dimensions have been extensively validated and operationalized across diverse contexts, including public and private organizations (Alnıaçık & Alnıaçık, 2012; De Andrade, 2018; Tanwar & Prasad, 2017).

Hedlund et al. (2009) later expanded the definition to reflect the internal perspective, positing that an employer is attractive if individuals *"are interested to apply, want to stay, and are engaged"* (p. 24). This definition makes it clear that attractiveness is not just about hiring people, but also about keeping them and getting them to work hard. This fits with the bigger goals of human capital management.

The formation of the construct of employer attractiveness is based on the following theories:

a) Social Identity Theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) Individuals want affiliation with organizations that have an image which boosts their self-concept. As a result, employer brand and reputation become the symbol of social prestige and attract the individual.

b) Signaling theory (Spence, 1973): The prospective as well as existing employees see signs in the organization which indicate the value system of the same.

c) Person-organization fit theory (Kristof, 1996): Employer attractiveness grows when the person feels that their values match with that of the organization.

These theoretical underpinnings clearly show that employer attractiveness is not just rational in nature but also a psychological, symbolic and identity-based construct.

A key next step in this thesis examines how perceptions captured by EmpAt link to P-O fit, job satisfaction, and affective commitment within Portuguese central public administration. Recent synthesis work frames employer attractiveness as an employee-side perception with consequences

for retention-related outcomes, with fit perceptions, satisfaction, and commitment appearing as recurring attitudinal pathways in the evidence base (Dassler et al., 2022) . Recent theory work on *P-O fit* reports stable associations between perceived fit and core work attitudes, including job satisfaction and organizational commitment which supports a pathway from valued employment attributes to fit appraisals, then to satisfaction, then to affective attachment (A. Kristof-Brown et al., 2023; Shahjehan et al., 2019). Public administration research also points in the same direction: experimental evidence shows sectoral employer attractiveness varies with public value signals across public, private, and nonprofit employers (Cordes & Vogel, 2022; Ritz et al., 2023), and evidence from public-employee samples links PSM to lower turnover intention through job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Gan et al., 2020). Recent employer branding research aligns with this mechanism by showing links between employer branding and employee outcomes through satisfaction, identification, and commitment (Bharadwaj & Yameen, 2020; Saini, 2023).

Understanding how those outcomes connect to employer attractiveness requires tracing how the concept itself has evolved.

Research on employer attractiveness has shifted considerably over the past three decades. From the early 1990s through roughly 2009, the field treated attractiveness as an external recruitment problem. Ambler and Barrow (1996) framed it through a marketing lens, and subsequent work measured attractiveness primarily through candidates' intentions to apply or accept offers, drawing on concepts like brand equity and corporate image (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Turban & Greening, 1997). From 2010 onward, the focus broadened to include how current employees perceive the organization they already work for, recognizing that retention and engagement require a different set of signals than initial recruitment does. Internal drivers such as organizational justice, psychological safety, and opportunities for growth emerged as key determinants of attractiveness for incumbent employees (App & Büttgen, 2016; Dassler et al., 2022; Kambasu, 2022). This shift matters particularly for public administration, where budgetary constraints and competition with the private sector make sustaining internal attractiveness a persistent management challenge (Linos, 2018; Ritz & Waldner, 2011). The present study focuses on this internal perspective, since its sample consists of civil servants already embedded in the Portuguese central public administration rather than prospective applicants.

2.2. Strategic Employer Branding

The notion of employer branding rests upon the assumption that corporations must be branded in order to remain competitive, as products. The employer brand serves as a value proposition for both existing and prospective employees. According to employer branding theory, the employee experience can be linked to the concept of branding due to its representation of the organization and its identity. The primary objective of employer branding is to create something valuable that the target audience would appreciate.

Employer branding can be understood as a strategy utilized by corporations for positioning themselves as employers of choice through communicating their identity and value proposition to internal and external stakeholders (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). This concept, developed in marketing and adapted to the sphere of human resource management as a tool for obtaining competitive advantage in terms of attracting and retaining talent, helps an organization increase its visibility in the job market as well as promote its corporate citizenship and employees' engagement in it (Cable & Turban, 2001).

It is important to note that employer branding theory focuses equally on internal and external approaches to the development of an employer brand. On the one hand, the employer brand is built with respect to internal aspects, such as creating a positive organizational climate and aligning employee experience with brand values (Singh, 2011). On the other hand, it is also linked to certain communication strategies focusing on such unique selling points as career progression opportunities, innovation, and social responsibility.

According to the resource-based perspective of organizations, human capital forms one of the crucial resources that contribute towards sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Employer branding aligns well with this perspective. Therefore, employer branding refers to the practice of improving organizational culture, organizational performance, employee satisfaction, commitment, and communication (Huang & Liu, 2010).

Strategic employer branding entails the use of marketing concepts to market the organization as an excellent employer. It is critical in the recruitment and retention of talent, particularly when operating within highly competitive labor markets (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Wilden et al., 2010; Wolf et al., 2015). Employer branding can be used to increase employer attractiveness through

matching the employer brand to the organizational identity and employee interests (Maxwell & Knox, 2009). Strategic employer branding can reassert the preferences of prospective employees, thus enhancing employer attractiveness (Hein et al., 2023).

The theoretical foundations of employer branding arise from the intersection of organizational behavior, human resource management (HRM), and marketing theory. These pillars have come to see employer branding as a symbolic and strategic process that tries to make an organization more attractive to both current and future employees.

Further empirical evidence was focused on the identification of components which made the organization attractive as an employer. For example, Berthon et al. (2005) suggested five dimensions - economic value, development value, social value, interest value, and application value. The validity of the dimensions was proven across various cultures and industries. Specifically, adaptations were developed for Eastern Europe by Grigore et al. (2023) and by India Dalvi (2021). At the same time, other aspects, such as corporate social responsibility and work-life balance, were also added to the model (Nanjundeswaraswamy et al., 2025).

The integration of employer branding into the public sector marks a significant evolution in the concept. Historically, public organizations were not seen as active participants in competitive labor markets. However, demographic trends, generational changes, and heightened citizen expectations have led public institutions to adopt employer branding as a means to remain attractive and legitimate (Leijerholt et al., 2019). In the Portuguese context, research by Fonseca and Salcedas (2024) highlights the difficulties faced by public administration in attracting younger generations, who perceive the sector as inflexible and less appealing compared to the private sector. Employer branding in such settings must balance public service values with modern employment expectations.

Culture has emerged as a key moderator in the effectiveness of employer branding. In a comparative study of Germany and Portugal, Luchtenveld (2014) confirmed the relevance of Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions in shaping employee expectations and employer branding perceptions. Despite the temptation to standardize employer branding strategies in other countries, these conclusions point to the need for cultural tailoring by international firms.

Additionally, digitalization has impacted the development of employer branding. The spread of social media and online employment websites has affected the way candidates gather data about

employers. Job applicants now have to evaluate the employer's reputation based on more than one source, including social networks and reviews provided by colleagues. Hence, honesty and transparency become vital elements of effective employer branding (Dabirian et al., 2019; Dalvi, 2021).

The development of measurement instruments has also made employer branding easier to examine empirically. The scale developed by Nanjundeswaraswamy et al. (2025) encompasses the following elements: remuneration and benefits, professional development opportunities, working conditions, and attitude toward the position in question. Such a scale can be quite helpful in conducting research and analyzing employer branding issues.

However, there are certain gaps that require further attention. First, the resistance to applying employer branding to the public sector may hinder the practical application of the strategy. Specifically, some critics view employer branding as an imposition of business values in the field (Gromark & Melin, 2013). Another challenge is that the concept of employer branding lacks clarity and specificity; it is rather abstract and multilayered. Therefore, additional studies are needed to explore its effect on various organizational outcomes.

One of the early definitions that came out regarding employer branding was made by Ambler and Barrow (1996), defining the idea of employer branding as the total functional, economic and psychological advantages linked with being employed at particular firms.

Theories developed in organizational studies link employer branding to three critical components, such as:

- Strategic Vision: What the organization wants to be.
- Organizational Culture: What the organization is.
- Corporate Image: How external stakeholders perceive the organization.

These components must align to develop a credible and attractive employer brand, especially in public organizations where values such as legitimacy, trust, and social responsibility are central (Leijerholt, 2021).

Employer branding also builds on social identity theory which suggests individuals derive part of their identity from the organizations to which they belong (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). A strong employer brand can enhance: Organizational identification (how much employees feel part of the organization), commitment and engagement, and retention and performance outcomes.

In public administration, these elements must be adapted to resonate with motivations tied to public service values such as equity, ethics, and societal contribution.

Employer branding also connects to the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991) which treats human capital as a source of competitive advantage. A strong employer brand supports the attraction and retention of high-quality employees, reduces turnover costs, and contributes to organizational learning and innovation capacity.

The concept of employee value proposition is a core construct in employer branding. It represents the unique set of benefits that employees receive in exchange for their skills and experience (Singh, 2011). Employee value proposition is both functional (e.g., pay, career development) and symbolic (e.g., purpose, values, culture).

In the public sector, employee value proposition may emphasize:

a) Stability,
b) Public service motivation (PSM),
c) Work-life balance and social value

The branding process within public sector entities will have to consider specific elements, such as opposition to commercialization and marketization (Wæraas, 2008), varying demands by stakeholders (Leijerholt et al., 2019), and the need for institutional legitimacy based on social value rather than profit.

Therefore, in addition to utilizing private sector branding principles, modifications will be necessary in order to align with the unique values, motives, and expectations of the public sector. This is especially relevant is the target is the existing public servants who have an insider knowledge about the public service values and may more clearly distinguish between public versus private roles in society.

Overall, employer branding has evolved from being a marketing tool to hire employees to becoming a complete strategy for dealing with organizational identification and relations with employees. Employer branding applies to both the public and private sectors, requires consideration of culture in which it is conducted, and becomes increasingly technology-driven and employee-focused. Thus, employer branding continues to remain an important topic academically and practically.

Applying this to the public sector brings special difficulties. Public institutions often struggle to differentiate themselves in employer branding due to regulatory constraints, rigid structures, and limited resources (T. Christensen & Lægreid, 2011). However, research indicates that public organizations can still craft compelling employer brands by focusing on mission-driven work, ethical standards, and opportunities for social impact (Bellou, 2010). In Portugal, efforts to rebrand public administration as a dynamic and citizen-centered employer are underway yet face skepticism due to historical perceptions of inefficiency and opacity (Gomes et al., 2023).

2.3. Public Service Motivation

Perry (1996) defines PSM as the disposition to act in response to motives grounded primarily or exclusively in public organizations and public interests. It encompasses altruistic motives, such as compassion, commitment to public values, and civic responsibility, which distinguish public sector workers from those in other sectors in terms of motivation and attitudes.

Conceptually, PSM contrasts with public choice theory in its basic assumption about the motives of bureaucrats, where self-interest is dominant. Instead, according to PSM theory, many public servants are internally driven by their work's impact on society and have a particular intrinsic motivation that guides their career decision-making and work in public organizations (Brewer & Selden, 1998; Bright, 2008). The construct has been operationalized as a multidimensional structure comprising four components. Attraction to policymaking reflects engagement with the political process and the desire to influence public policy. Commitment to public interest represents a normative motivation to advance societal welfare. Compassion captures an affective orientation of empathy and concern for others. Self-sacrifice describes the willingness to prioritize public good over personal interest (Perry, 1996). Further developments came up with a model for an international framework consisting of instrumental, value-based, and identification motivations (S. Kim & Vandenabeele, 2010) but still retaining the core notion that PSM emanates from internal psychological drives associated with purpose, ethical values, and citizenship. Some theorists advocate for an international or unidimensional PSM measure that does not differentiate among its components and reflects altruistic motivation.

Both approaches continue to be used, with multidimensional scales offering richer insight into specific motivational drivers and global measures offering parsimony for applied settings where survey length is constrained (Vandenabeele, 2007).

Numerous empirical studies demonstrate that there is a positive connection between PSM and such work-related attitudes as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and prosocial behavior at public agencies (Crewson, 1997; S. Kim, 2012; Wright & Pandey, 2008). Employees with high PSM are satisfied with engaging in socially important activities and feel greater emotional identification with the organization (S. Kim, 2011). The link between PSM and work-related attitudes is frequently affected by the P-O fit, which means that employees have higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment when there is agreement between the employee's values and the values of the organization (Bright, 2008; Steijn, 2008).

In the Portuguese public sector, PSM plays a central role in attracting individuals to public careers, particularly in periods of economic uncertainty or social change. Studies also document declines in motivational levels among Portuguese civil servants, attributed to political instability, limited career progression, and public disillusionment with government effectiveness (Carvalho, 2018). Strengthening PSM through meaningful work design, participatory governance, and transparent leadership is therefore a relevant concern for revitalizing Portuguese central public administration as an attractive employer.

Relevance for the present study. PSM is central to the measurement argument developed in this chapter for one specific reason. The Application dimension of the original EmpAt scale combines two meanings that may be particularly distinct in Portuguese CPA. The first is civic contribution, where workers seek to serve public missions and make a societal difference, aligning with the commitment to public interest and compassion dimensions of PSM. The second is professional knowledge application, where workers seek to use and share their expertise. This second meaning is not a core PSM dimension and is better interpreted through competence use, professional identity, and work design. In the student and private-sector samples where EmpAt was developed, these two orientations may reasonably co-occur within a single dimension. In a sample of civil servants embedded in a mission-driven institution, however, there are theoretical and contextual reasons to expect them to emerge as distinct experiences. This expectation grounds H2, stated in the research question and hypotheses section below.

2.4. Public versus Private Sector Employment

In this regard, the comparative analysis of public and private sector employment becomes important for the study of institutional attractiveness and the dynamics of the labor market. The

use of employer branding is becoming widespread among public organizations, which makes it necessary to analyze the differences between public and private employment in terms of structural and cultural aspects. Comparative synthesis will be an indispensable basis for studying the mechanisms by which public institutions, especially in Portugal, can improve their attractiveness as employers.

Comparative sector perception refers to the study of the attractiveness of public, private, and non-profit organizations. Public sector jobs tend to have a better image than those in the private sector (Cordes & Vogel, 2022). In comparison with employees in the private sector, those working in the public sector value social characteristics more highly (Vogel & Satzger, 2024).

The differences that exist between government work and private company work include ownership and financing approaches, motivational foundations, accountability systems, employment security, organization's objectives, performance rewards, decision-making process, and corporate image. Each difference is based on authoritative research sources highlighting distinctions in organizations' structures and management of the staff (Baldwin, 1990; Ottensmeyer & Bozeman, 1988; Perry & Rainey, 1988). Private sector companies are concerned more about financial gain, accountability to the stockholders, and providing bonuses to workers. Public sector organizations, however, are motivated not to generate profit but serve the citizens and are subject to legal regulations; moreover, these organizations offer employees stable employment. In this respect, the discussion about the differences is vital as the distinctions affect individuals' perception of job offers directly.

This comparative paradigm is especially pertinent to the study of inter-institutional employer attractiveness within Portuguese public administration. The idea of PSM, which has been linked to attracting and keeping employees in experiments, fits within the public sector's focus on civic duty, social justice, and the legitimacy of institutions. On the other hand, individuals driven by financial and professional advancement objectives are attracted to the private sector's competitive stance and adaptable incentive structures. The idea is that public administration needs to use its unique strengths, like stability, meaningful work, and contributions to society, to stay competitive in attracting top talent in a changing job market. It does this by putting these differences in the context of the larger conversation about employer branding.

2.5. Research Question and Hypotheses

Three conclusions follow from the literature review presented above. First, although EmpAt has become the leading method for assessing employer attractiveness, the body of research backing its factor structure in the public sector domain is relatively sparse and methodologically weak. Second, Portuguese central public administration works in an institutional environment that does not fit the market-related assumptions of the original instrument (statutory salaries, rigid career advancement, and legal mission). Finally, PSM offers a concrete explanation for why the civic component of Application may be especially salient in CPA, while the professional knowledge component is better understood through competence use, professional identity, and work design.

Based on these three premises, the study addresses the following research question: **How should the EmpAt scale be specified to validly measure employer attractiveness among employees of Portuguese central public administration?**

To address this research question, the empirical analysis proceeds in three steps. First, it examines whether the original five-factor EmpAt structure provides an acceptable representation of inter-institutional employer attractiveness among employees of Portuguese central public administration. Second, it tests whether a revised structure offers a more appropriate specification of the construct by separating the original Application dimension into two theoretically distinct facets, one reflecting civic contribution and the other the application and transfer of professional knowledge. Third, it assesses the relative contribution of the retained dimensions to a higher-order employer attractiveness construct, with particular attention to whether Economic value occupies a weaker position in a context characterized by centrally regulated pay and limited compensation differentiation. These three analytical steps are formalized in the following hypotheses:

H1, on fit of the original structure. The original five-factor EmpAt structure will show unacceptable fit in a CPA sample, reflecting the misalignment between the scale's market-based assumptions and the statutory compensation and career regime of the Portuguese civil service.

H2, on the Application split. The Application dimension will split into two empirically distinct facets, Application-Civic and Application-Knowledge. Application-Civic reflects public service and prosocial contribution, whereas Application-Knowledge reflects competence use and professional knowledge transfer.

H3, on the relative weight of Economic value. In a second-order model of overall employer attractiveness, Economic value will load more weakly than the remaining dimensions, because the Portuguese civil service operates under centrally regulated pay, which limits the role of compensation as a distinctive employer signal.

Hypotheses 1 to 3 are sequentially analyzed. Hypothesis 1 is tested using the confirmatory factor analysis based on the original five-factor framework. Hypothesis 2 is explored by the exploratory factor analysis on the whole pool of items, followed by the confirmation of the resultant six-factor framework. Hypothesis 3 is tested via the second-order factor analysis conducted on the new framework. In the Method section, the procedures used for testing the hypotheses are briefly explained.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

The current research adopts a quantitative research strategy that employs a hypothetico-deductive research methodology. Regarding the research question raised in the current study, whether EmpAt could be used as a scale to measure employer attractiveness among employees in the central public administration in Portugal, an empirical study driven by hypotheses should be conducted. Psychometrics testing can be seen as a quantitative process, and hence confirmatory tests have to be employed to verify construct validity, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability of measures (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2022).

3.2. Procedure

We relied on a structured survey based on the Employer Attractiveness (EmpAt) scale used by Berthon et al. (2005). This test provided a means to empirically operationalize the employer's appeal according to five different value dimensions, namely: Social, Development, Application, Interest, and Economic. Through translation and adaptation of this instrument into the CPA of Portugal setting, we were able to obtain numerical scores on how civil servants evaluated the levels of attractiveness in each of these dimensions.

The relevant central government entities were officially notified about our intention to seek endorsement of the survey. Once permission was granted, the questionnaire was delivered via each of these organizations to their respective employees without any possibility for researchers to have

access to their email addresses. In order to comply with research ethics requirements, we provided each participant with a consent form outlining the organizational background, the aims of the study, the voluntary and anonymous character of participation, confidentiality of all data collected, duration of filling out the survey, contact information of the researcher, and confirmation that it is a genuine survey.

Because participation was voluntary and anonymous, some risk of self-selection bias cannot be excluded (Kaźmierczak et al., 2023), particularly because respondents were asked to evaluate features of public employment. Despite this, it is clear that since the questionnaire did not deal with any personal information, the sampling process did not enable a reconstruction of the invited sample or the determination of an actual response rate. It follows that self-selection was neither avoidable nor measurable in this case. To evaluate the likelihood of possible generalization from this sample, a comparison between the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and those of the entire Portuguese central public administration was conducted.

In parallel, we used secondary data to situate the survey results in the institutional and workforce context of Portuguese public administration. We analyzed contemporary documents and official statistics relevant to public sector human resources, including workforce demographics, age structure and retirement projections, available engagement or employee survey outputs, and official recruitment or employer branding materials produced by public entities. In addition to this, the use of policy documents and rules regarding the working conditions of the public workforce was considered to understand how institutional features may have impacted their perceptions of attraction and attainability (Berthon et al., 2005).

This secondary data allowed us to corroborate the findings and interpret them within context, as suggested by Modell (2005). For instance, if development and advancement were considered crucial elements behind attraction among the respondents, we might have evaluated it against career development policies of the organization, or even the statistics of promotion recently, to measure its validity.

In its Portuguese version (Appendix A), the survey was carried out online using the Qualtrics XM software.

The survey ran from May 2025 to the end of June 2025, and a follow-up was sent in mid-June. Data was collected through an online questionnaire. The invitation was issued through two

complementary channels. First, all central public administration organizations were formally asked to disseminate the questionnaire among their employees, and the National Institute of Administration (INA) was also asked to disseminate it to civil servants through its own communication channels. Second, the invitation and the access link were shared on the researcher's personal LinkedIn profile and on Facebook, with a request for responses and further dissemination through the networks of civil servants reached by these platforms. Because the first channel depended on the internal dissemination decisions of each organization, and the second channel operated through open social networks, the total number of civil servants who received the invitation cannot be reconstructed. A formal response rate is therefore not computable. A total of 490 were retained after screening for eligibility and completeness. Respondents from municipal bodies, state-owned enterprises, or other non-central-administration settings were excluded during screening, as described in the data analysis strategy subsection. The resulting sample is a mixed-source convenience sample of Portuguese central public administration employees. Generalization to the full CPA workforce rests on the argument that the obtained demographic profile is broadly consistent with the known composition of central administration employees, a point returned to in the Discussion.

3.3. Measures

As stated, the questionnaire included a measure of employer attractiveness, commuting, and sociodemographic variables.

Employer attractiveness was measured with EmpAt, which comprises a set of instrumental and symbolic benefits that prospective and current employees associate with an employer (Berthon et al., 2005; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). A total of 25 items cover five factors measured and all factors comprise five items: The first factor, “Development” includes items such as e.g., “Gaining career-enhancing experience”, “Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organization”, the second “Social” e.g., “Having a good relationship with your colleagues”, “Happy work environment”, the third “Interest” e.g., “Working in an exciting environment ”, “The organization produces high-quality products and services”, the fourth “Application”, e.g., “Humanitarian organization - gives back to society”, “The organization is customer-oriented”, and the fifth “Economic”, e.g., “Job security within the organization”, “Hands-on inter-departmental

experience". Participants were required to signal their options following the question "Why did you choose to work where you do?"

All 25 items were rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not important) to 7 (very important), matching the response format used by the author in the original scale validation. This alignment preserves the metric equivalence required for the direct mean comparison reported in the Benchmark section.

Due to the nature of the Portuguese public administration services, the EmpAt items were adjusted to rename "firms" to "organizations" to fit the nature of public service institutions, as follows Table 3.

Table 3- EmpAt

Nr.	Question	Factor	Abbreviation
QS2.1	Recognition/appreciation from management	Development	D1MgmtRecog
QS2.2	A fun working environment	Social	S1FunWork
QS2.3	A springboard for future employment	Development	D2CareerSB
QS2.4	Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular org	Development	D3SelfPride
QS2.5	Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular org	Development	D4SelfConf
QS2.6	Gaining career-enhancing experience	Development	D5CareerExp
QS2.7	Having a good relationship with your superiors	Social	S2RelSuper
QS2.8	Having a good relationship with your colleagues	Social	S3RelPeers
QS2.9	Supportive and encouraging colleagues	Social	S4SuppCols
QS2.10	Working in an exciting environment	Interest	I1ExcitWork
QS2.11	Innovative employer - novel work practices/forward-thinking	Interest	I2InnovEmp
QS2.12	The organization both values and makes use of your creativity	Interest	I3UseCreat
QS2.13	The organization produces high-quality products and services	Interest	I4HQProdSvc
QS2.14	The organization produces innovative products and services	Interest	I5InnovProd
QS2.15	Good promotion opportunities within the organization	Economic	E1PromoOpps
QS2.16	Humanitarian organization - gives back to society	Application	A1HumanOrg
QS2.17	Opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution	Application	A2ApplyEdu
QS2.18	Opportunity to teach others what you have learned	Application	A3TeachOth
QS2.19	Acceptance and belonging	Application	A4Belonging
QS2.20	The organization is customer-oriented	Application	A5CustOrien
QS2.21	Job security within the organization	Economic	E2JobSec
QS2.22	Hands-on inter-departmental experience	Economic	E3InterDept
QS2.23	Happy work environment	Social	S5HappyWork
QS2.24	An above-average basic salary	Economic	E4AboveSal
QS2.25	An attractive overall compensation package	Economic	E5TotalComp

Commuting was measured with three items from Stutzer and Frey (2008), namely: “Location of your home”, “Organizing your private life”, and “Time spent travelling to work”. This measure indicates location-related problems that may affect work-life balance in the Portuguese public administration context. An initial statement was first presented: “The choice of your current job was influenced by…” to which the participants were required to answer for each item in a seven-point Likert scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree). As a complement to these items, we opted to include two additional items from the Portuguese 2021 Census (Instituto Nacional de Estatística (Portugal), 2021), namely the exact time spent commuting (one-way trip, ranging from “1 = up to fifteen minutes" to “6 = more than ninety minutes") and the means of transportation used to get from home to work (including “walking”, “taking a private automobile as a driver” or “passenger”, “taking a bus or coach”, “taking employer-provided transportation”, “taking the underground”, “taking a train”, “taking a bicycle”, “taking a boat”, and an open "other" option.

The inclusion of both perceived measures and factual indicators offers a more robust approach to endorsing this pertinent contextual factor in modeling work-life balance and associated consequences within employer attractiveness studies (Stutzer & Frey, 2008; Wheatley, 2021).

Demographic characteristics were collected for aggregate sample description and for model adjustment (control purposes) in subsequent analyses. Prior research shows demographic characteristics should be used as control variables when scrutinizing attitudinal variables such as employer attractiveness dimensions (Meyer et al., 2002; Ng & Feldman, 2010). The questionnaire measured gender (1 = Female, 2 = Male, 3 = Other, 4 = NA), age group (“18-25”, “26-30”, “31-35”, “36-40”, “41-45”, “46-50”, “51-55”, “56-60”, “>60”), academic qualifications (“1 = Secondary education”, “2 = Professional education”, “3 = Degree education”, “4 = Master's degree”, “5 = Doctorate”, “6 = Other. Which?”), type of organization (“1 = General Secretariats”, “2 = General Directorate”, “3 = Inspectorate”, “4 = Public Institute”, “5 = Local Administration”, “7 = Other. What is it?”), professional category (“1 = Top management”, “2 = Middle management / Specialist or equivalent”, “3 = High Technician Assistant/IT Specialist or equivalent”, “4 = Operational Assistant”, “5 = Operational Assistant Technician”), and length of service in the current organization (“1 = Less than 1 year”, “2 = Between 1 and 2 years”, “3 = Between 2 and 6 years”, “4 = Between 6 and 10 years”, “5 = Between 10 and 15 years”, “6 = Between 15 and 20 years”, “7 = Over 20 years”).

In the case of the professional category, response options reflect the general public employment career structure, supplemented with top and middle management categories to align with the general careers defined in Portuguese public employment law and under guidance provided by the Directorate General for Administration and Public Employment (Fernandes, 2021).

3.4. Sample

Our target population consisted of public servants working in the Portuguese CPA, namely employees from central government ministries, departments, and agencies. This group comprises career public servants operating under a national administrative framework.

We also treated this population as theoretically important because civil servants often exhibited distinctive motivational patterns shaped by public service values. In particular, public-sector employees frequently placed greater emphasis on traditional values such as equity and accountability, and prior research linked these orientations to PSM (S. Kim et al., 2013). We considered these value-based motives as a plausible influence on how employees perceived employer attractiveness, especially when evaluating non-economic and symbolic aspects of employment. We studied this group to find out what made public organizations appealing as employers (S. Kim et al., 2013).

The dataset contained 490 valid responses. Respondents reported complete information for all demographic and commuting variables. The only exception was the type of organization, which included three missing cases (0.6%), leaving 487 valid responses for that variable. This sample size is considered suitable for a model with this complexity (five latent constructs comprising 25 items total, with each construct comprising at least four items, Hair et al., 2019).

The age profile showed a mature workforce. Respondents aged 46 years and older accounted for 72.9% of participants, distributed across the following categories: 46 to 50 years (21.6%), 51 to 55 years (21.8%), 56 to 60 years (15.5%), and over 60 years (13.9%). The most common age group was the age group of 51 to 55 years old, which represented 21.8% of the participants. The age category had a cumulative distribution exceeding 50% and thus the median was also the age group of 51 to 55 years old. Respondents who were younger made up a small portion of the sample, as those below 36 years old represented only 9.0% of the participants. This age composition showed that the respondents comprised a late-career workforce.

Female participants made up 337 of the participants (68.8%), while male participants made up 151 of the participants (30.8%). Two participants identified themselves as other category, representing 0.4% of the participants. There were no missing values on gender. In other words, the sample contained a considerable majority of women, which is relevant for interpreting the patterns associated with work-family and work-flexibility support.

The level of educational attainment among the participants was high, with 54.3% reporting having attained a bachelor's degree or its equivalent. A percentage of 28.2% of the sample held master's degrees, while 3.1% had doctorates. Secondary education was attained by 10.8% of the sample, while 1.8% attained professional education and another 1.8% had some form of educational qualification other than the others. Adding the percentages of bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees, 85.5% of the sample attained university education.

Professional categories were highly concentrated. High technicians and information technology specialists made up 64.5% of the sample. Middle management represented 16.9% of the sample, technical assistants and informatics technicians 13.3%, top management 3.1%, and operational assistants 2.2%.

Among the 487 responses, 44.8% of respondents worked in directorates general, 31.4% in public institutes, 19.3% in secretariats general, 3.3% in inspections, and 1.2% in authorities, which are all central administration bodies. The sample mostly comprises directorates general and has a substantial representation from public institutes and secretariats general. We treated the authority category with caution due to the small number of cases, as it may limit the ability to make inferences for that subgroup specifically.

Commuting times were distributed across five bands: up to 15 minutes (23.5%), 16 to 30 minutes (24.3%), 31 to 60 minutes (35.1%), 61 to 90 minutes (11.6%), and over 90 minutes (5.5%). The median fell within the 31 to 60 minute band. Nearly half the sample (47.8%) reached work within 30 minutes, while 17.1% spent more than 60 minutes commuting each way. These patterns are substantively relevant given the documented link between commuting duration and daily mood and work attitudes (Stutzer & Frey, 2008).

Private automobiles were the dominant mode of transport. Cars (as drivers) accounted for 46.7% of respondents, while cars as passengers accounted for 3.5%. Mass transit was also widely used: bus or coach represented 11.0%, underground 9.2%, train 16.1%, and boat 3.1%. Active

modes were less common, with 6.7% commuting on foot and 0.6% by bicycle. A further 3.1% reported other modes. When we aggregated categories, private motorized modes represented 50.2% of commuting, mass transit represented 39.4%, and active modes represented 7.3%. Considered alongside commuting time, this modal split reinforced the relevance of hybrid work design, schedule control, and alternative work locations as plausible levers for employer attractiveness in the public sector (T. D. Allen et al., 2013; Humphrey et al., 2007).

3.5. Data Analysis Strategy

As the nature of this study is mostly psychometric, the data were previously screened for invalid entries (which we define as having too many missing values, above 10%; being civil servants not operating in central governmental organizations, e.g., from municipal bodies).

As a first step, we computed the means for all the items and compared them with the original items' means as reported in Berthon et al. (2005). This was intended to gain awareness about the perceived centrality of each item in our sample compared with known values.

As a technical requirement, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), which is a robust technique that tests how well the data fit a given theoretical structure. According to Hair et al. (2019), the fit is judged based on a set of indicators as follows: the normed chi square (chi-square divided by the degree of freedom) should not fall above 3, while the chi-square statistic is ideally non-significant (for $p < .05$). As this statistic is prone to bias towards significant levels when large samples are being analyzed, it requires caution and is often discarded in favor of more robust statistics. Additionally, considering that the fit indices should be adjusted for model complexity and sample size (Hair et al., 2019) we have adopted the following thresholds: Comparative Fit Index CFI (Bentler, 1990), should have at least .94 (although Bentler, 1990 sets .90 as sufficiently good); Tucker-Lewis index (TLI, Tucker & Lewis, 1973) should also reach at least .94 (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004 sets .90), (acceptable >0.9, excellent 0.95) The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA, Steiger & Lind, 1980) should fall below .07, although it is more commonly established as <.08 (e.g., Browne & Cudeck, 1992); the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR, Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1982) should also fall below .08. All factor loadings should be significant ($p < .05$), and errors should not be correlated among themselves.

In case the CFA provides an indication of a poor fit, we opted to run Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) which requires a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic of at least 0.70, and a Bartlett's

significant Chi-square ($p < .05$), which both indicate sufficient shared variance to allow the extraction of factors. Principal components analysis was applied, and only items with commonalities above .500 should be retained. Additionally, a varimax rotation was adopted to guarantee clear boundaries between the dimensions while avoiding items that clearly cross-load.

As an eventual valid EFA solution was found, we conducted a new CFA based on this emerging solution to gauge its factor structure more robustly. The fit indices adopted are the same as described above. This technical procedure gives an indication of the construct validity.

In addition to construct validity, a psychometrically sound scale should also have convergent validity, i.e., that the variance of items that fall within a given factor is at least accounted for 50% by the latent construct. This is indicated by the Average Extracted Variance (AVE, Fornell & Larcker, 1981) of .500 or more.

Moreover, if a construct entails more than one factor (such as clearly the case for EmpAt), the factor solution should also have discriminant validity, which is indicated by the HeteroTrait-MonoTrait (HTMT, Henseler et al., 2015) remaining below .85 (for strict) and .90 (for liberal) decision.

As validity concerns the degree to which a given indicator measures what it is intended to, it leaves out the consistency with which such a measure occurs. Therefore, to judge such consistency, also named as reliability, we adopted Cronbach's alpha (with the .70 cutoff) and Jöreskog (1971) composite reliability with the exact same threshold.

3.6. Benchmark

We benchmarked our Portuguese central public administration (CPA) results (N = 490) against the original EmpAt study by Berthon et al. (2005), which developed and validated the 25-item scale with a convenience sample of 683 final-year university students who rated how important each attribute was when considering potential employers.

Both studies used a seven-point Likert response scale, which permits direct comparison of item and dimension means across the two samples.

In our data, the overall average of item means was 5.01 on the seven-point scale, compared with 5.56 in Berthon et al. (2005), which implied a -0.55 difference indicating the means are lower for our population ($t(489) = -10.665$, $P < .001$).

As regards the theoretical dimensions, we repeated this analysis for each dimension. The largest gaps emerged in Economic value and Development value. Economic value averaged 4.60 in our sample versus 5.78 in Berthon et al. (2005), a significant difference of -1.18 ($t(489) = -18.373$, $P < .001$). Development value averaged 4.75 versus 5.69, a significant difference of -0.94 ($t(489) = -16.161$, $p < .001$). Social value also declined (5.19 versus 5.80, -0.61, $t(489) = -10.174$, $p < .001$), and Interest value showed a more modest difference (5.20 versus 5.35, -0.15, $t(489) = -2.305$, $p = .022$). Lastly, Application value remained slightly higher in our sample (5.33 versus 5.18, +0.15, $t(489) = 2.754$, $p < .01$). (Table 4)

Table 4 - Factor-mean Benchmark

	Mean	Std. dev.	Berthon et al. (2005)	Dif.
Development	4.75	1.28	5.69	-0.94
Social	5.19	1.32	5.80	-0.61
Interest	5.20	1.47	5.35	-0.15
Application	5.33	1.17	5.18	0.15
Economic	4.60	1.42	5.78	-1.18

At the item level, the largest negative gap concerned “a springboard for future employment” (3.49 versus 5.62, -2.13, $t(489) = -25.774$, $p < .001$), followed by pay items (attractive overall compensation package, 4.13 versus 5.94, -1.81, $t(489) = -19.516$, $p < .001$) and above-average basic salary, 4.19 versus 5.97, -1.78, $t(489) = -19.456$, $p < .001$). The largest positive difference occurred for “humanitarian organization, gives back to society” (5.95 versus 5.00, +0.95, $t(489) = 16.112$, $p < .001$), followed by “working in an exciting environment” (5.63 versus 5.37, +0.26, $t(489) = 3.779$, $p < .001$) and “customer-oriented” (5.45 versus 5.24, +0.21, $t(489) = 3.012$, $p < .01$). See Table 5 for details.

Table 5 - Means for EmpAt items

Item code	Item	CPA Mean	Berthon 2005 mean	Diff
D1	Recognition/appreciation from management	4.65	5.58	-0.93***
D2	A springboard for future employment	3.49	5.62	-2.13***
D3	Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organization	5.28	5.69	-0.41***
D4	Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular organization	4.87	5.72	-0.85***
D5	Gaining career-enhancing experience	5.46	5.83	-0.37***
S1	A fun working environment	4.28	5.75	-1.47***
S2	Having a good relationship with your superiors	5.30	5.66	-0.36***
S3	Having a good relationship with your colleagues	5.64	5.92	-0.28***
S4	Supportive and encouraging colleagues	5.36	5.65	-0.29***
S5	Happy work environment	5.40	6.01	-0.61***
I1	Working in an exciting environment	5.63	5.37	0.26***
I2	Innovative employer, novel work practices/forward-thinking	4.97	5.31	-0.34***
I3	The organization both values and makes use of your creativity	5.17	5.45	-0.28***
I4	The organization produces high-quality products and services	5.26	5.41	-0.15*
I5	The organization produces innovative products and services	4.94	5.22	-0.28***
A1	Humanitarian organization, gives back to society	5.95	5.00	0.95***
A2	Opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution	5.18	5.19	-0.01 ns
A3	Opportunity to teach others what you have learned	4.87	4.85	0.02 ns
A4	Acceptance and belonging	5.18	5.63	-0.45***
A5	The organization is customer-oriented	5.45	5.24	0.21**
E1	Good promotion opportunities within the organization	4.48	5.82	-1.34***
E2	Job security within the organization	5.46	5.75	-0.29***
E3	Hands-on inter-departmental experience	4.73	5.43	-0.70***
E4	An above-average basic salary	4.19	5.97	-1.78***
E5	An attractive overall compensation package	4.13	5.94	-1.81***

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$ ns= not significant

3.7. Psychometric Quality of EmpAt

As stated in the data analysis strategy section, the psychometric quality analyses will report findings concerning the construct validity, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability.

3.8. Construct Validity

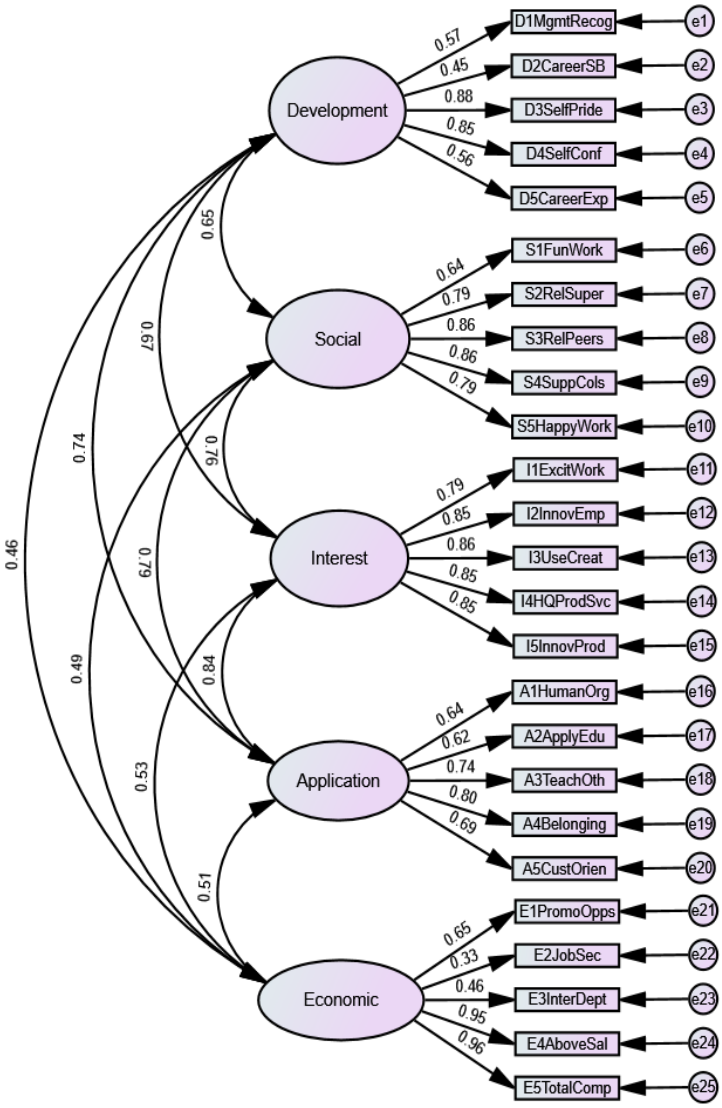
Because the factorial structure of EmpAt is theoretically accepted as being both a 2nd order factor that aggregates the five 1st order factors, or simply a 1st order 5-factor structure, we have opted to test both factorial structures.

We therefore conducted a first-order and a second-order CFA in AMOS with the following factors: Development, Social, Interest, Economic, and Application.

3.8.1. EmpAt 1st order solution

The CFA for the 1st order solution showed poor fit as indicated by $\chi^2(265) = 1954.477$, normed $\chi^2 = 7.375$, CFI = .812, TLI = .787, RMSEA = .114, 90% CI [.109; .119], P-close = .000; and SRMR = .127. In line with this, some 1st order factors with the original items also show suboptimal convergent validity ($AVE_{development} = 0.466$; $AVE_{application} = .487$). Figure 1.

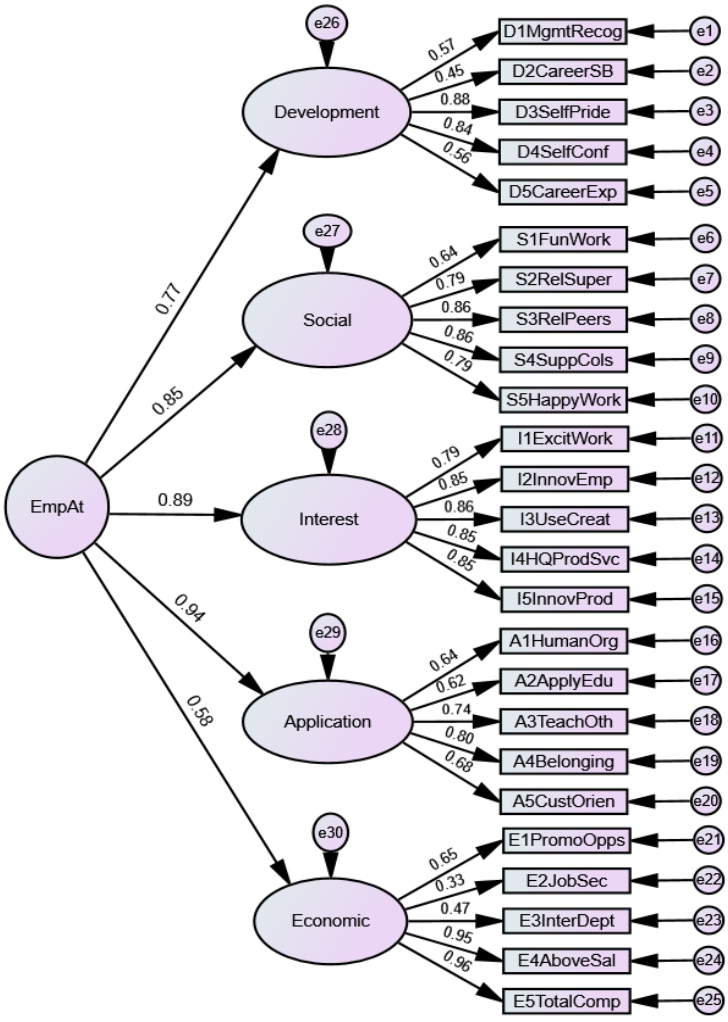
Figure 1 - CFA 1st Order EmpAt



3.8.2. EmpAt 2nd order solution

The CFA for the 2nd order solution also showed poor fit as indicated by $\chi^2(270) = 1959.190$, normed $\chi^2 = 7.256$, CFI = .812, TLI = .791, RMSEA = .113, 90% CI [.108; .118], P-close = .000; and SRMR = .128, although the 2nd order factor has good convergent validity (AVE = .664). (Figure 2)

Figure 2 - CFA 2nd Order EmpAt



3.8.3. Adjusting for the public administration population

Following the data analysis strategy, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (principal component analysis) on the full set of items. The EFA showed the solution shared enough variance to allow the extraction of factors (KMO = .931; Bartlett's $\chi^2(300) = 9089.451$, $p < .001$) but contained several issues that required attention. Namely, some items show poor communalities, and the rotation matrix included many cross-loadings, which contribute to factor blurring.

By removing these items, a 6-factor solution was extracted (KMO = .867; Bartlett's $\chi^2(105) = 5146.696$, $p < .001$), accounting for 73.5% variance after rotation (Varimax). Table 6 shows the factor loadings and respective reliability and convergent validity indicators.

Table 6 - Rotated Component Matrix for EmpAt

	Component					
	1 Social	2 Interest	3 Development	4 Economic	5 Appl1 Civic	6 Appl2 Knowledge
S3RelPeers	**.889**	.182	.144	.092	.182	.103
S4SuppCols	**.817**	.260	.159	.155	.091	.187
S2RelSuper	**.737**	.179	.288	.166	.189	.159
I5InnovProd	.195	**.839**	.183	.132	.205	.209
I4HQProdSvc	.236	**.792**	.227	.099	.301	.188
I3UseCreat	.309	**.707**	.187	.268	.214	.182
D4SelfConf	.175	.129	**.834**	.099	.233	.148
D3SelfPride	.262	.180	**.721**	.082	.380	.171
D5CareerExp	.149	.208	**.721**	.217	-.049	.095
E4AboveSal	.134	.152	.150	**.933**	.078	.127
E5TotalComp	.170	.151	.167	**.926**	.090	.114
A1HumanOrg	.202	.215	.192	.120	**.817**	.119
A5CustOrien	.172	.357	.149	.058	**.742**	.204
A2ApplyEdu	.117	.209	.147	.079	.152	**.861**
A3TeachOth	.285	.218	.193	.212	.156	**.740**

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

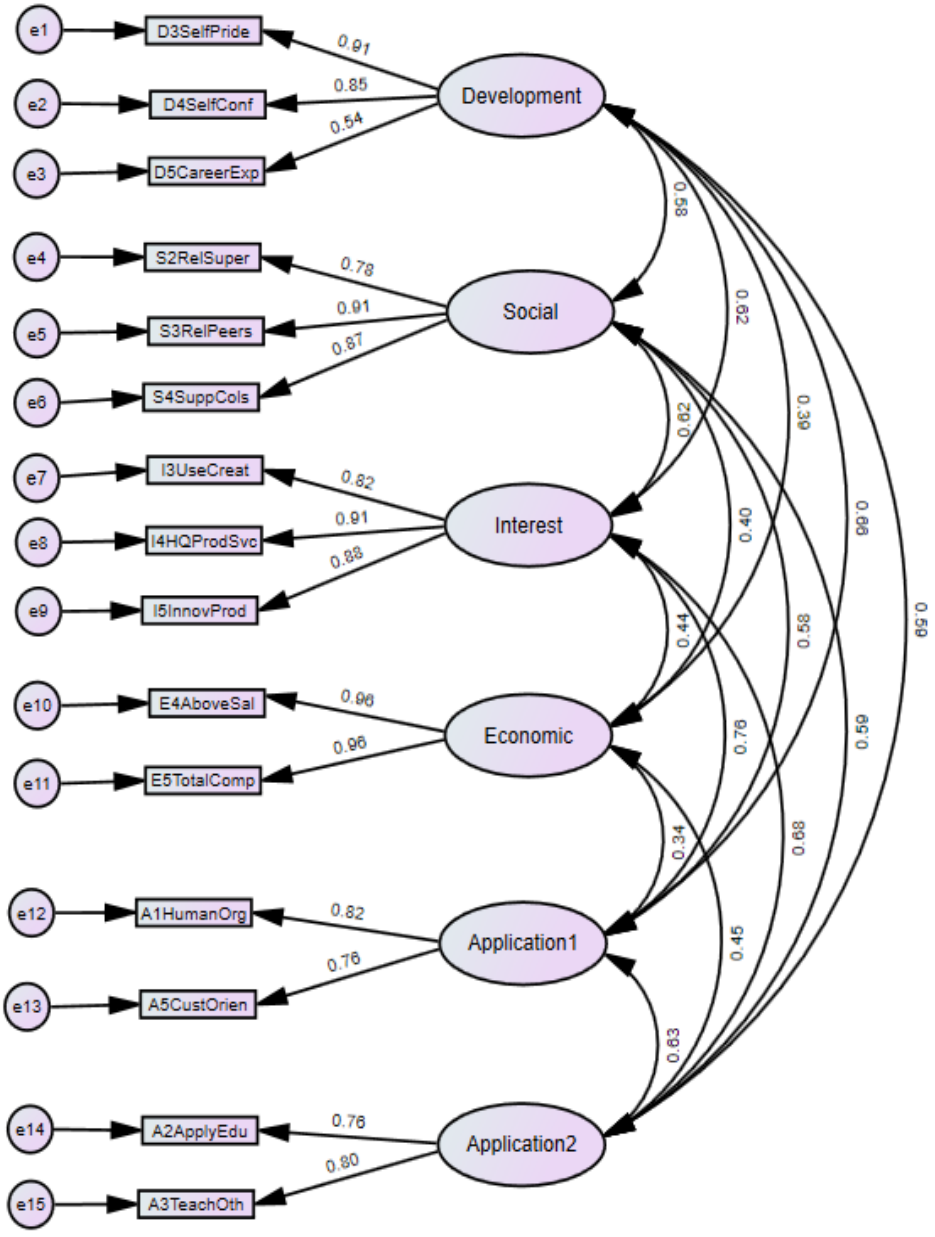
This solution was further tested with a CFA which showed acceptable fit indices: $\chi^2(78) = 326.271$, normed $\chi^2 = 4.183$, CFI = .951, TLI = .935, RMSEA = .081, 90% CI [.072; .090], PClose .000; and SRMR = .051. All factors have convergent validity as indicated by AVE and are also reliable (Table 7).

Table 7 - Factor Loadings, Convergent Validity, and Reliability

Indicator		Factor	Loading	AVE	Cronbach's alpha / rSB
QS2_6_D5	<---	Development	0.545	0.613	0.806
QS2_5_D4	<---	Development	0.846		
QS2_4_D3	<---	Development	0.909		
QS2_8_S3	<---	Social	0.911	0.732	0.882
QS2_7_S2	<---	Social	0.782		
QS2_9_S4	<---	Social	0.869		
QS2_14_I5	<---	Interest	0.885	0.759	0.900
QS2_13_I4	<---	Interest	0.910		
QS2_12_I3	<---	Interest	0.816		
QS2_25_E5	<---	Economic	0.958	0.922	0.960
QS2_24_E4	<---	Economic	0.962		
QS2_20_A5	<---	Application1	0.756	0.618	0.773
QS2_16_A1	<---	Application1	0.815		
QS2_17_A2	<---	Application2	0.760	0.610	0.754
QS2_18_A3	<---	Application2	0.802		

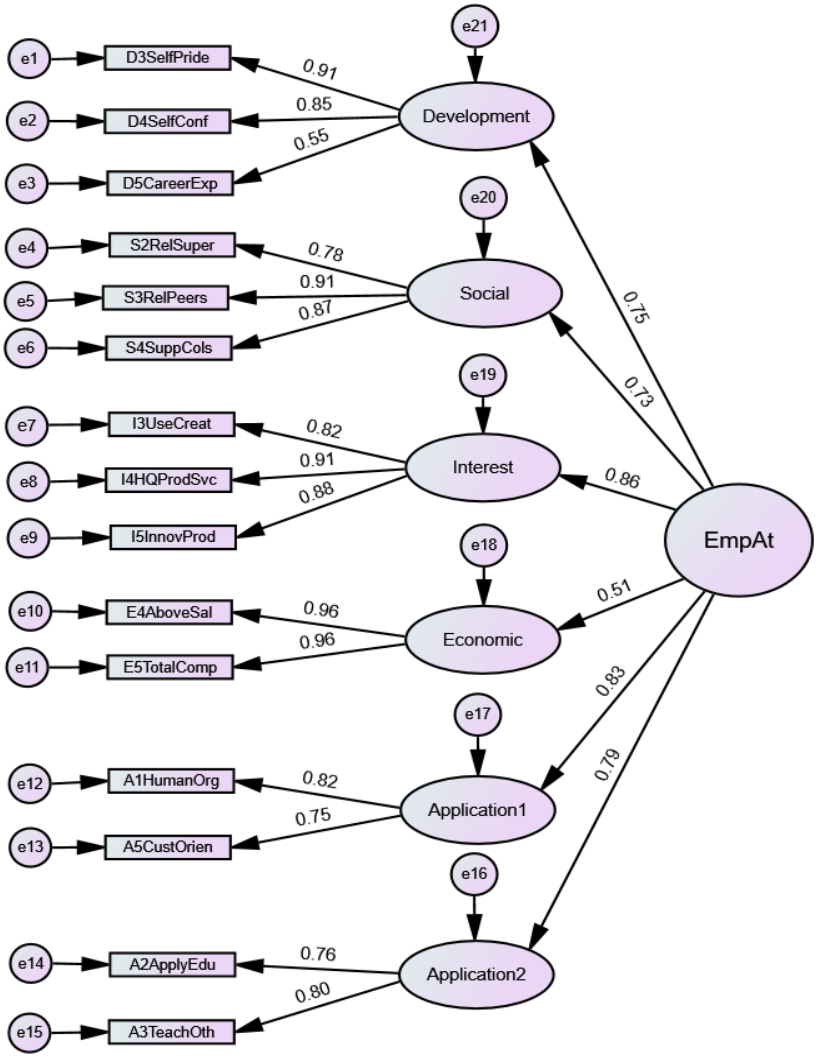
For clarity's sake, Figure 3 - CFA 1st Order Revised EmpAt shows the loadings and covariances between the 1st order factors.

Figure 3 - CFA 1st Order Revised EmpAt



However, when analyzing discriminant validity, HTMT indicated an issue related to the application dimensions where the value exceeds the .90. This suggests that the factors do not have sufficient difference to justify their splitting. By conducting a new CFA on the suggested fused solution between application dimensions, the fit indices are poorer than the previous 6-factor solution ($\chi^2(81) = 428.043$, normed $\chi^2 = 5.284$, CFI = .932, TLI = .912, RMSEA = .094, 90% CI [.085; .102], PClose = .000; and SRMR = .056 as indicated by the ΔCFI>.01 and the $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 101.772$) which has a p-value below .01, indicating worse fit. (Figure 4)

Figure 4 - CFA 2nd Order Revised EmpAt



These contradictory indications suggest that the application dimensions do exist, but under a 2nd order factor. By testing this solution, the fit improves to the point of being equivalent to the one found for the 1st order solution (ΔCFI = .001 and the $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 11.84$, p = .019) with acceptable convergent validity (AVE = .626). Therefore, anticipating a future test of the 2nd order factor, we consider that the application dimension is rightfully split and should be treated as such. Still, as a caveat, it is important to test eventual multicollinearity whenever these two factors are used in the same equation.

To test this same solution under a general 2nd order factor, we redesigned the factor structure, and findings indicate this solution has good fit indices as follows: $\chi^2(87) = 347.161$, normed χ^2 = 3.990, CFI = .949, TLI = .938, RMSEA = .078, 90% CI [.070; .087], P-close = .000; and SRMR = .055. The second order factor has convergent validity (AVE = .571) as well as reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .837). It also has equivalent fit to the original 6-factor 1st order solution (ΔCFI = .001 and the $\Delta\chi^2(9) = 20.89$, $p = .013$).

4. Discussion

The discussion of results will first focus on the means compared to the original and then on the psychometric quality.

4.1. Population and Sample Means

The overall scale means found for our sample fall below the means reported by Berthon et al. 2005. We interpreted this gap as evidence that the overall salience of the EmpAt attributes was weaker in our CPA context than in the original benchmark, while also recognizing that Berthon et al. (2005) explicitly framed the instrument around potential employer choice among prospective entrants (students), which could have heightened ratings in their sample relative to an incumbent public sector setting.

They also cautioned that employer attractiveness could vary across contexts and that cross-national extension required renewed psychometric testing, which reinforced the relevance of benchmarking the EmpAt profile in our Portuguese CPA setting rather than assuming invariance.

Likewise, apart from Application, all means in the EmpAt dimensions fall below those reported by Berthon et al. (2005). We interpreted the relatively lower means as a shift away from market-style rewards and mobility-related propositions and toward application-oriented meanings aligned

with public service and societal contribution. Moreover, as stated, the original sample comprises students who, at that stage, may experience stronger motivations to engage with a specific employer profile.

When the analysis focused on individual items, the means observed in our population fell below those reported by Berthon et al. (2005) in most items. Five items departed from this pattern. Three were rated significantly higher than in the original benchmark: 'humanitarian organization, gives back to society' (A1, +0.95), 'working in an exciting environment' (I1, +0.26), and 'customer-oriented' (A5, +0.21). Two application items were statistically equivalent across the two samples: 'opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution' (A2) and 'opportunity to teach others what you have learned' (A3). The contrasts reflects weaker emphasis on mobility and economic advantage and stronger emphasis on societal contribution and stimulating work content in Portuguese central public administration relative to the original benchmark.

4.2. Psychometric Quality - Construct Validity

As regards construct validity, the analyses indicated that the original factor structure did not hold in the present sample of Portuguese central public administration employees. Specifically, we retained three indicators for the development dimension, namely: D3 Self-pride, D4 Self-confidence, and D5 Career experience, while eliminating D1 Management recognition and D2 Career springboard. The retained items summarize psychological progress and professional self-efficacy, which are the essence of the EmpAt development domain (Pignault et al., 2023). As the CFA results show, D3 and D4 load strongly on Development ($\beta \approx .91$ and .85, respectively), whereas D5 loads moderately ($\beta \approx .55$). We nevertheless kept D5 for content coverage as it taps the *accumulation of experience* aspect of development, which would be under-represented if only pride/confidence were retained, and because the construct-level diagnostics remain acceptable with a valid Cronbach's alpha as well as AVE. In contrast, D1 overlapped conceptually and empirically with the Social climate indicators (recognition by others), undermining discriminant validity, and D2 ("springboard") reflects external labor-market mobility rather than developmental value *within* the organization, making it less appropriate in an internal-labor-market civil-service context.

For the social dimension, we preserved relational-quality items (S2 Relations with supervisors, S3 Relations with peers, S4 Supportive colleagues) and eliminated S1 Fun and S5 Happy work.

In the context of public administration, the items kept are more closely aligned with the social exchange that is more central than the hedonic experience associated with work. Empirically, this affective dimension was also found to cross with the development dimension, thus evidencing its transversal nature and contributing to blur the theoretical structure. In its current form, the revised factor is clearer about measuring high-quality day-to-day working relationships.

In the interest dimension, we kept “I3 Creativity”, “I4 High-quality products/services”, and “I5 Innovative products” and excluded “I1 Exciting work” and “I2 Innovative employer”. The discarded items represented broad "brand-level" attitudes that intersected with Development and Social excitement; the retained items emphasize intrinsic job content relevant to public work design.

For the economic dimension, we preserved “E4 Above-average wage” and “E5 Total compensation” while eliminating “E1 Promotion chances”, “E2 Job security”, and “E3 Interdepartmental experience”. Job security in the Portuguese public administration is a foundational feature that is rarely broken, which means that as an item it adds no value at all for either descriptive or comparative purposes within central public administration. The interdepartmental experience does not have a parallel to that observed in the private sector, as central public administration units entail departments that are aligned with its nature, therefore implying that interdepartmental experience is enabled not by a specific employer (unit) but rather by moving around, which is not the target of the EmpAt measure. Lastly, career progression is established by law equally for all in the central public administration and such opportunities are closely linked to compensation, which makes compensation a proxy. This is encouraged by the fact that both items retained are linked to compensation, which were also most distinctive due to their relatively lower means. This dimension, reduced to these two items, gains clarity as regards its indication of EmpAt’s “economic value”.

The application dimension is the one that required stronger adjustment to the original model for the central public administration. The original dimension is split into two: Application Civic (Civic/Service application) which comprises “A1 Humanitarian Organization” and “A5 Customer/Citizen Orientation”, and Application Knowledge which comprises “A2 Implement education” and “A3 Instruct others”. The first application factor pertains to civic service embodying the mission and public value aspect of application, the opportunity to apply one’s efforts

in aiding individuals and society, a fundamental signal consistent with PSM (Perry & Wise, 1990). This explanation is consistent with PSM and public value literature that connects prosocial impact signals to attraction (Vandenabeele & Jager, 2020). The second application factor pertains to Knowledge Application referring to knowledge and skill usage which are characteristic of professional public service positions. The only item removed was "A4 Belonging*"* because it cross-loaded with Social (supervisors/peers) and behaved as a sentiment rather than an "application" indicator.

4.3. A View on EmpAt as a General Construct

Both 1st and 2nd order factor solutions are theoretically defensible. However, the 2nd order factor solution is more informative about the overall employer attractiveness measure as well as the relative weight each dimension has in producing this overall perception. Not all dimensions load equally on the 2nd order factor as interest ($\lambda = .86$), Application Civic (civic service, $\lambda = .83$), and Application Knowledge (knowledge use/teaching, $\lambda = .79$) are the most contributive to the latent construct. These are followed by development ($\lambda = .75$) and social ($\lambda = .73$), and at a great distance, the economic ($\lambda = .51$).

These relative weights suggest that, when conceiving the overall image of employer attractiveness within the central public administration, the participants mostly represent in their minds what they value the most.

In this case, the Portuguese central administration roles look most appealing when respondents associate public employment with stimulating work content and visible public usefulness in line with the core nature of public service itself (Holt, 2018). As stated, Development and Social dimensions follow closely, where growth signals, such as pride and self-confidence, remain important, and relational conditions retain meaningful weight, with Social only slightly below Development.

The weakness of the economic value loading is informative. Despite maintaining statistical significance in terms of individual items, the second-order association of .51 implies insufficient leverage on the part of compensation as a discriminator when intrinsic, civic, development, and social factors are included in the model. This is consistent with the prevailing notion that government compensation lags behind private sector practices (Gindling et al., 2019).

4.4. Implications for Portuguese Public Administration

The results from the analysis of the EmpAt scale and necessary modifications have important theoretical and practical implications for the Portuguese central public administration.

The revised factor structure connects to each of the theoretical frameworks introduced earlier in ways that reinforce rather than contradict one another. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) helps explain why Interest and Application-Civic carry the strongest loadings on the second-order factor: civil servants derive part of their professional identity from the public mission of their organization, making stimulating work content and visible societal contribution the most identity-relevant signals an employer can send. Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973) and Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) together account for the relative weakness of Economic value: when compensation is centrally regulated and therefore identical across organizations, it loses its signaling function and ceases to operate as a meaningful exchange differentiator. Psychological Contract Theory (Rousseau, 1995) suggests that civil servants enter public employment with expectations shaped by public service values, and the strong weight of Application-Civic in the revised structure indicates those expectations center on mission fulfillment rather than financial reward. Taken together, these frameworks converge on the same conclusion that PSM theory reaches from a motivational angle (Perry, 1996): in a mission-driven institutional setting, the most powerful attractiveness signals are those that confirm an employee's sense of civic purpose and professional contribution

The applied contribution from our findings is also extensive. Namely, recruitment and internal branding within the central public administration institutional network will be favored by stressing job content and challenge. Communications that underline innovation, problem solving, quality standards, and autonomy in daily tasks have higher leverage potential since the Interest dimension holds the strongest loading within the general attractiveness construct. Additionally, institutional communication intended to foster positive employer attractiveness potential benefits from foregrounding civic service in concrete terms by providing examples of citizen impact, service improvements, and public value outcomes within their employer narratives, given the weight of Application Civic. Almost as important as the previous couple, talent practices that reinforce development pathways (such as a strong investment in training, mentoring, progression clarity, and opportunities to apply formal education and teach others) should receive consistent emphasis,

supporting both Development and Application Knowledge. Based on the findings, inter-institutional employer attractiveness benefits from giving compensation a baseline condition status rather than a lead message. Compensation is important, but attending to the means and the general public perception about compensation in the public sector plays a secondary role in determining the potential attractiveness (Vogel & Satzger, 2024).

4.5. Limitations

Findings reflect also limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the construct at hands is the inter-institutional employer attractiveness, which can be considered a subset of the larger employer attractiveness. Such brings limitations related to the studied population because the survey had to restrict only to employees of the central public administration. In other words, the focus on existing employees of public administration rather than job seekers who consider working there meant that the results do not address the attractiveness dynamics for potential external applicants. Still, due to the hiring contentions, there is a relatively reliance on internal mobility which implies the internal applicants' perception is relevant from both theory and applied viewpoints. The evaluation criteria for the measured dimensions in question may be slightly different from public at large, as in this case, participants work in the public sector. Still, their views reflect more experienced reality rather than mere expectation. An additional study involving, for instance, final-year university students or graduates who look into possibilities of getting employed in the public sector might be advantageous to get insight into the importance of different dimensions when evaluating how inter-institutional employer attractiveness may differ from general employer attractiveness so to gauge false expectations.

Furthermore, although the proposed six-factor structure seemed theoretically meaningful and has better fit compared to the original model, both exploratory and confirmatory solutions based on the latter were conducted using the same data sample. This means that despite the findings obtained via CFA, it cannot be claimed independently confirmed since they have been tested within the same sample. Sample-specific optimizations cannot be ruled out completely considering that items' elimination and factor rearrangement were based on the results obtained from the analyzed dataset. To conclude, future research should either replicate the new structure in an independent larger sample of Portuguese central public administration employees or use split-sample approach to examine the stability of the six-factor solution and Application split.

Third, another issue that needs acknowledgement concerns the comparability of the revised instrument. The current 15-item solution used for testing the six-factor structure cannot be compared directly to studies based on the original 25-item version of the EmpAt scale although there are cases where the scale was also trimmed down (e.g. (Caputo et al., 2023)).

5. Conclusion

This study asked "How should the EmpAt scale be specified to validly measure employer attractiveness among employees of Portuguese central public administration?" Findings indicate that the original five-factor specification does not adequately represent the construct in this institutional context and that a contextually refined six-factor structure provides a more valid specification.

Overall, the results indicate a positive response to the research question, since among employees of the Portuguese central public administration, the EmpAt construct can be represented as a new six-factor model, while the original five-factor specification was not sufficiently appropriate for use in the chosen context. Specifically, the newly developed framework maintains the main factors of the original EmpAt construct but distinguishes the Application dimension into Application-Civic and Application-Knowledge. This distinction reflects the ability of civil servants to separate public service from application of their knowledge in work situations. Nevertheless, the second-order factor analysis suggests that all the six dimensions represent the overall inter-institutional employer attractiveness construct, but the Economic value factor plays a less significant role than the remaining dimensions. Consequently, the most suitable specification of the EmpAt construct for central public administration is the adapted version of the original model.

All three hypotheses were supported. H1 hypothesized that the initial five-factor structure of EmpAt will display poor fit when tested on CPA sample. Such low fit should be caused by inconsistency between the underlying assumptions of the scale (market-oriented) and reality of statutory salary and career development in the civil service of Portugal. H1 was confirmed, as the CFA showed poor fit indices for the initial five-factor structure (CFI equals .812, RMSEA equals .114). H2 argued that the Application factor would split into two factors, Application-Civic and Application-Knowledge. This expectation was based on the idea that civic contribution and professional knowledge application may represent different forms of value in CPA: the first closely linked to PSM, and the second more closely linked to competence use and professional

contribution. Empirical analysis supported H2, as it revealed the Application-Civic and Application-Knowledge factors with good reliability and convergent validity. H3 argued that Economic value factor should exhibit lower loading in the second-order model, compared with the remaining factors. Second order solution showed following loadings for all six EmpAt dimensions: Interest (.86), Application-Civic (.83), Application-Knowledge (.79), Development (.75), Social (.73), Economic (.51). Thus, we can conclude that EmpAt scale requires structural adjustment to properly measure employer attractiveness within public servants in Portuguese CPA, and that the economic motive, as previewed, is not a main factor in this regard.

Eventually the most interesting finding emerging from this validation study is the split observed in the application dimension: Application-Civic (humanitarian orientation and citizen orientation), which is related to the civic engagement of civil servants, and Application-Knowledge, which refers to the application of professional knowledge. The comparison with Berthon et al. (2005) revealed that civil servants evaluated their compensation much lower compared to students, whereas humanitarian orientation was rated much higher by civil servants.

This work contributes to Public Administration literature in four ways. First, it provides the first psychometrically test of EmpAt in Portuguese central public administration, with a sample size sufficient to support full CFA and complete convergent, discriminant, and reliability assessment. Second, it offers theoretical ground for treating civic contribution and knowledge application as distinct motivational experiences within the Application dimension, a split partly grounded in PSM theory for the civic component and complemented by competence use and professional identity arguments for the knowledge component. Third, it characterizes the role of economic value in public sector inter-institutional employer attractiveness as a baseline institutional condition rather than differentiating employer signal, under the institutional interpretation discussed above and held provisionally pending replication. Fourth, it offers a replicable methodological template for adapting employer attractiveness measures to institutional settings where the assumptions of competitive labor markets and market-based rewards do not hold.

The findings and the limitations of the present study open two lines of inquiry.

The first line follows from a question the measurement work leaves unanswered. The new six-factor model explains the way civil servants understand the dimensions of inter-institutional

employer attractiveness. However, there is no explanation about whether the organizational leaders, the individuals responsible for the implementation of HR strategies, communication patterns, and culture associated with those perceptions of the employees, have the same understanding of the representation of employer attractiveness. In case of any differences between the perceptions of leaders and their employees, there will be an internal dissonance within organizations, where they are putting efforts into wrong levers, sending wrong signals, and failing to meet the expectations of the dimensions that employees find most important. In case this scenario is correct, it will become a second-order issue, which is not being addressed by the current measurement effort. A natural next step is a qualitative study focusing on leaders' interpretations.

The second line follows from a question the measurement work opens rather than closes. The revised structure tells us how inter-institutional employer attractiveness is perceived, but not what those perceptions produce. A psychometrically sound instrument is only useful if it predicts what matters, and what matters in public sector workforce management is ultimately whether civil servants choose to stay and whether they develop emotional attachment to the organizations where they work. The relative weights established here, with Interest, Application-Civic, and Application-Knowledge loading most strongly on overall attractiveness, generate specific expectations about which dimensions will carry the strongest effects on retention-relevant outcomes. The provisional interpretation of Economic value as a baseline institutional condition generates a parallel expectation about its weaker mediated effect. The commuting evidence in the sample description also points to location-based work-life balance as a plausible parallel predictor of the same outcomes, operating alongside the attractiveness dimensions rather than as a background control. An outcome-chain model testing these expectations, using the instrument validated here as its input, becomes the natural extension of the measurement work.

Together, this study and the new paths form a progression from measurement foundation, through mechanism understanding, to outcome prediction. The next study builds on the findings of this study, and both discuss the issue of employers attractiveness in Portuguese central public administration as an empirical concept, managerial and cultural reality, and a determinant of attitudinal consequences pertinent to retention.

Study 2
Comparing What Leaders Prioritize and What Employees Value: Employer Attractiveness in Portuguese central public administration

1. Introduction

Considering the results from Study 1, the concept of employer attractiveness, measured using the EmpAt scale devised by Berthon et al. (2005), does not seem to replicate in the Portuguese central public administration (CPA) the same construct configuration generally found in empirical research where the original factor composition of the concept is taken for granted without reassessing its validity in CPA settings or where CPA-specific populations have not been studied. This justifies a qualitative investigation into the factors deemed important for attraction and retention purposes by top managers in CPA, the extent to which such factors go beyond the traditional EmpAt variables, and the degree to which managers converge on their interpretations of those factors so that they may be compared with the data obtained in Study 1 from employees.

Study 2 aims to complement the employee-based evidence from Study 1 by examining how senior officials in Portuguese CPA interpret employer attractiveness, attraction, and retention. For such a purpose, it aims to attain four objectives. First, it seeks to identify differences in the relative importance of employer attractiveness dimensions from the senior CPA officials' viewpoint. Second, it aims to assess whether leadership perceptions converge with or diverge from the value dimensions and priorities reported by employees in Study 1. Third, it examines the specific role attributed by leaders to the two dimensions derived from the split of Application value, namely, civic contribution and knowledge application. Fourth, it aims to detect additional factors, beyond the classic EmpAt structure, that may form part of the implicit theory of employer attractiveness held by leaders in CPA, such as commuting conditions and workplace accessibility, institutional instability and reform exposure, and the development springboard effect through which training investment raises external employability.

Consistent with these research goals, this study is guided by six research questions: What aspects of employer attractiveness do senior leaders view as particularly significant for employee attraction and retention in Portuguese CPA? How do senior leaders view the relative significance of civic contribution, knowledge application, development, interest, social atmosphere, and economic value as factors affecting attractiveness? How do senior leaders conceptualize the distinction between civic contribution and knowledge application, and how do these two aspects relate to employer attractiveness perceptions? To what degree do senior leaders' perceptions correspond to the employee priorities identified in Study 1? What other important factors, beyond

those included in the classic EmpAt framework, are recognized by senior leaders as relevant to employer attractiveness? What implicit theory of employer attractiveness appears to guide senior leaders' understanding of why employees join, remain, and commit to their organizations?

In public administration, where mission-driven elements and institutional constraints often coexist with employee expectations, qualitative approaches offer unique insights into how strategic decisions, organizational culture, and public value are perceived internally (Perry & Hondeghem, 2008; Vandenabeele, 2007). For this reason, we have adopted a qualitative approach. In line with this option, this chapter presents the methodological rationale and procedures associated with the qualitative component of this research, particularly the use of semi-structured interviews conducted with leaders of public organizations.

The link between Study 1 and Study 2 rests on construct-level triangulation grounded in the refined EmpAt measurement from Study 1. The interview blocks were aligned with Application-Civic, Application-Knowledge, Development, Interest, Social, and Economic value, together with additional blocks grounded in the literature on P-O fit, job satisfaction, and affective commitment. Study 2 does not retest the psychometric validity of the revised scale. Instead, it examines whether leaders' accounts provide construct-level triangulation and substantive qualitative corroboration of the dimensions identified in Study 1.

The theoretical foundation of the initial study was retained in the current study in terms of the constructs contained within the interview blocks. Employer branding and employer attractiveness provided the foundation for the general theory of employment value propositions and attraction. Public service motivation and public value theory provided the framework for questions on the purpose and importance of the organization in attracting and retaining employees as well as the role in society. The concept of P-O fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2023) and values congruence were used to justify the mission and core values blocks. Social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986), and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) were used to explain the recognition and motivation blocks. Organizational culture served as the motivational factor for the cultural and work climate block. Job satisfaction and organizational commitment explained the blocks focused on outcomes since they are key HRM concepts. Compensation and total rewards theory were used to motivate the pay and benefits block.

Because the study is qualitative, it also allows factors beyond the classic EmpAt framework to be captured from leaders' accounts.

As will be illustrated, the study also examines location-based WLB as an additional factor beyond the classic EmpAt framework. This factor, informed by prior commuting and WLB research and by the relevance of commuting already identified in Study 1, captures the role of commuting costs, accessibility, and workplace location in shaping the employment experience of public servants.

2. Literature Review

Three strands of the employer attractiveness literature provide background for Study 2. The first strand deals with the instrument used to operationalize employer attractiveness (EmpAt). Berthon et al. (2005) developed the EmpAt measure for use in the private sector, Study 1 showed that the originally proposed five-factor structure was not reproduced without modification in Portuguese CPA when applied to contexts characterized by tight controls over pay levels and missions of particular importance. One such modification was developed in Study 1, which divided Application into its civic and knowledge components and produced a six-factor structure. Study 2 examines whether leaders' narratives provide substantive qualitative corroboration of that revised structure and help clarify how its dimensions are interpreted in practice. The second strand addresses P-O fit as a mechanism through which perceptions of organizational attributes lead to attitudinal outcomes like job satisfaction, commitment, and retention (Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Instead of asking which attributes of organizations attract employees, fit focuses on whether the package of benefits offered by the organization matches the interests of individual employees, which is the essence of comparing the narratives of leaders and employees as conducted in Study 2. Finally, there is an increasing concern over the impact of WLB on employee attraction and retention, specifically related to commuting and location. Recent studies emphasize the importance of accessibility, flexibility, and high costs of commuting as characteristics of employment with considerable influence on employee retention and attraction, especially in contexts in which wage differentiation is limited (Bloom et al., 2015; Harrop et al., 2025).

2.1. EmpAt, Public Service Motivation, Public versus Private

Based on the conceptual background provided in Study 1, three constructs that affect the analysis carried out in Study 2 are identified: the attractiveness of the employer, operationalized by means of the revised EmpAt structure, Public Service Motivation, which is considered the mechanism by means of which mission-based characteristics influence the attractiveness construct, and the public-private distinction that changes the role of these characteristics.

Study 1 has provided evidence that the five-factor structure of the EmpAt construct is not replicated in Portugal among CPAs, whereas the revised six-factor structure, including two types

of application factors, represents a more valid choice. Based on the second order loadings obtained in this structure, Interest, Application-Civic, and Application-Knowledge appear to be the most important sources of attractiveness, whereas Economic value loads least, which can be explained by the salary similarity and job immobility that distinguish the public sector in Portugal. Study 2 starts from this new empirical basis and checks for qualitative confirmation of this structure within the scope of leadership discourses.

PSM Theory, first formulated by Perry and Wise (1990), subsequently refined by Perry (1996), Vandenabeele (2007), and Kim and Vandenabeele (2010), offers the essential theoretical basis for understanding why civic contributions and knowledge applications constitute separable motivations for an institutionally driven organization, and also why the motivational effects of economic incentives become irrelevant once salaries are standardized. These theories, developed extensively in Study 1, lead to a prediction about Study 2 namely that leaders operating in the same institutional context as their employees will express a motivational configuration characterized by Civic, and interest motivations over and above economic value. The extent to which this prediction is met, and the way in which this varies from employee judgments, is the fundamental comparison undertaken in Study 2.

The public-private differentiation, based upon Perry and Rainey (1988), Boyne (2002), and Rainey and Bozeman (2000), determines the institutional framework within which both leaders and employees must operate. Within Portuguese CPA, legal requirements with regard to pay scales, career development and mission, define a work environment in which the employer brand is necessarily founded upon non-economic factors. Study 2 investigates how senior officers articulate this in practice.

Proposition 1: In a context characterized by public service, individuals who exhibit strong PSM, mission compatibility, public value orientation, and citizen impact perception will be more inclined towards joining and staying in the organization because of these characteristics instead of monetary motivators.

2.2. Psychological States as Mechanisms

Several theoretical constructs form the basis of the analysis framework that is employed in Study 2 for the interpretation of leadership narratives on attraction, retention, satisfaction, and commitment.

P-O fit underlies the process by which organizational traits contribute to attitudinal variables. When the goals, values, and traits of an individual match those of the organization, perceptions of fit become a source of job satisfaction and affective commitment while reducing the tendency to quit (Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). The social identity model supplements this process by explaining how congruence in values and affiliation with the group results in organizational membership and affective ties (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The two models can explain why leaders of mission-oriented organizations speak of civic identification and relational atmosphere as factors contributing to retention even in difficult economic times.

The concept of organizational culture, examined using the competing values approach, influences the interpretation of daily interactions within the organization, such as the expression of respect and inclusiveness and the fit between employee and organizational identities (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Schein, 2010). Social exchange theory accounts for organizational recognition, which is communicated via supervisors and organizational policies and results in employee loyalty and dedication (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Eisenberger et al., 1986). Self-determination theory highlights the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in promoting intrinsic motivation, which supersedes differentiation based on monetary compensation due to legal constraints on salary differences (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Career development theories consider mentoring, training, and career advancement as signals of organizational commitment to value creation in the future (D. G. Allen et al., 2003; Tansky & Cohen, 2001). Pay and benefit theories discourage the interpretation of leader perspectives on compensation without further investigation, as employee reports of pay motivation often fail to correspond to behavior (Barber, 1998; Rynes et al., 2004).

One major theoretical contribution in Study 2 is the direct comparison between what senior officials claim matters to employees and what employees actually report in Study 1. The relevance of this comparison is supported by the Mercer (2024) Global Talent Trends benchmark, which treats executive-employee perception gaps as a central diagnostic criterion in talent management,

and by internal employer branding theory, which holds that alignment between leadership intent and employee experience is a precondition for an effective employer value proposition (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

2.3. Vertical Alignment as a Key Driver

Several theoretical arguments support the expectation of partial alignment between leaders and employees, which this study examines through the comparison of themes across leader narratives and employee survey findings. Leaders tend to see attractiveness in terms of policy instruments, budgets, career rules, and considerations of legitimacy; on the other hand, employees tend to define attractiveness based on their experiences regarding work design and relations and boundary management.

Institutionalism provides further explanation as public organizations are subject to considerable pressure towards isomorphism and conformity to rules (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

This tension fits the earlier argument that public organizations cannot import private branding playbooks without adaptation, which raises the chance that leaders emphasize compliance-consistent themes, while employees emphasize experience-based themes such as supervisor support, recognition, and meaningful impact.

Location-based WLB is an additional construct beyond the classic EmpAt framework that adds value in portraying public administration-relevant outcomes and in specifying attraction and retention under commuting constraints. Its inclusion in Study 2 was theoretically informed rather than purely inductive: the interview guide deliberately incorporated a block on geographic location and accessibility so that leaders' accounts could clarify how commuting time, transport access, and workplace location enter their understanding of employer attractiveness (W. A. V. Clark et al., 2003; Van Ommeren & Gutiérrez-i-Puigarnau, 2011). The EmpAt framework will be enhanced by integrating accessibility and commuting as structural characteristics, whose effect can be measured in terms of time pressure and fatigue management and, consequently, boundary control, thereby linking up to satisfaction and commitment blocks of the mechanism chain used in Study 1.

Recent mapping of employer attractiveness research also points to a shift toward internal communication, employer branding aimed at current employees, and public sector organizational attractiveness as active strands of the field (Siem et al., 2025). This research direction supports the logic of combining employee survey evidence with leader interviews. The survey captures

employee evaluations of EmpAt-related dimensions and outcomes, while the interviews capture managerial sensemaking about the same dimensions, including intended messages, intended HR practices, and the implicit theory of retention operating inside senior leadership teams.

A central recent contribution to public administration links employer attractiveness to perceived public value rather than sector labels alone. Ritz et al. (2023) show stronger attractiveness for organizations perceived as generating public value, with PSM strengthening this relationship. This result matters for Study 2 because several interview questions asked directly about citizen orientation, societal contribution, mission, and core values, and those themes align with a public value mechanism rather than a narrow pay-centered mechanism. In practice, this framing helps interpret why employees can rate "civic" and "social impact" attributes as central even when financial attributes remain constrained by centralized rules.

Public sector recruitment and retention also depend on frictions that senior leaders see daily, such as formalization and administrative burden. Sievert et al. (2022) document formalization and administrative burden as obstacles to recruitment, a topic that fits naturally into senior official interviews because leadership often controls process design, approvals, and HR workflow choices even under legal constraints. These constraints help bridge potential gaps between what employees value and what managers feel able to change within the Portuguese central administration context.

Study 2 also follows Mercer's comparative logic by examining differences between leader and employee perceptions of attractiveness. The current research by Mercer in relation to Global Talent Trends involves a large sample including not only executives but also human resources and employees and stresses differences in priorities of work experience, security, and organization effectiveness. Additional data from the Edelman Trust Barometer special report on trust at work provides evidence that there are differences in perception between executives and non-executives, making it relevant to make such a comparison as a way to achieve the objectives of the analysis. In terms of the thesis argument, such a comparison enables to find where the perception of the significance of different levers is exaggerated, underestimating the problem of high friction.

A major added value of Study 2 lies in examining additional factors that extend the EmpAt-based model beyond its classic dimensions. Three such factors emerge as analytically relevant: location-based WLB, institutional instability under reform and political cycles, and the development springboard effect through which training investment increases external

employability. Of these, location-based WLB receives the most extensive theoretical treatment because it represents a new construct candidate for the EmpAt framework, while institutional instability and the springboard effect operate as contextual conditions that moderate the role of stability and development dimensions already in the model. One such factor is location-based WLB, which was theoretically anticipated and included in the interview protocol, but whose practical relevance for Portuguese CPA employer attractiveness is clarified through leaders' accounts. Recent evidence links hybrid work and location flexibility to retention and satisfaction outcomes. Bloom et al. (2015) report experimental evidence where hybrid work increased job satisfaction and reduced quit rates, with stronger quit reductions among employees with long commutes. This result is consistent with a WLB model based on commuting duration and boundary control. Additional labor economics findings from a stated preferences experiment also show high willingness to trade off flexibility of schedule, telework opportunities, and shorter commuting time, with higher compensation needed for long commuting time and lack of flexibility (Van Landeghem et al., 2024). Further research also finds an association between flexible working options and increased job satisfaction, enhanced organizational commitment, better work-life interface quality, and other well-being measures, while varying by type of flexibility arrangement (flextime, flexplace, both) (Harrop et al., 2025). Location-based WLB may thus provide a feasible option, even under the constraint of wage inflexibility, as a means to alter attractiveness experience in a public sector context, and interview results facilitate assessing its potential, limitations, and implementation issues in central organizations. Evidence on conditions and regulation of telework in Europe is also helpful in viewing telework/hybrid work as an organizational structure affecting working conditions and WLB (Eurofound, 2022).

Taken together, the updated literature supports a combined study logic for our thesis. Study 1 provides employee-level measurement of perceived attractiveness attributes and associated outcomes. Study 2 provides a leadership-level interpretation of the employment offer and its delivery mechanisms, plus a structured way to test alignment or misalignment between senior official beliefs and employee evaluations, in line with Mercer's executive employee comparison approach. Recent public administration evidence strengthens the civic and public value channel, recent recruitment research highlights administrative burden constraints, and recent labor and

organizational evidence supports location-based WLB as a distinct job amenity with meaningful implications for attraction and retention.

2.4. Location-Based Work-Life Balance Theories

WLB research begins with the role-conflict tradition. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined work-family conflict as the tension arising when the demands of one role become incompatible with the demands of another, identifying time, strain, and behavior as its three sources. Boundary theory extends this view by examining how individuals draw, maintain, and shift the lines between work and personal life (Ashforth et al., 2000). Some workers prefer integration of the two domains, others prefer segmentation, and organizational policies should accommodate both preferences. Greenhaus and Powell (2006) added a positive counterpart through the work-family enrichment construct, which describes how experiences in one role enhance the quality of life in another. Together, these frameworks establish WLB as a multi-dimensional outcome shaped by both job design and individual preference.

The conceptual frame has shifted over time from balance toward integration, reflecting changes in work organization, technology, and household structure. Kossek and Lautsch (2008) argued for individual agency in managing porous boundaries, and Kossek et al. (2013) extended the argument through an integration lens. The operational lever in both views is flexibility, defined as control over when, where, and how work happens (Richman et al., 2008). Karasek's (1979) job demand-control model anchors the connection between flexibility and well-being by linking autonomy to reduced strain. Bloom et al. (2015) provided experimental evidence linking hybrid arrangements to higher job satisfaction and lower quit rates, with the strongest retention gains among workers facing long commutes.

Commuting has come to be a structural aspect of WLB, separate from in-role flexibility but important in its own way. According to Chatterjee et al. (2020), significant reductions in life satisfaction can be seen with respect to longer commute times. Kahneman et al. (2004) identify commuting as one of the activities that people find to have the worst emotional valence of any on a daily basis. Stutzer and Frey (2008) use longitudinal data to show the negative well-being effects of extended commuting times, which are often not appreciated until after taking the job. In the case of public sector jobs, where salary differentiation does not exist, commuting and geographic location transition from being peripheral factors into core factors of the employment package. Kim

and Wiggins (2011) show that longer commutes are correlated with lower levels of job satisfaction for public sector employees, while flexible working time helps mitigate this relationship. In Portuguese CPA, the issue of geographical location takes place at two levels. First, there is access to a workplace, both in terms of transport, parking, and access conditions. Second, there is the spread of operational locations across Portugal, where assignment to a particular position becomes an independent factor with regard to commute time despite the employer. Geographic location, together with access conditions to the place of work, become the core elements of the location-based WLB construct examined in Study 2.

3. Method

The literature reviewed above identifies the constructs and theoretical mechanisms relevant to employer attractiveness in CPA. Study 2 operationalizes those constructs through semi-structured interviews with senior officials (Appendix B), structured around fourteen interview questions grouped into six thematic blocks. Each interview question maps to one or more theoretical anchors from the literature, as shown in Table 8 The remainder of this section presents the research design, the interview protocol, the sampling strategy, and the data processing and coding procedures.

3.1. Research Design

3.1.1. Qualitative

The rationale for Study 2 being a qualitative interpretivist study stems from the focus of the research questions on the interpretations of senior public officials concerning employer attractiveness in the context of their organization. In contrast to the measurement of the proportion of respondents sharing similar views about employer attractiveness, Study 2 aims to analyze the meanings of attraction and retention in the eyes of organizational leaders, the interpretative process through which they make sense of the HR tools at their disposal, and the underlying assumptions that frame their interpretation. This approach is congruent with the interpretivist tradition, whereby social reality is seen as constructed through meaning, language, and interpersonal interactions rather than existing independently and thus not fully comprehensible via standard measurement techniques (Creswell & Poth, 2023; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

From this perspective, employer attractiveness becomes an interpretive organizational phenomenon in which leaders describe how they view their organization's competitive advantages and limitations, how they define attractions and retention, and how they relate the organizational context to employee motivation. Such interpretations cannot be captured entirely by means of survey items but are better explored via qualitative investigation of participant explanations and reasoning.

In line with Yin and Campbell (2018), qualitative methods are more suitable to answer research questions about how or why something happened instead of how much it happened, and when the goal is to gain conceptually rich insights instead of statistically representative measurements.

This study's research questions are about senior public leaders' thinking about what makes an employer attractive, why different types of organizations require different weights to different factors, and what unspoken beliefs leaders use to make decisions about what attracts candidates and keeps employees loyal. These are interpretive questions that probe into how public leaders think, judge situations, and make sense of things. This is exactly the kind of information that interviews are meant to gather.

As some scholars, such as Strauss and Corbin (1998), argue, qualitative research is capable of illustrating the complex nature of social phenomena in ways impossible to achieve through the use of quantitative techniques. Rubin and Rubin (2011) provide an even more detailed justification of interviews as a data collection technique, noting that interviewing enables the researcher to track the thought processes of informants, to establish the criteria for assessment, and to identify the implicit knowledge of actors. Given that this research project seeks to explore the implicit theory of attractiveness of employers among public sector leaders, interviews are appropriate here.

In organizational studies, interviewing high-level officials is especially informative, as elite actors are in places that let them see how organizations work, how people are hired, and how employees act in ways that other informants cannot (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). These actors can elaborate about both the official rules of the organization and the unwritten rules, cultural factors, and structural constraints that affect how workers follow those rules. However, their accounts are not clear windows into the organization's reality. Instead, they are interpreted constructions that show their own positionality, institutional interests, and cognitive frameworks. This is a limitation that qualitative analysis must recognize and deal with by using rigorous reflexivity and cross-case comparison.

3.1.2. Interviews as the chosen technique

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the data collection method because they enable comparability and at the same time provide flexibility sufficient to investigate the underlying rationale behind the narratives of the organizational leaders. The use of an interview guide ensured comparability by including the same key dimensions of employer attractiveness within all ten organizations, while using a semi-structured approach helped to ask additional clarifying questions and gain deeper insight into the rationale specific to the organizations studied (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Qu & Dumay, 2011). This method was especially suitable for the present study, since in

addition to revealing the key factors mentioned by the leaders and their interpretations of the attractiveness factors, it enabled an analysis of how such factors could be explained by organizational limitations as well as compared to the findings from Study 1.

3.1.3. Interview protocol

Based on the findings from Vandenabeele and Jager (2020), who examined the role of organizational signaling and value-focused communication in creating an employer brand, the interview guide explores the perceptions that public officials have regarding their organization's attractiveness and the degree to which this aligns or misaligns with employee preferences. Theoretically, these dimensions are connected to earlier frameworks in the literature. Kim's (2012) model posits that value congruence (P-O fit) is a significant determinant of public employees' well-being. The interview allows for an evaluation of the alignment between leadership's impression of values and appeal and employees' actual experiences, an important element that surveys may inadequately reflect.

We used a detailed interview outline that included important subjects such as the organization's employer positioning, executives' thoughts on the pros and cons of working in the public sector, and recent initiatives to improve the organization's reputation as an employer. However, participants were still free to bring forward new ideas.

The interview guide covers 14 questions chosen to integrate the interviews, and each one was thought of as being an important aspect of what makes an employer attractive. The themes were taken from the EmpAt survey used, ideas from the literature, and practice-oriented benchmarks such as the Mercer (2024) Global Talent Trends Report. Overall, the questions are spread across six blocks. They were not sequentially presented (questions from the same block were shown to be mixed with others) so that the interview would allow for an increasing building up of complexity.

The first block covered perceived attractiveness factors and comprised five questions starting with a general focus: "From your perspective, what are the main factors that make your public organization attractive as an employer?", and moving on to cover specific EmpAt factors, namely: job security "How much weight does the job security and stability offered by your organization carry in attracting new employees and retaining current employees?", development and career progression "What opportunities for professional development and career progression does your organization offer, and to what extent do those opportunities influence candidates' decisions to join

the institution?", innovation and creativity "How do you assess your organization's ability to promote an innovative work environment and to encourage employees' creativity? To what extent do people see this as relevant?", compensation and benefits "What role do pay and benefits offered by your organization play in professionals' decisions to join and to stay? Beyond reward and recognition practices established in general law, are there practices that differentiate your organization from comparable public bodies? If yes, which practices?"

The second block covered mission and purpose and comprises two questions targeting public value and citizen orientation: "To what extent does contributing to society and a citizen-oriented focus help attract and retain employees? Please share examples.", and mission and core values, "To what extent do the public mission and the organization's core values weigh in professionals' decisions to choose to work in your institution?"

The third block covered organizational culture and comprised one question that specifically focused on culture: "How would you describe the organizational culture and the work environment in your institution, and how do you think those aspects influence professionals' decisions to join and to stay with the organization?"

The fourth block covered recognition, satisfaction and commitment and comprised three questions starting with employee recognition from leadership: "How does leadership recognize and value employees' contributions, and how relevant do you see this recognition for motivating professionals to work, and to keep working, in the institution?", and also targeting satisfaction: "How would you describe employees' level of satisfaction with the organization and with their roles?", and commitment: "What level of commitment to the organization and sense of belonging do you observe among employees?".

The fifth block covered the additional topic of location and commuting, comprising one question: "To what extent does your organization's geographic location and ease of access, for example, transport options and commuting time, influence public servants' decisions to join the organization?"

The sixth, and final block covered alignment between leadership and employee perspectives and comprised two questions targeting implicit theories about the relative strength of employee motivators: "What do you see as the main factors that motivate employees to perform well in your organization? Include the 6-factor ranking using the EmpAt definitions.", and "When you consider

all factors that help explain why this institution is attractive to prospective employees, what strengths help attract strong candidates, and what weaknesses reduce attractiveness for future strong candidates?"

3.1.4. Triangulation with Survey and Alignment of Perspectives

The design of the interview, as shown in Table 8 with questions based on the employee survey items, was conceived to help combine qualitative and quantitative data. By mapping one-to-one themes, we may compare the numerical ratings with the leaders' stories on each dimension, which is achieved in the sixth block. This mixed-methods alignment supports construct-level triangulation by examining whether the dimensions identified in the employee survey are also reflected in leaders' accounts of employer attractiveness (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

The interview also implicitly tests congruence between leadership and workforce perspectives. In theory, effective employer branding and HR strategy require alignment between what leaders intend and what employees experience (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The reasoning behind this approach is based on Person-Environment theory and Social Exchange theory, suggesting that leaders manage policies within the organization (environment), whereas employees offer information via their attitudes and behavior. In case leaders properly comprehend employee values, P-O fit is high, and attraction increases (Cable & DeRue, 2002). On the other hand, differences can suggest a dysfunctional psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995) or a mismatch in social identity communication (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). By explicitly asking leaders whether their perceptions "match" those of employees (as the interview prompts do), the methodology echoes requests in the literature to analyze diverse stakeholder viewpoints in employer branding (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003) and to integrate managerial and employee data (Davies et al., 2001).

Table 8 - Interview Script, Central Theme, and Key Theorists

Question Number	Interview question text	Central theme	Key theorists
Q1	From your perspective, what are the main factors that make your public organization attractive as an employer?	Employer attractiveness	Berthon et al. (2005), Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), Lievens and Highhouse (2003)
Q2	How would you describe the organizational culture and the work environment in your institution, and how do you think those aspects influence professionals' decisions to join and to stay with the organization?	Organizational culture and work environment	Schein (2010), Cameron and Quinn (2011), Kristof-Brown et al. (2005)
Q3	How much weight does the job security and stability offered by your organization carry in attracting new employees and retaining current employees?	Job security and stability	Perry and Wise (1990), Vandenabeele (2007)
Q4	To what extent does contributing to society and a citizen-oriented focus help attract and retain employees? Please share examples.	Public value and citizen orientation	Perry and Wise (1990), Perry (1996), Vandenabeele (2007)
Q5	How does leadership recognize and value employees' contributions, and how relevant do you see this recognition as for motivating professionals to work and to keep working in the institution?	Recognition and appreciation	Eisenberger et al. (1986), Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), Deci and Ryan (2000)
Q6	What opportunities for professional development and career progression does your organization offer, and to what extent do those opportunities influence candidates' decisions to join the institution?	Development and career progression	Allen et al. (2003), Tansky and Cohen (2001), Kuvaas (2008)
Q7	How do you assess your organization's ability to promote an innovative work environment and to encourage employees' creativity? To what extent do people see this as relevant?	Innovation and creativity	Amabile (1996), Mumford and Gustafson (1988)
Q8	To what extent do the public mission and the organization's core values weigh in professionals' decisions to choose to work in your institution?	Mission and core values	Chatman (1989), Cable and DeRue (2002), Ashforth and Mael (1989)
Q9	What do you see as the main factors that motivate employees to perform well in your organization? Include the 6-factor ranking using the EmpAt definitions.	Work motivation and factor ranking	Deci and Ryan (1985), Herzberg (1966), Perry et al. (2010)

Q10	How would you describe employees' level of satisfaction with the organization and with their roles?	Job satisfaction	Locke (1976), Spector (1997), Judge et al. (2001)
Q11	What level of commitment to the organization and sense of belonging do you observe among employees?	Organizational commitment and belonging	Meyer and Allen (1991), Mowday et al. (1979), Riketta (2002)
Q12	What role do pay and benefits offered by your organization play in professionals' decisions to join and to stay? Beyond reward and recognition practices established in general law, are there practices that differentiate your organization from comparable public bodies? If yes, which practices?	Pay, benefits, and differentiating practices	Rynes et al. (2004), Barber (1998)
Q13	To what extent does your organization's geographic location and ease of access, for example, transport options and commuting time, influence public servants' decisions to join the organization?	Location and access	Van Ommeren and Gutiérrez-i-Puigarnau (2011), Clark et al. (2003)
Q14	When you consider all factors that help explain why this institution is attractive to prospective employees, what strengths help attract strong candidates, and what weaknesses reduce attractiveness for future strong candidates?	Integrated strengths and weaknesses	Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), Berthon et al. (2005)

3.2. Sampling and Participants

3.2.1. Type of sampling

Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research when the aim is to select information-rich participants whose roles and experience allow them to provide analytically useful accounts of the phenomenon under study (Palinkas et al., 2015).

3.2.2. Eligibility criteria

Due to the nature of the information targeted, the eligible interviewees have to be senior managers in public administration who hold strategically significant roles and possess knowledge of talent management processes. The incorporation of diverse organizational contexts (e.g., central government organizations, regulatory agencies, public institutes) sought to portray the diversity of the Portuguese central public sector.

The selected organizations include inspection and oversight bodies, general secretariats, public institutes, and directorates general, thereby capturing variation in organizational mission, degree of technical specialization, citizen contact, and managerial constraints. The interviewees held the highest leadership role in each institution, which is appropriate given the objectives of the study, since these actors possess a strategic view of recruitment, retention, organizational positioning, and human resource constraints.

3.2.3. Procedure

Senior officials were contacted to invite them to participate in this study, which comprised the informed consent that was written in accordance with the guidelines from ISCTE and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Namely, the purpose and academic nature of the study were clarified upfront, alongside its voluntary participation, making explicit that the interviewee could drop out at any time without any consequence, stating also that no foreseeable risk or harm would come from participating, as well as the benefits that the participation could bring to the current knowledge via the study. The informed consent shared (Appendix C) an estimate about the length of the interview, as well as the personal contacts of the researcher, should any doubts emerge after its completion. The nature of the study implies the identification of the organizations, and because the eligible participant is the most senior leader, it would be impossible to preserve anonymity. Therefore, the informed consent made clear that participation would entail the possibility of nominally identifying the participants. Due to the contents of the interview not being sensitive, all invited participants have given their written, signed informed consent under these circumstances.

Interviews started without a fixed target number because the stopping rule combined two complementary criteria, information saturation and analytical diversity. Information saturation was assessed following the procedure described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and operationalized through three indicators applied after each interview. The first indicator was the proportion of new subthemes emerging from the latest interview relative to the cumulative coding frame. The second was the recurrence of previously identified themes across interviews from different organizational types. The third was the absence of new theoretical insights relevant to the research questions. Saturation was considered reached when no new subthemes emerged for two consecutive interviews and when the existing themes were confirmed across at least three different organizational types. This stage was reached during the eighth interview. Another two interviews were subsequently carried out to ensure adequate coverage of organizations belonging to organizational types not yet covered in the sample, namely a large territory-wide organization and a central service that cut across multiple themes. This resulted in a sample of ten organizations that demonstrates a combination of thematic saturation and diversity that is acknowledged as an important criterion for stopping in qualitative research (Palinkas et al., 2015).

3.2.4. Participants

Participants are senior officials from ten organizations within the Portuguese CPA. The intention was not statistical representativeness, but analytical breadth across different institutional contexts. Across the ten organizations, the aggregate workforce totals 3,824 employees, which corresponds to approximately 8.4% of the workforce of Portuguese CPA. Although this proportion does not support statistical generalization, it provides meaningful analytical coverage of organizational diversity within the sector.

We interviewed top leaders from ten core public administration institutions with varied missions, operating models, and workforce profiles. The interviews lasted on average around 25 to 35 minutes each. The sample is characterized in Table 9.

Table 9 - Sample Characteristics

Abv	Institution	Position	Name	Gender	Age	Nr. Employees	Interview Duration
IGF	Inspeção-Geral de Finanças	Inspector General	António Ferreira	M	>60	179	33':23''
SGMSAUDE	Secretaria-Geral do Ministério da Saúde	Secretary General	Ana Pedroso	F	50-60	78	21':35''
INA	Instituto Nacional de Administração	President	Luisa Neto	F	50-60	133	21':07''
DGAV	Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária	Director General	Susana Pombo	F	50-60	783	39':35''
IMPIC	Instituto dos Mercados Públicos, do Imobiliário e da Construção	President	Fernando Baptista	M	50-60	110	29':23''
ICNF	Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas	President	Nuno Banza	M	50-60	1800	23':51''
SGMTSSS	Secretaria-Geral do Ministério do Trabalho da Solidariedade e da Segurança Social	Secretary General	Maria João Lourenço	F	>60	105	27':24''
DGAEP	Direção Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público	Director General	Armanda Fonseca	F	50-60	115	22':56''
DGLAB	Direção-Geral do Livro dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas	Director General	Luis Santos	M	40-50	321	22':59''
DGT	Direção-Geral do Território	Director General	Fernanda do Carmo	F	50-60	200	39':39''

The set contains two inspection and oversight agencies, IGF and IMPIC, that work with high technical demands and considerable external visibility. It also contains two general secretariats, SGMSAUDE and SGMTSSS, whose work focuses on governance support, coordination, and shared services inside respective ministries. INA represents the training and capacity-building function for the public sector. DGAV represents a significant operational regulator with substantial fieldwork demands in food safety, animal health, and border and slaughterhouse regulations. ICNF represents a large territorial organization with field operations and a strong conservation mission. DGAEP represents a cross-cutting central service focused on public employment and administrative policy. DGLAB represents a national authority with a strong knowledge and heritage mandate. DGT represents a specialist technical directorate general focused on territory, spatial planning, geographic information, and related activities.

These organizations differ substantially in workforce size: while in SGMSAUDE it is 78, in ICNF it reaches as much as 1,800, while in DGAV it is also significant, equaling 783. Leaders in smaller organizations have more interaction with their employees, resulting in better information about organizational culture, forms of recognition, and informality. In larger organizations that cover some territory and operate in shifts, issues like staffing, logistics, strain

on operations, and disparity between departments are emphasized. Accordingly, interviews were conducted for different periods of time, from 21 to roughly 39 minutes depending on the complexity of organizational operations and storytelling.

Accordingly, we selected institutions from CPA that differed in their degree of interaction with citizens, field operation versus head office activity, levels of specialization in technical matters, competitive pressure in terms of salaries, and visibility in the public sphere. This approach was intended to facilitate the process of identifying organizational patterns and help us distinguish those that reflect sectorial trends from those that represent organizational peculiarities.

3.3. Data Processing and Coding

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding combined deductive categories derived from the literature and survey items with inductive openness to new subthemes, allowing new subthemes to emerge from the narratives of the leaders.

This data processing and coding is based on the methodological framework of content analysis developed by Bardin (1977). In accordance with the methodology, the analysis of qualitative data consists of three consecutive stages: pre-analysis; exploration of the material; and analysis of findings. During the pre-analysis stage, ten interview texts were read entirely, and the scope of research was determined. The unit of analysis was determined as the meaning unit, one complete sentence or a short group of related sentences conveying a single thought concerning the question asked in the interview. This decision is made in line with Bardin's methodological advice not to use the unit of recording exclusively on the basis of its syntax but in regard to its meaning.

The exploration phase applied a hybrid coding strategy that combines deductive and inductive procedures, which Bardin frames as mixed content analysis. The initial coding frame was built from the interview guide, the refined EmpAt structure from Study 1, and the theoretical propositions associated with each thematic block. This deductive starting point is consistent with what Hsieh and Shannon (2005) call directed content analysis, where prior theory provides the initial categories (or *a priori* coding; see Bardin, 1977). At the same time, the coding remained open to themes not anticipated by the original framework, following Bardin's provision for emergent categorization when the material contains meanings the analyst did not predetermine, i.e., *a posteriori* coding.

For the first round of coding, statements were coded into subthemes in relation to each interview question. For the second round of coding, subthemes were compared between the ten cases and grouped together to form cross-case analytical themes, according to pattern coding and matrix comparison techniques explained by Miles et al. (2014) and Saldaña, (2021). This was helpful in identifying dominant trends, underlying mechanisms, and pertinent outliers for each research question through comparative analysis with the interview data.

To organize the coded material and support cross-case comparison, the analysis used a question-by-question matrix with organizations in columns and themes in rows. Two descriptive indicators were applied within this matrix: Frequency (F), which refers to counting the total number of supporting statements associated with each theme across all interviews, and Number of organizations (N), which indicates how many organizations mentioned the theme. Bardin (1977) explicitly allows for the use of frequency counts in content analysis as a descriptive tool to assess the relative weight of themes, on the condition that counting supports interpretation rather than replacing it.

In the inference stage, the data that were coded and counted were analyzed in four phases, namely, dominance of themes through salience, analysis of outliers and deviations unique to the organization, linkages to the theory from the literature, and triangulation against Study 1's quantified results. This is consistent with how Bardin views the process of inference as the key mental act involved in content analysis, which refers to the process of inferring from the manifest content of the text to its latent structural meanings.

The findings of this qualitative study are presented below, with emphasis on the themes related to the characteristics that make employers attractive, with emphasis on their areas of agreement and disagreement relative to Study 1.

4. Results

4.1. Interview Findings by Question

The corpus underwent a theoretical content analysis approach that was divided according to questions asked (Bardin, 1977). The selection of this method resulted in fourteen thematic questions, which were related directly to the concepts, value dimensions, and propositions identified in Study 1. Specifically, each research question was considered as an analytical unit of the first level, thus ensuring comparability across organizations while keeping the conceptual purity of each topic under discussion, such as culture and climate, job security, public value, recognition, development, innovation, P-O fit, remuneration, and commuting.

The analysis proceeded via four steps after the data was coded. Firstly, the major themes and their saliency were established using the cross-case matrix. Secondly, the outliers and unique characteristics of specific institutions were considered to prevent organizational generalization. Thirdly, a connection was established between each question and the related theory and its quantitative findings revealed in the previous study, which permitted triangulation of the qualitative and quantitative evidence gathered from employees and leaders' interviews respectively. In this regard, the qualitative analysis did not stand alone. It served an explanatory mechanism-oriented function, explaining how leaders perceive organizational attractiveness and the priorities that they set, while comparing their opinions with those of employees'.

A final methodological point concerns the logic of inference. Because the sample was purposive and designed for analytical breadth rather than statistical representativeness, the findings should be interpreted as cross-case explanatory patterns rather than as population estimates. The value of the coding procedure lies in its ability to compare meaning structures across a strategically diverse set of public organizations, identify the relative salience of themes, and connect those qualitative patterns to the broader construct structure and attitudinal results already established in the employee survey.

4.2. Block 1: Factors That Make a Public Organization Attractive as an Employer

4.2.1. Factors of employer attraction

The analysis of Question 1 ("What are the main factors that make your public organization attractive as an employer?") reveals a differentiated, multi-dimensional structure of employer attractiveness across the sample. Rather than converging on a single dominant factor, interviewees articulate attraction through a combination of symbolic, relational, practical, and

knowledge-based dimensions, with variation across organizational types. Table 10 presents the full frequency distribution of attraction themes by organization.

The most frequently articulated attraction theme is ***flexibility, telework, and people-centered management*** (F = 14, N = 4). ICNF, SGMTSSS, DGAEP, and DGT all frame flexible work arrangements, including telework, WLB policies, and managerial accommodation of personal needs as central components of their employer value proposition.

Institutional reputation, reference status or strategic centrality is the second most common topic (F = 13, N = 6). In addition to that, reference status shows the most widespread organizational representation throughout the data set. Indeed, the data shows significant variation in terms of how different organizations represent this particular topic. IGF bases its reference status on well-known brand and high media coverage. SGMSAUDE uses institutional prestige and competence as grounds for its reference status. INA refers to its long-term (46 years) institutional tradition and re-centralization from 2021 onwards. DGAEP represents its reference status as the public service in the context of public administration. DGLAB emphasizes its dual authority status as the national regulatory body for both archives and libraries. DGT stresses its exclusive national competence and its role as the focal point for EU territorial cooperation programs such as URBACT.

Mission, public impact, or meaningful contribution is the third most frequent theme (F = 10, N = 3), but its distribution is markedly concentrated. All supporting statements originate from DGAV, IMPIC, and ICNF. DGAV frames its work around protecting society and consumers, safeguarding the agri-food chain, and addressing zoonotic diseases, presenting the public health dimension of its mandate as inherently attractive to prospective candidates. IMPIC emphasizes the direct regulatory impact of its functions on the daily lives of citizens and the approximately 80,000 entities it oversees. ICNF connects its remit to nature, forests, and social relevance, noting that workers are drawn by the desire to work in environmentally meaningful domains.

Table 10 - Frequency of Attraction Themes by Organization

Theme	F	N	IGF	SGMSAUDE	INA	DGAV	IMPIC	ICNF	SGMTSSS	DGAEP	DGLAB	DGT
Institutional reputation, reference status, or strategic centrality	13	6	3	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	3	2
Positive climate, cohesion, or collaborative environment	9	5	0	3	1	0	2	0	2	1	0	0
Flexibility, telework, or people-centered management	14	4	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	3	0	4
Learning, school effect, or career capital	8	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2
Mission, public impact, or meaningful contribution	10	3	0	0	0	5	3	2	0	0	0	0
Economic differentiation described as weak or absent	5	3	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
Location or ease of access	4	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	0
Exceptional HR investment or material work conditions	7	1	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	0

Note. F = Frequency; N = Number of organizations; IGF = Inspeção-Geral de Finanças; SGMSAUDE = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério da Saúde; INA = Instituto Nacional de Administração; DGAV = Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária; IMPIC = Instituto dos Mercados Públicos, do Imobiliário e da Construção; ICNF = Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas; SGMTSSS = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social; DGAEP = Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público; DGLAB = Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas; DGT = Direção-Geral do Território.

Positive climate, cohesion, or collaborative environment is the fourth most frequent theme (F = 9, N = 5). In SGMSAUDE, a positive work environment spreads through informal word-of-mouth between current and prospective workers. INA similarly reports that its internal work atmosphere becomes known outside the organization through informal networks. IMPIC formalizes climate investment through whole-team workshops held three times per year. SGMTSSS emphasizes team cohesion and solidarity at the leadership level. DGAEP acknowledges an informal and accessible atmosphere that coexists with a formal hierarchical structure.

Learning, school effect, or career capital constitutes an analytically important theme (F = 8, N = 4). IGF and DGAEP both explicitly use the metaphor of a school to describe their organizational identity, framing the institution as a place where people arrive with a disposition to learn and from which they depart with enhanced professional credentials. Knowledge transfer that allows for competence building within workers is presented by DGLAB as its value. On the other hand, DGT emphasizes unique projects in terms of technology that allow for curriculum development and self-satisfaction, with the important fact being that workers opt to join the organization despite equal or better wages elsewhere.

Exceptional HR investment and material work conditions is an example of a topic that is wholly centered on one particular institution. ICNF has all the seven sentences that have been coded (F = 7, N = 1). This institution is responsible for fully applying the SIADAP appraisal system, paying out around €500,000 per annum in performance payments, having a base salary level that is relatively low, offering 100 new pickup trucks to their teams on the ground, offering laptops to all their employees due to a million euro deal with Microsoft, and investing some €20 million into the restoration of eleven buildings throughout the country.

Economic differentiation identified as lacking or even nonexistent in five sentences coded in three organizations (F = 5, N = 3): IGF, IMPIC, and DGT. It is not just that salary is ignored in the leaders' descriptions of attractiveness. Rather, economic constraints are pointed out and compared with the firm's strengths as being well known facts of public sector employment. IGF points out that its past advantage of salary is now waning. IMPIC mentions that there is no scope for further increase in the salary structure. DGT says that employees select the organization despite salary equality or disadvantage with respect to the similar position.

Location and ease of access is the least frequent theme in the data (F = 4, N = 3). DGLAB, IMPIC, and SGMTSSS each cite accessibility as a relevant, if secondary, contributor to attractiveness, particularly in the context of Lisbon's transportation infrastructure and urban

congestion. In DGLAB, proximity to the Cidade Universitária, public transport links, and available parking are described as secondary positive features that reinforce the overall attractiveness of the work setting.

Illustrative excerpts supporting these themes are presented in Appendix D - Table 29 - Attraction Themes.

4.2.2. Importance of job security and stability

In examining the answer to Question 3 ("What importance do you place on the security and stability of employment provided by your agency in recruiting new staff and retaining existing ones?"), there emerges one finding that holds consistently across all responses: leadership does not view job security and employment stability as unique aspects of its organization. Rather, it is seen more as an inherent aspect of being employed in a public sector organization rather than something unique to any particular organization. Table 11 presents the full frequency distribution of stability-related themes by organization.

The theme ***other conditions override stability*** is the theme with the highest frequency in the table (F = 11, N = 5). IGF highlights that the promotion possibilities have decreased and that there is no longer the remuneration differential that existed in the past regarding the inspection career. SGMSAUDE mentions that many individuals are attracted to their work because of their philosophy of public service and common interest but not for security purposes. Regarding the theme mentioned, DGAV offers the most detailed description. What motivates people to join DGAV is the territorial decentralization as well as living close to home, not stability; in addition, the abnormal work schedule, consisting of night and weekend hours in the slaughterhouses, causes people's leaving even if they like their position, as does the difficulty in conciliating family life. IMPIC reports a concrete case in which a worker departed for a salary increase of 25 to 30%. DGLAB describes a pattern in which technically specialized staff leave to take on leadership roles in other institutions, workers acquire knowledge at DGLAB and then move to better-paying organizations, and remuneration and progression opportunities elsewhere consistently exceed what DGLAB can offer.

Stability is described as irrelevant or a weak differentiator in practice by five organizations (F = 8, N = 5). SGMSAUDE notes that while stability may be notionally relevant, the scarcity of external competition means it is not strongly felt in practice. DGAV acknowledges that stability is mentioned as a factor in Lisbon-based positions, but is immediately displaced by geographic proximity as the primary driver of attraction. IMPIC reiterates that stability is not a

differentiator precisely because it is identical across all public bodies. ICNF states that, for current workers, stability is simply irrelevant to retention since they have already internalized it as a given, and that for new entrants under full-employment conditions, it is equally not a determining factor. DGT notes that recruitment through internal mobility means that incoming workers already possess public sector stability before joining, rendering it meaningless as an organizational incentive.

The theme ***stability as a shared public sector condition, not institution-specific*** (F = 7, N = 4) illustrates this logic. As mentioned above, according to INA, both stability and security are not unique for INA but are characteristics of public servants in general. The reason why workers who belong to public service already have this characteristic irrespective of their organization membership is clearly stated by IMPIC. In comparative perspective, IMPIC emphasizes that stability is the same whether someone works at IMPIC or at Tribunal de Contas, where equal employment terms are valid in all public institutions. Security and permanence are assured in any public institution, according to ICNF. In addition, as regards DGAEP, it is clear that employment terms of DGAEP do not differ much from other public services.

Table 11 - Frequency of Stability-Related Themes by Organization

Theme	F	N	IGF	SGMSAUDE	INA	DGAV	IMPIC	ICNF	SGMTSSS	DGAEP	DGLAB	DGT
Other conditions override stability (pay, progression, commute, schedules, or mobility)	11	5	2	1	0	4	1	0	0	0	3	0
Stability is described as irrelevant or a weak differentiator in practice	8	5	0	1	0	2	1	2	0	0	0	2
Stability as a shared public sector condition, not institution-specific	7	4	0	0	2	0	2	1	0	2	0	0
Lower salience among younger, mobile, or externally attractive profiles	7	4	1	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Reform, extinction, or institutional uncertainty weakens the stability signal	6	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0
Stability weighs more for retention than for initial attraction	3	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stability may shelter low accountability or low performance behavior	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0

Note. F = Frequency; N = Number of organizations; IGF = Inspeção-Geral de Finanças; SGMSAUDE = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério da Saúde; INA = Instituto Nacional de Administração; DGAV = Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária; IMPIC = Instituto dos Mercados Públicos, do Imobiliário e da Construção; ICNF = Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas; SGMTSSS = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social; DGAEP = Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público; DGLAB = Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas; DGT = Direção-Geral do Território.

A generational dimension further complicates the picture. The theme ***lower salience among younger, mobile, or externally attractive profiles*** (F = 7, N = 4) can be observed within organizationally heterogeneous cases. According to IGF, younger generations are no longer optimistic about their career development in a public body and are much less motivated by the perspective of working at such organizations throughout their career. The INA report identifies two different groups: those from older generations who find themselves motivated by stability, which serves as a tool for retaining them, and those from younger generations who are not motivated by stability in a particular organization but consider stability an overall feature of public administration. ICNF argues that the presence of high or full employment reduces the importance of stability as a motivator for the candidate and that it is challenging to attract generalists, including legal and financial workers, since there is no need for them to have a guaranteed salary and they are less inclined to receive less money. The DGT report claims that a technically qualified specialist does not encounter any problems leaving and can freely move across different public organizations.

A structurally important counter-narrative appears in the theme ***reform, extinction, or institutional uncertainty*** weakens the stability signal (F = 6, N = 3). SGMSAUDE reports that the announced possibility of extinguishing the Secretariat Generals has directly undermined the traditional association between these institutions and security, noting that in earlier periods no one would have considered such institutions at risk. DGAEP connects organizational instability to political cycles, observing that three governments in a few years have generated a climate of perturbation and uncertainty that erodes the stability signal. DGLAB reports that merger-driven extinction processes and the superior salary supplements offered by transversal support entities actively cannibalize its human resources.

Where ***stability retains some residual relevance, it weighs more for retention than for initial attraction*** (F = 3, N = 2). IGF states that stability and job security were much more influential as attractors in previous times compared to now, although a relatively recent competition which attracted more than 1,000 applicants proves otherwise. INA clearly distinguishes the present versus the potential employees, stating that stability is more of a concern for keeping the existing workforce in the organization than attracting others into it.

The analytically isolated theme of ***stability sheltering low accountability or low performance behavior*** (F = 2, N = 1) is contributed entirely by SGMTSSS. The leader describes a pattern in which young workers contest organizational demands and avoid responsibilities,

noting that in the private sector such behavior would result in dismissal, and that parental status is used in some cases as a protective mechanism that limits operational reliability.

Illustrative excerpts supporting these themes are presented in Appendix D (Table 30-Stability Themes).

4.2.3. Importance of professional development and career progression

The analysis of Question 6 ("What opportunities for professional development and career progression does your organization offer, and to what extent do those opportunities influence candidates' decisions to join the institution?") shows a recurring and structurally significant trend within the data set: professional development is abundant and meaningful, but it is largely confined to forms of training, technical education, project experience, and specialization within networks, not career progression. The major trend identified is one that separates development as an investment in competence, which organizations have the capacity to deliver, from development as career progression, which is slow, poorly differentiated, and restricted by the legal and fiscal infrastructure of Portuguese public employment. Table 12 presents the full frequency distribution of development and career progression themes by organization.

Training and continuous learning as a major development lever (F = 10, N = 5) is the most frequent topic in the table and also the most developed. According to SGMSAUDE, training is actively encouraged and systematically monitored for all employees in the context of a strict system of performance management. For DGAV, training is one of the primary levers of development used by the organization, supported by interaction with other organizations and academia and close proximity to universities in the entire country, thus making scientific and professional networks additional channels of development apart from formal training programs. IMPIC bases its development strategy on an annual training program derived from discussions with middle-level managers and considers training mandatory, with at least one year of training planned for each evaluation period. ICNF has made the largest investment into this topic among all organizations in the sample, as evidenced by few rejections of training, cooperation with several universities, and a specific instance of extraordinary organizational dedication to development, namely, the €150,000 investment to send two experts in marine biology on a research cruise in the Santa Maria Manuela. DGAEP reports that professional training is always actively sought, including through the identification of free or low-cost external provision.

Table 12 - Frequency of Development and Career Progression Themes by Organization

Theme	F	N	IGF	SGMSAUDE	INA	DGAV	IMPIC	ICNF	SGMTSSS	DGAEP	DGLAB	DGT
Training and continuous learning are a major development lever	10	5	0	1	0	3	2	3	0	1	0	0
SIADAP or performance management is used as a progression lever	7	4	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	3
Career progression is limited, slow, or weakly differentiated	7	3	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0
Formal support for study, advanced training, or qualifications exists	5	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
School effect or springboard logic - development also raises poaching risk	5	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0
Internal mobility or career-broadening pathways are used	3	3	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Development is framed through learning in role, projects, networks, or technical exposure	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
Development opportunities influence attraction or joining decisions	3	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0

Note. F = Frequency; N = Number of organizations; IGF = Inspeção-Geral de Finanças; SGMSAUDE = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério da Saúde; INA = Instituto Nacional de Administração; DGAV = Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária; IMPIC = Instituto dos Mercados Públicos, do Imobiliário e da Construção; ICNF = Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas; SGMTSSS = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social; DGAEP = Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público; DGLAB = Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas; DGT = Direção-Geral do Território.

SIADAP and performance management as a progression lever (F = 7, N = 4) This theme is relatively common and institutionalized. According to the SGMSAUDE source, it uses a stringent SIADAP process, with promotion tied to achievement. The DGAV source shows that although SIADAP applications have been successful in promoting employees, there is a systemic problem as mobility applications become systematic following SIADAP assessment cycles. It appears as though the process creates certain expectations for the organization, which it is unable to meet through internal promotions. DGAEP provides data regarding budget allocations to support salary position adjustments and performance awards in the current assessment cycle. According to DGT, it demonstrates the most robust SIADAP process in the sample set, which is stringent and timely, with all quotas distributed, monitoring of staff close to the threshold for progression, and performance awards being issued sparingly.

Career progression is limited, slow, or weakly differentiated (F = 7, N = 3) represents the structural counterpart to training investment and introduces the most critical finding of this question. IGF describes progression as very slow and explicitly demotivating, further reporting that it was excluded from a Finance Ministry restructuring that resulted in peer organizations offering salaries more than €2,000 higher, with six or seven departures reported in the weeks preceding the interview and no strategy found to reverse the trend. DGAV describes a case that illustrates the structural perversity of public sector career design: a newly created Veterinary Inspection special career was established, but offers the same salary as the general career, with progression in the special career ultimately worse than in the general one, a reform that effectively undermines rather than enhances the attractiveness of a formally differentiated professional path. DGLAB reports that no development opportunities meaningfully differentiate it from other public administration institutions in recent years, and notes that the archivist and librarian careers already require substantial prior qualification, meaning that staff arrive with postgraduate degrees and development at the point of entry is not a real differentiator.

Formal support for study, advanced training, or qualifications (F = 5, N = 3) is concentrated in three organizations. SGMSAUDE systematically grants student-worker status and adjusts internal organization to ensure that staff returning to study are not penalized. SGMTSSS reports an internally developed “Qualifica” program through which staff progressed to degree level and subsequently moved into technical roles, a case of employer-supported upward social mobility within the public administration. DGT provides the most extensive academic development infrastructure in the sample, supporting unpaid leave for master's and

doctoral studies, integrating researchers into university research centers and external projects, and giving workers time and space to conduct research in areas of professional interest.

The school effect and springboard logic, alongside the poaching risk (F = 5, N = 3), constitutes one of the most analytically significant themes in Question 6. IGF mentions six or seven recent departures because of slightly higher remuneration elsewhere and admits its inability to counteract this tendency. DGAEP directly refers to its role as a training center and entry point to other organizations, noting that out of more than 25 people in its staff, many are now actively involved in various leadership positions in other agencies of public administration, viewing this situation not as a shortcoming but as an essential part of their institutional culture. DGLAB notes a similar process where employees leave to become directors in other organizations due to gained experience.

Internal mobility and career-broadening pathways (F = 3, N = 3) appear as a limited but practically meaningful development tool across three organizations. INA views internal mobility as a strategy for retaining employees, as they try to find internal opportunities for the employee before making any other decision. There is an example in IMPIC, where administrative assistants who finished their studies were internally promoted from being administrative assistants to having positions in technical fields using functional internal mobility as a way to provide a real career path without any change in the external one. On the contrary, DGAV sees SIADAP mobility requests as being reactionary rather than strategic.

The theme ***development opportunities influencing attraction or joining decisions*** (F = 3, N = 2) produces a finding that is analytically important precisely because of its internal contradiction. According to IMPIC, decision making in joining is not impacted by the issue of professional development, and it starts with the initial question about money from those applying, indicating how such narratives become largely unproductive during attraction if there are no financial incentives met. On the other hand, SGMTSSS notes that individuals joined the organization based on information spreading about an internal training process named "Qualifica." The leadership agrees that the impact of attraction due to such programs was real and identifiable.

Illustrative excerpts supporting these themes are presented in Appendix D (Table 31 - Development and Career Progression Themes).

4.2.4. Importance of innovation and creativity

The analysis of Question 7 ("How do you assess your organization's ability to promote an innovative work environment and to encourage employees' creativity? To what extent do people see this as relevant?") suggests that while innovation and creativity are considered by most respondents to be relevant dimensions of organizational reality, the approach towards implementing this concept remains pragmatic rather than abstract and involves digitalization, process optimization, usage of AI technology, and collective brainstorming rather than establishing an innovation management function within the organization. At the same time, several limitations related to the structural and cultural factors of innovation potential development become evident. Table 13 presents the full frequency distribution of innovation themes by organization.

Innovation and creativity, seen as relevant for employees (F = 12, N = 9), emerges as the highest-frequency theme as well as the most widely dispersed one with contributions from nine out of ten organizations supporting its relevance. In particular, IGF reports that employees are proactive and ready to collaborate with new ways of thinking. SGMSAUDE mentions that innovation relevance varies from worker to worker. INA presents its view of the matter suggesting that innovation is relevant and important to people; however, the claim is immediately qualified by the limitations of resources. IMPIC finds that innovation is undeniably relevant and stresses productive and quality aspects of the working process motivating employees' interest in innovations. ICNF suggests that creativity and innovation are deliberately encouraged in the organization. SGMTSSS points out that relevance of innovations largely depends on whether the employees believe that their ideas receive attention. DGAEP states that the innovative working environment relevant to staff and the encouragement of creativity important for the management of the organization. DGLAB stresses that operating at the cutting edge of artificial intelligence and digital revolution in their working activities is extremely relevant to the professional engagement of employees. DGT finds that innovation is relevant in the organization while the involvement in European territorial cooperation initiatives implies searching for innovations as such.

Table 13 - Frequency of Innovation Themes by Organization

Theme	F	N	IGF	SGMSAUDE	INA	DGAV	IMPIC	ICNF	SGMTSSS	DGAEP	DGLAB	DGT
Innovation and creativity seen as relevant for employees	12	9	2	1	1	0	1	1	1	2	1	2
Innovation linked to digitalization, AI, or process improvement	8	4	2	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	2	0
Participation, suggestions, or staff voice drive innovation	11	4	0	3	0	0	3	0	3	2	0	0
Acceptance is uneven - some roles or workers prefer routine or resist change	5	3	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	1
Resource limits, workload, or lack of slack constrain innovation	4	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Advanced external innovation signal - partnerships, AI leadership, state of the art	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0

Note. F = Total frequency (sum of references across all organizations); N = Number of organizations; IGF = Inspeção-Geral de Finanças; SGMSAUDE = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério da Saúde; INA = Instituto Nacional de Administração; DGAV = Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária; IMPIC = Instituto dos Mercados Públicos, do Imobiliário e da Construção; ICNF = Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas; SGMTSSS = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social; DGAEP = Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público; DGLAB = Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas; DGT = Direção-Geral do Território.

Participation, suggestions, or staff voice as drivers of innovation (F = 11, N = 4) is the second-highest frequency theme and captures a model of innovation that is fundamentally relational and bottom-up rather than technology-led. SGMSAUDE describes the most institutionally embedded version of this model: an open-door policy for any suggestion or idea, combined with a mandatory improvement-proposal objective embedded in the SIADAP performance appraisal for every worker, requiring all staff to reflect systematically on how their work can be done better. IMPIC reports a collaborative model in which organizational units propose process changes through internal discussion, with the monthly workers' committee meeting with the full Board of Directors, and transparent follow-up provided through monthly minutes that track what was implemented and what was not. SGMTSSS implements participatory budgeting and actively encourages staff to propose ideas within their areas. DGAEP describes a model in which staff can participate in decisions, are genuinely heard, and can criticize and make suggestions without facing negative consequences, with management explicitly consulting staff before advancing with key organizational decisions.

Innovation linked to digitalization, AI, or process improvement (F = 8, N = 4) captures the most concrete and institutionally grounded form of innovation reported in the sample. IGF describes a running AI initiative involving between 40 and 50 staff, developed in partnership with INA, though not yet extended across the whole organization. DGAV is responsible for the reporting about the acquisition and distribution of licenses for the Microsoft Copilot, as well as the gradual deployment of innovative tools within operations. The ICNF talks about infrastructure transformation processes involving such aspects as dematerialization, information security improvements, transition to cloud-based technology solutions, and enabling multidisciplinary telework teams. The DGLAB presents a report concerning digital transformation that appears to be the most progressive in the group as it is based on the implementation of AI for processing an incredible number of documents.

Uneven acceptance across roles and workers (F = 5, N = 3) captures the cultural and individual heterogeneity of innovation uptake. INA reports that, for some staff, learning to do things differently is experienced as an annoyance, and that acceptance depends on whether individuals are personally disposed to being challenged. Perhaps DGAV offers the most telling case from the above theme, with a whole bunch of managers and employees never accessing the Copilot application despite the availability of this technology since the organization’s leadership perceives resistance to be culturally entrenched through the social norm of AI being indicative of laziness or incompetence in one’s job description. On the other hand, the

organization known as DGT exhibits signs of an ambivalent attitude among its employees because they demand creative jobs but enjoy doing routine activities on the platform.

Resource limits, workload, or lack of slack constraining innovation (F = 4, N = 2) introduces a structural qualification to the otherwise positive framing of innovation across the sample. According to INA, there is a situation wherein innovative capability relies totally on the amount of available resources and the amount of workload, wherein the daily pressure from operational activities limits the space for thinking differently, and wherein engaging in novel approaches is time-consuming relative to well-established practices. The other theory, DGT, highlights the necessity of managing the innovative process by limiting it to just six to seven streams of work that can be innovated effectively.

Illustrative excerpts supporting these themes are presented in Appendix D (Table 32 - Innovation Themes).

4.2.5. Importance of pay and benefits

When asked "What role do pay and benefits offered by your organization play in professionals' decisions to join and to stay?, and “Beyond reward and recognition practices established in general law, are there practices that differentiate your organization from comparable public bodies?”, answer reveal a clear and systematic pattern in the sample: pay and monetary benefits are depicted as restrictions or dissatisfaction causes instead of being used as motivational devices.

This pattern holds throughout in six organizations in the study: leaders perceive that remuneration in their respective organizations is not a differentiator factor against comparable public organizations, and most also agree that the financial resources available are largely dictated by the general legal context.

The value proposition of these employers thus relies on alternative non-monetary elements such as telework possibilities, flexibility, human resources management, and the substantive value of the tasks, with a minor subset relying more on performance management. Table 14 presents the full frequency distribution of compensation and financial incentive themes by organization.

SIADAP, performance bonuses, and extra progression as differentiating tools (F = 10, N = 6) is the highest-frequency theme and identifies a subset of organizations that have moved beyond passive acceptance of the structural pay constraint to deploy performance management tools actively as partial financial differentiators. IMPIC reports the attribution of performance

awards as a differentiating tool. In ICNF, there is a clear example of the most distinguished and detailed explanation: the leader of the organization claims that their organization is unique among other organizations within its two ministries' boundary, being the only one that grants performance bonuses and managerial salary progression. Moreover, he declared that SIADAP previews a small discretionary power of managers that has always been used in each cycle, which has resulted in quicker progression than in any other similar organization. Finally, employees are aware of the payment cycles and find it reliable, and they have become more challenging in defining goals and assessing competencies; hence, it seems that they have embraced the performance management culture. In SGMTSSS, the leader has described the managerial option of SIADAP in such a way that it will serve to promote both already promoted individuals and those who have not been promoted yet. Besides, this institution uses progression offers as an incentive tool when dealing with personnel who are about to quit working there. The leader in DGAEP has reported that the amount that has been budgeted for the current cycle of salary positioning and performance awards has increased significantly.

Pay as a binding constraint or weak differentiator (F = 8, N = 6) concludes the initial finding on this topic. SGMSAUDE defines remuneration as being too insignificant to differentiate itself in terms of. The most striking comparative remark made by INA in the sample is that remuneration does not represent a differentiation criterion in any way financially compared to other public organizations, with the emphasis made on the agencies and the Assembly of the Republic paying considerably higher, since even a gardener in them receives more money compared to INA employees. DGAV highlights the importance of pay as being highly valuable for attracting people into the institution, thus defining its significance as a problem while indirectly confirming that there is no solution for the issue. IMPIC highlights that the inability of the organization to attract more people is determined by its inability to compensate for lack of money, referring to pay and financial benefits as being highly significant for solving the problem. DGAEP represents a detailed analysis, with pay having a considerable influence but not determining whether someone joins the organization or stays. DGT highlights pay as a rather weak criterion for distinguishing the organization.

Table 14 - Frequency of Compensation and Financial Incentive Themes by Organization

Theme	F	N	IGF	SGMSAUDE	INA	DGAV	IMPIC	ICNF	SGMTSSS	DGAEP	DGLAB	DGT
SIADAP, performance bonuses, or extra progression are used as differentiating tools	10	6	0	0	0	0	1	4	2	1	1	1
Pay is a binding constraint or weak differentiator for attraction and retention	8	6	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	2	0	1
Telework, flexibility, or work-life conciliation operate as indirect benefits	7	4	0	3	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	1
Human-centered management, practical conditions, or non-pay support substitute for pay	6	4	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Few differentiated financial tools exist beyond the general legal framework	8	3	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	3	3	0
Pay gaps, unfairness, or better offers trigger exits, withdrawals, or retention loss	3	3	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1

Note. F = Total frequency (sum of references across all organizations); N = Number of organizations; IGF = Inspeção-Geral de Finanças; SGMSAUDE = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério da Saúde; INA = Instituto Nacional de Administração; DGAV = Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária; IMPIC = Instituto dos Mercados Públicos, do Imobiliário e da Construção; ICNF = Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas; SGMTSSS = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social; DGAEP = Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público; DGLAB = Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas; DGT = Direção-Geral do Território.

Telework, flexibility, and work-life conciliation operating as indirect benefits (F = 7, N = 4) captures the most common alternative mechanism to pay differentiation in the sample. SGMSAUDE outlines an approach that involves telework, WLB and conciliation, adaptability in case of unexpected events like unwell children or appointments, and facilitation of those staff members who have decided to return to education, with a clear indication of preference of the leader towards the calm working at home rather than the need for physical presence at work. INA mentions its blended telework scheme that contributes greatly to the decision-making of the employees regarding the employment offer made. SGMTSSS captures the substitution argument in full, explaining how working at home by those staff members who come from places far away from Lisbon becomes an indirect payment, making use of the opportunity to avoid traveling expenses and living in less expensive areas, a real money gain in lieu of the absence of higher payments. DGT explains how telework and flexibility become an element of compensation for people comparing with organizations which do not allow telework and flexibility.

Human-centered management, practical conditions, and non-pay support substituting for pay (F = 6, N = 4) extends the substitution logic beyond telework to encompass the broader quality of the work experience. IGF describes activities, internal climate, and training as creating a sense of unified organizational body that substitutes for financial differentiation. SGMSAUDE reports two concrete examples: the provision of ergonomic monitors and physical support to all staff, and an organizational philosophy of seeing workers as people first, with the leader noting that this perspective is felt and valued by employees rather than being merely rhetorical. INA describes involvement in strategic definition and execution as a nonfinancial substitute for pay, alongside deliberate investment in moments of relaxation and socializing designed to build affective and emotional attachment to the institution. SGMTSSS identifies basic working conditions, including a proper dining area, microwave access, and adequate heating as relevant differentiators, noting that staff expectations have risen and that material dignity in the daily work environment is no longer taken for granted.

Few differentiated financial tools existing beyond the general legal framework (F = 8, N = 3) elaborate the structural dimension of this constraint with particular precision. DGAV reports that only legally mandated compensations exist, covering shift supplements, night pay, and travel allowances, and describes a legally created trap in the special veterinary inspection career whereby half of the newly admitted staff rescinded their contracts when they discovered they would not enter the salary position they had anticipated. DGAEP provides the most

comprehensive account of financial constraint in the sample: the organization has no capacity to differentiate financially, the only available avenue is the managerial SIADAP option, a 25% salary supplement foreseen as part of a future restructuring is not yet available, and the leader describes a perception of injustice among staff relative to other entities that received supplements without what are seen as equivalent justifications. DGLAB states plainly that it has nothing beyond what the law provides, that the first-ever excellent SIADAP rating in the organization's history was only recently awarded as a novelty, that ongoing restructuring has proceeded without response in terms of creating new leadership positions, and that the only honest offering to candidates is work, a great deal of it, with nothing extra in remuneration terms.

Illustrative excerpts supporting these themes are presented in Appendix D (Table 33 - Compensation and Financial Incentive Themes).

Overall, across the five questions in Block 1, the data reveal a multi-dimensional and structurally consistent picture of employer attractiveness in Portuguese CPA. Flexibility, institutional reputation, mission, relational climate, and learning value emerge as the primary attraction drivers in Question 1, while job security, though universally present, functions as a shared baseline condition rather than a differentiating feature. Professional development is widely invested in through training and performance management, but formal career progression remains slow and structurally constrained. Innovation is broadly valued and predominantly expressed through digitalization and participative practices, with meaningful variation in both intensity and cultural receptivity across organizations. Compensation is nearly exclusively an inhibitor, as most organizations substitute non-monetary forms while some use limited monetary differentiators. No single variable seems to dominate all organizations. Rather, each organization uses combinations of symbolical, relational, practical, and epistemic variables to create an employer value proposition (EVP) that is as structurally constrained as strategically designed.

4.3. Block 2: The Role of Mission and Purpose

4.3.1. Importance of society and citizen-orientation

The analysis of Question 4 ("To what extent does contributing to society and a citizen-oriented focus help attract and retain employees? Please share examples.") shows that social contribution and social value are acknowledged throughout the sample as key determinants of attractiveness for potential employees. However, there is notable diversity in the strength of the role that social contribution plays in influencing attractiveness for different organizations. Unlike an assumption of a simple relationship between civic motivations and social contribution, it turns out that the level of mission orientation, visibility of social contribution, and generational differences influence whether social contribution can actually be used as an effective lever for recruiting people. Table 15 presents the full frequency distribution of public impact and societal contribution themes by organization.

Societal contribution or public value supports attraction and retention (F = 8, N = 8) is the most broadly distributed theme in the table, with eight of the ten organizations contributing at least one supporting statement. IGF notes that societal contribution attracts people in some way. SGMSAUDE describes the feeling of having an impact on people as genuinely important to its workers. INA affirms that its contribution to society through its mission is fully relevant for both attracting and retaining staff. DGAV reports that a taste for having a role in societal safety is perceptible in candidate interviews. IMPIC frames its societal contribution as a great added value, noting that workers know their work has an impact and that this awareness attracts and retains. ICNF reports that the civic dimension helps considerably to attract candidates who have a specific prior interest in its area of activity. DGAEP links attraction and retention to workers' understanding of the public administration to citizen relationship. DGT explicitly cites contribution to society and orientation to the citizen as features of its employer identity.

Table 15 - Frequency of Public Impact and Societal Contribution Themes by Organization

Theme	F	N	IGF	SGMSAUDE	INA	DGAV	IMPIC	ICNF	SGMTSSS	DGAEP	DGLAB	DGT
Societal contribution or public value supports attraction and retention	8	8	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1
Explicit public service, citizen focus, or common good language is used	8	6	0	1	3	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
Societal contribution is important in principle, but not a distinctive attraction lever	7	6	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	2	1
Impact is framed indirectly through regulation, support, or system effectiveness	10	5	2	2	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	2
Concrete examples of societal or citizen impact are provided	5	3	0	2	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
Visibility in crises, media, or salient cases strengthens perceived public value	2	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0

Note. F = Frequency; N = Number of organizations; IGF = Inspeção-Geral de Finanças; SGMSAUDE = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério da Saúde; INA = Instituto Nacional de Administração; DGAV = Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária; IMPIC = Instituto dos Mercados Públicos, do Imobiliário e da Construção; ICNF = Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas; SGMTSSS = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social; DGAEP = Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público; DGLAB = Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas; DGT = Direção-Geral do Território.

Explicit public service, citizen focus, or common good language (F = 8, N = 6) is most elaborated in organizations where the public mission is most substantively defined. INA provides the richest account within this theme, reporting that a public service orientation is very frequently mentioned by new workers at the point of entry, that the public service ethos is expressed even by those arriving from the private sector, and that the idea of INA as a public service school is described as motivating. DGAV articulates an explicit *esprit de corps* around the mission of protecting societal safety. IMPIC frames the public benefit of its activity around the fight against illegal practice and the promotion of transparency in public construction and procurement. ICNF reports that many new recruits explicitly cite nature conservation, biodiversity, climate change, and species protection as their motivation for joining, making this the clearest case in the sample of mission-driven self-selection into public employment. DGT describes a deeply embedded public service identity, articulated through the recognition that providing public service and knowing what the public interest is constitutes an organizational value in itself. SGMSAUDE also states citizen orientation as an explicit organizational feature.

The most analytically significant qualifying finding in Question 4 is that societal contribution, while widely acknowledged, does not consistently function as a distinctive attraction lever (F = 7, N = 6). INA identifies a branding deficit in public administration, noting that the scope of what can be accomplished in the sector is not effectively communicated as an attraction factor to potential candidates. DGAV notes a generational shift in which younger recruits show less mission commitment and in which WLB considerations now override dedication to societal safety as a motivational priority. SGMTSSS explicitly states that its thematic area is less inherently attractive than adjacent bodies and that the organization must actively create attraction factors because the mission does not sell itself. DGAEP introduces a negative dimension, noting that heavy processes, limited feedback on results, and an effort-to-visible-impact ratio perceived as disproportionate actively undermine both attraction and retention. DGLAB reports that citizen orientation, while acknowledged as important within its field, does not function as a distinctive pull factor, with financial conditions, authority in the domain, and leadership considerations dominating over mission as attraction drivers. DGT acknowledges that the connection to the individual citizen is weaker in its activity and that its contribution operates more broadly at the societal level than at the level of direct service interaction.

Impact framed indirectly through regulation, support, or system effectiveness (F = 10, N = 5) is the highest-frequency theme and captures an important structural feature of support and

technical bodies. IGF describes its relationship with society as short and indirect, characterized by passive visibility, present in media attention around high-profile cases but not constant. SGMSAUDE acknowledges that many of its tasks are inward-facing and oriented toward administrative support for government members, with societal contribution operating through strategic planning and its indirect effects on policy effectiveness. SGMTSSS notes explicitly that it is a support and administrative body with no direct citizen impact, and that it enables the ministerial cabinets that carry out the substantive public-facing work. DGAEP describes its contribution as indirect, functioning as a school and reference point for understanding the public administration to citizen relationship rather than serving citizens directly. DGT acknowledges that direct citizen contact is limited in most of its activities, and that its contribution to society operates primarily through geographic information made available to institutional partners.

Concrete examples of societal or citizen impact (F = 5, N = 3) are most fully developed in three organizations. Between 9,000 and 10,000 annual cases involving citizen complaints, queries, and clarifications fall within the view of SGMSAUDE, which also shares best practices, verifies data, and maintains the institution's archive at the Ministry of Health. According to IMPIC, its function includes regulating construction and real estate mediation firms and promoting transparency in national procurement processes. ICNF is largely driven by its mission statement, as evidenced by the fact that the majority of new employees join because of nature protection, biodiversity, and climate change-related activities.

Illustrative excerpts supporting these themes are presented in Appendix D (Table 34 - Contribution Public Impact and Societal Themes).

4.3.2. Importance of the public mission

The analysis of Question 8 ("To what extent do the public mission and the organization's core values weigh in professionals' decisions to choose to work in your institution?") reveals that public mission and core values are widely recognized as meaningful factors in professionals' decisions to join and remain in Portuguese CPA organizations. For eight out of the ten organizations studied, there seems to be no doubt that mission and values do have an impact. Nonetheless, the manner in which the influence works is significantly different depending upon the institution type, profession of the respondents, as well as generation, yielding a distinctly different picture from the one associated with societal contribution analyzed under Question 4. While Question 4 was concerned with the contribution of institutions towards society, Question 8 looks at the issue from the inside, assessing how much of the professionals believe in the

institution's mission and values. Table 16 presents the full frequency distribution of mission and values themes by organization.

Mission and core values weighing strongly in attraction or choice (F = 11, N = 8) is the most widely distributed theme among all themes included in the table. The IGF confirms that mission and core values play an important role in recruitment process. The INA gives probably the most unequivocal definition saying that mission and core values weigh considerably mentioning that orientation to public service is expressed in all conversations at entrance level, even for those who came from private organizations. The DGAV also confirms that mission weighs a great deal. In turn, the IMPIC defines this characteristic as very important. The ICNF gives the most impressive statistical example in the dataset saying that mission importance and high social visibility resulted in 50 jobs attracting more than 4000 candidates, thus providing a clear example of how the organizational mission can be used as a strong pre-entry attraction sign if it is open and resonant with people's emotions. The SGMTSSS also states that "mission" is very important aspect for the organizational identity. DGAEP confirms that mission plays a great role defining it through the perspective of working in common good and collective well-being, creating something that affects citizens' lives and the whole country's destiny. DGT defines "mission" as an umbrella that embraces workers.

Values congruence, identity, and meaning source (F = 6, N = 5) highlights the more subjective nature of mission fit, shifting focus from the formal declaration of mission importance to the psychological mechanisms by which values gain personal significance. According to the INA, public service values are not only emphasized in the entry stage but are deliberately cultivated through the organization's culture, becoming a recurrent discussion topic among newly recruited employees. The ICNF indicates that, due to its increasing reputation for being a values-aligned workplace, particularly in terms of its conservation mission and people-oriented HR policies, the organization is becoming more visible as a values-aligned recruiter, acting as a pull factor that attracts candidates even prior to the recruitment process. The SGMTSSS mentions that values related to open communication and non-hierarchical cooperation are strictly enforced in the organization, and middle managers are responsible for ensuring that such values are reflected in their actions. In turn, DGAEP specifies the meaning source of public service values by distinguishing between the pursuit of public good and commercial interests, thereby establishing the unique status of public sector jobs vis-à-vis the private sector. Finally, the DGT describes the interpretive mission process, where the annual

strategic reference framework becomes a tool for rationalizing work priorities and creating shared meaning within the organization.

Technical or professional identity weighing more than explicit citizen language (F = 5, N = 4) constitutes one of the most analytically distinctive findings of Question 8. SGMSAUDE notes that workers in the health sector rarely leave it, and that sector belonging functions as a stronger pull factor than organizational mission per se, suggesting that professional identity at the sectoral level can be as powerful as organizational identification. DGAV confirms that specialized technical professionals choose by the technical dimension of the mission rather than by generic citizen-service language. DGLAB provides the most complete elaboration of this pattern: workers come to the institution to acquire knowledge from the national archival authority, and the attraction operates through the technical and archival identity associated with that role rather than through a citizen-facing purpose. DGT similarly interprets institutional identity through a set of specific technical competences in geographic information and territorial planning, framing mission as a collection of technically defined activities rather than as an abstract civic calling.

Values alignment supporting longer-term attachment or identity growth over time (F = 3, N = 3) introduces a temporal dimension to the mission fit dynamic. IGF describes a pattern in which recent entrants who appeared uncertain about their institutional identification at the point of entry gradually became fully integrated and mission-aligned over a period of approximately two to three years. SGMSAUDE reports that, over time, workers feel that they are in an organization with prestige that values their contribution, with attachment reinforced progressively through the experience of recognition and organizational belonging. DGLAB articulates a distinct but related dynamic: workers who pass through the institution develop a technical identity and a set of competencies that make them valuable to any future employer, with professional identity growing during tenure, though the leader notes that this also feeds poaching risk.

Table 16 - Frequency of Mission and Values Themes by Organization

Theme	F	N	IGF	SGMSAUDE	INA	DGAV	IMPIC	ICNF	SGMTSSS	DGAEP	DGLAB	DGT
Mission and core values weigh strongly in attraction or choice	11	8	1	0	2	1	1	2	1	2	0	1
Values congruence, identity, or meaning source	6	5	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	2
Technical or professional identity weighs more than explicit citizen language	5	4	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	1
Values alignment supports longer-term attachment or identity growth over time	3	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Stronger effect for specialized professions, older cohorts, or some groups more than others	4	2	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mission expressed indirectly in support or transversal bodies	4	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0

Note. F = Total frequency (sum of references across all organizations); N = Number of organizations; IGF = Inspeção-Geral de Finanças; SGMSAUDE = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério da Saúde; INA = Instituto Nacional de Administração; DGAV = Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária; IMPIC = Instituto dos Mercados Públicos, do Imobiliário e da Construção; ICNF = Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas; SGMTSSS = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social; DGAEP = Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público; DGLAB = Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas; DGT = Direção-Geral do Território.

Stronger effect for specialized professions, older cohorts, or specific groups (F = 4, N = 2) creates significant differentiation in a situation of otherwise unified mission discourse. IGF questions the level of commitment to public service felt by the new generation compared to that felt by previous generations but acknowledges the fact that while the most recent arrivals seem thoroughly mission-aligned, other newcomers have yet to find their feet professionally. DGAV represents perhaps the most striking example of mission differentiation across organizations, where members of the organization's workforce are drawn to distinct dimensions of its mission according to technical rather than organizational criteria; even among the veterinary sector itself, practitioners choose to pursue different missions based on the nature of the work itself.

Illustrative excerpts supporting these themes are presented in Appendix D (Table 35 - Mission and Values Themes).

In summary, based on the answers to the two questions in Block 2, the data indicate that mission and purpose have emerged as significant but institutionally differentiated aspects of attractiveness for employers in Portuguese CPA. The concept of societal contribution is accepted by the majority of the sample organizations, with eight out of ten recognizing its significance in recruitment and retention efforts, although its efficiency in attracting talent differs depending on organizational type, visibility of the mission, and the degree of tangible societal benefit. Mission appears to function most strongly as an attraction lever in organizations where public contribution is visible, concrete, and closely connected to the institution’s day-to-day work, allowing prospective and current employees to recognize more easily how their tasks generate societal value. In the case of supporting and technical organizations, the same civic significance must be created using institutional discourse, reputation, and the concept of indirect benefits. “Mission and values were described as important for organizational choice in eight organizations, although the fit mechanism changes from civic significance to professional identity and gradual values alignment through organizational socialization.

4.4. Block 3: The Role of Organizational Culture

4.4.1. Importance of organizational culture and climate

The analysis of Question 2 ("How would you describe the organizational culture and the work environment in your institution, and how do you think those aspects influence professionals' decisions to join and to stay with the organization?") suggests that organizational culture and environment serve largely as retention strategies within Portuguese CPA and not as attraction devices for recruitment. In most organizations studied, positive descriptions of the internal environment are common but with clear differences in their emphases and forms of culture. The thematic framework identified revolves around the following dimensions: relationship, participation, leadership, institution, and structure, along with the observation that organizational culture becomes salient to the extent that employees are already working inside an organization and interacting within work relations. Table 17 presents the full frequency distribution of organizational culture themes by organization.

The most frequently articulated theme is positive or healthy work environment (F = 14, N = 7), which is also the most widely spread topic in the sample. The IGF believes that the working environment was very good during previous times and is currently quite positive, although there are some reservations. SGMSAUDE provides the most detailed description of this topic. The management of this organization believes that their institution is really a good place to work. In addition, the impression is transmitted informally from one employee to another. IMPIC claims that its working culture is very healthy because it is based on a favorable atmosphere inside the institution and on interpersonal harmony. ICNF, SGMTSSS, DGAEP, and DGT also confirm the positive working environment; however, DGAEP specifies that the working environment remained good and relaxed despite changes in leadership.

Table 17 - Frequency of Organizational Culture Themes by Organization

Theme	F	N	IGF	SGMSAUDE	INA	DGAV	IMPIC	ICNF	SGMTSSS	DGAEP	DGLAB	DGT
Positive or healthy work environment	14	7	2	3	0	0	3	1	1	2	0	2
Open, participative, or informal culture	13	6	1	3	3	0	3	0	1	0	0	2
Culture matters more for retention than for first attraction	10	7	0	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	0	2
Hierarchical, siloed, or conservative constraints	8	2	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	3	0
Leadership proximity, support, or psychological safety	6	2	0	4	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Cohesion, *esprit de corps*, or strong identity	5	3	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
Telework or flexibility as part of the work model	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0

Note. F = Frequency; N = Number of organizations; IGF = Inspeção-Geral de Finanças; SGMSAUDE = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério da Saúde; INA = Instituto Nacional de Administração; DGAV = Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária; IMPIC = Instituto dos Mercados Públicos, do Imobiliário e da Construção; ICNF = Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas; SGMTSSS = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social; DGAEP = Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público; DGLAB = Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas; DGT = Direção-Geral do Território.

Culture matters more for retention than for first attraction registers the highest number of contributing organizations (F = 10, N = 7), this makes it the most widespread theme overall in the chart, even though its raw frequency is average. SGMSAUDE points out that many of its staff members decided to join after being recruited by other workers already there through personal contacts. In this case, word-of-mouth communication takes root on the basis of retention experience, and not recruitment. The cultural factor is noted by INA not just as an attraction factor, but as a way to build esprit de corps and as something that helps with retention. According to IMPIC, culture may play no role in the choice to enter the organization but rather comes into play as a value-add for retention. It is, in fact, thanks to culture that the organization can attract people at all. Perhaps one of the clearest examples of such attraction through organizational experience comes from ICNF, where staff who were winners at other institutions withdrew their previous choices and came back due to better conditions. The cultural argument is made explicitly by SGMTSSS. When candidates realize there is no monetary incentive to choose this organization, but the working atmosphere is good, this becomes the reason why they make their choice. DGAEP says that retention largely stems from interpersonal bonds established in the organization. According to DGT, newcomers do not know what they are signing up for upon entering, but stay because of the working environment, and some former staff members left and returned to the same environment.

Open, participative, or informal culture is the second most frequent theme (F = 13, N = 6) and captures a distinct cultural orientation that cuts across several organizations. IGF notes a reduction in earlier departmental silos and a move toward greater cross-departmental collaboration. SGMSAUDE describes an open-door culture in which any worker can propose ideas, and leadership is genuinely accessible. INA characterizes its culture as less hierarchical and more matrix-oriented, with staff actively informed and involved in the organization's mission, vision, and values. IMPIC reports a strong culture of internal transparency, including whole-team workshops held three times per year and the open sharing of QUAR results, projects, and strategic priorities. SGMTSSS describes its culture explicitly as one of participation. DGT emphasizes an outward-facing openness, including the broad sharing of geographic data and a consistent orientation toward building bridges with other organizations.

Cohesion, esprit de corps, and strong institutional identity constitute a distinct but moderately frequent theme (F = 5, N = 3) INA notes a corporate spirit that has come about as a result of purposeful cultural transformation, coming close to something that the leader terms as a symbolic communion on shared goals. The IMPIC defines a culture of commitment as one

of the unique characteristics of the organization. The DGT highlights an intense institutional identity with the institution being compared to wearing a team's jersey.

Hierarchical, siloed, or conservative constraints (F = 8, N = 2) includes the two main outliers in the data set. DGAV has the most detailed description of this culture, defining it as a very rigid culture that is extremely hierarchical in nature, resistant to change because it is a characteristic of the organization, highly stratified along functional lines, not allowing for horizontal communication between the different departments, and resistant to digital means of communication, especially in older, more practical employees. DGLAB has described a relatively conservative culture based on long tenure and high personal acquaintance that limits the organization's ability to innovate and is currently facing structural changes due to the impending retirement of about 40 to 50 people between 2025 and 2026.

Leadership proximity, support, and psychological safety constitute a important theme (F = 6, N = 2) even though it applies to fewer organizations. The organization that offers the most complex explanation under this topic is SGMSAUDE, where leadership keeps the doors open, assumes institutional accountability so that the blame does not fall on individuals, and works side-by-side with overburdened employees, thereby ensuring that employees feel they have never been alone. The idea of ICNF, which recruits its chiefs internally, is also similar. This internal recruitment is on the basis of primus inter pares, and this gives leaders a realistic image.

Illustrative excerpts supporting these themes are presented in Appendix D (Table 36 - Organizational Culture Themes).

In general, the single item within Block 3 suggests that organizational culture and workplace conditions act chiefly as retention tools in Portuguese CPA, not initial attractants. Seven of the ten organizations measured enjoy a good working atmosphere, and six have cultures that are open or participative, thus rendering relational quality and accessibility nearly ubiquitous elements in how organizational leaders describe their institutions. Culture's predominance as a tool for retaining workers versus attracting them becomes the most commonly reported theme in this set, seen in the context of a seven-out-of-ten word-of-mouth process, the return to a familiar place of employment after being exposed to suboptimal environments elsewhere, and the idea that working conditions become the major selling point when money cannot be used as motivation. Proximity between leader and worker and creation of a safe psychological environment, group cohesion and esprit de corps, and flexibility within working conditions as

culturally driven factors also emerge as less widespread but equally valuable points. The two exceptions here are organizations reporting restrictive hierarchical and insular cultures that hamper innovation and adaptation efforts. One such organization also confronts a generation change that puts its institutional memory at risk. In all, the data collected in Block 3 show organizational culture as a gradual retention asset to be best valued through experience of relations and work.

4.5. Block 4: Recognition, Satisfaction, and Commitment

4.5.1. Importance of leaders' recognition

The analysis of Question 5 ("How does leadership recognize and value employees' contributions, and how relevant do you see this recognition for motivating professionals to work, and to keep working, in the institution?") shows that there is a consensus among the leaders about the relevance of recognition as an important means for motivating and retaining employees, even if it is almost exclusively implemented in non-material terms due to the payment system constraints intrinsic to Portuguese CPA. Recognition is presented as encompassing a wide range of relational, developmental, and organizational practices carried out to demonstrate appreciation, such as direct praise, participation, training, and flexible working arrangements. It becomes evident that the major role played by recognition in the current scenario is to serve as a sign of care and trust. Table 18 presents the full frequency distribution of recognition themes by organization.

Recognition through well-being, flexibility, or personal support (F = 8, N = 6) encompasses the element of recognition which makes working life sustainable and not just professionally prestigious. SGMSAUDE has both teleworking possibilities and a work-personal-family life conciliation program explicitly incorporated in their model of recognition. ICNF has a workers' club which organizes games, leisure and social activities, and management is involved in supporting the recreational-social dimension of working relations. SGMTSSS implements one of the most encompassing programs on well-being called "Cuidar a AP," which encompasses psychological, nutritional and osteopathic care within the framework of an expanded concept of occupational health, including free psychological care, as well as discounted prices for other services provided. DGAEP implements flexible hours, teleworking and work-family conciliation whenever possible. DGT has seasonal flexibility and works with employees who have specific health issues among their families. DGAV provides a significant counter-example regarding this theme, which includes the longstanding inability to solve the aging fleet of inspection vehicles. As such, inspectors were known to travel by private car, and the lack of material conditions to make inspections easier becomes a case in which the recognition message does not come through because the conditions were not met.

Table 18 - Frequency of Recognition Themes by Organization

Theme	F	N	IGF	SGMSAUDE	INA	DGAV	IMPIC	ICNF	SGMTSSS	DGAEP	DGLAB	DGT
Recognition through well-being, flexibility, or personal support	8	6	0	1	0	1	0	2	2	1	0	1
Recognition through autonomy, involvement, role fit, or exposure	12	5	1	0	4	0	0	2	0	0	3	2
Recognition through praise, communication, or visible appreciation of effort	10	4	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	3	0	2
Recognition through training, study support, or professional investment	8	4	2	1	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	0
Recognition is mainly nonfinancial because monetary tools are constrained	4	4	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Recognition is treated as relevant or essential for motivation and retention	3	3	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Structured performance awards or other tangible reward tools	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0

Note. F = Total frequency (sum of references across all organizations); N = Number of organizations; IGF = Inspeção-Geral de Finanças; SGMSAUDE = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério da Saúde; INA = Instituto Nacional de Administração; DGAV = Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária; IMPIC = Instituto dos Mercados Públicos, do Imobiliário e da Construção; ICNF = Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas; SGMTSSS = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social; DGAEP = Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público; DGLAB = Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas; DGT = Direção-Geral do Território.

Recognition through autonomy, involvement, role fit, or exposure (F = 12, N = 5) represents the most frequent topic in the presented table. It represents a conceptually more complex version of recognition compared with simple praise. The description provided by INA seems to offer one of the most elaborate versions, which entails a program of talent and competency mapping with the objective to put everyone in the right place, where each person fits best, the practice of staff's participation in external events and presentations as a means of recognizing their knowledge ownership and internal mobility policy that includes consultations on possible ways out of the organization with staff involved. IGF recognizes training and development opportunities in terms of the school nature of the institution with involvement in the process of education being treated as organizational recognition. ICNF allows for an actively working workers' committee, which holds regular meetings on the subject of industrial relations, thus stimulating participation in the organization. DGLAB offers recognition activities adjusted to young workers, which includes the open approach to the institution beyond its document core, digital channels, and educational services as sources of professional growth, as well as allowing workers looking to engage in community work to do it within the organization. DGT ties recognition to motivational drives, providing workers with necessary trust and exposure.

Recognition through praise, communication, or visible appreciation of effort (F = 10, N = 4) is the second most frequently cited theme and represents the most immediate and interpersonal form of recognition discussed in the sample. The description provided by SGMSAUDE is the richest one where there is an example of effort being identified clearly and openly. In this practice, the effort is identified explicitly, written down, communicated both publicly and privately, praised directly and mistakes are addressed without blame, as people look at how to solve the problem and not who committed it. IMPIC uses its group work of the entire team to communicate the message that each person is equally important and that all results depend on their collective commitment. DGAEP describes recognition through communication in close proximity of the leaders to workers where everyone is invited to participate and speak up freely about the things they would like to say or suggest, thereby recognizing participation as such. DGT says that verbal recognition is rare, yet appreciated; constructive criticism given during all meetings is balanced with praises for good job performance.

Recognition through training, study support, or professional investment (F = 8, N = 4) reinforces the developmental logic of recognition in this sample. IGF describes a postgraduate

program developed in partnership with Nova IMS for its inspection staff and frames training as an area in which the organization performs particularly well. SGMSAUDE facilitates workers who wish to return to formal education. DGAV reports the most internationally oriented training offer in the sample, providing staff with access to the EU Commission's Better Training for Safe Food program and funding international training in multiple EU locations, an investment described as highly valued by participants, given that it is otherwise unavailable through salary or progression. SGMTSSS funds postgraduate courses in relevant work areas and provides extensive procurement and contracting training for the whole team.

Recognition is mainly nonfinancial because monetary tools are constrained (F = 4, N = 4) establishes the institutional context for the entire recognition repertoire across the sample. SGMSAUDE states clearly that the organization would like to give workers more money but is unable to do so and must therefore find other ways to motivate them. INA confirms that it is constrained by public sector rules and that no financial forms of recognition are practically available. DGAV describes a situation in which salary progression and pay increases are strongly blocked, with procedural paths described as too long and responses as never arrival. DGLAB points to the structural condition in which salary bands are identical across public administration and in which transversal support entities offer supplements that DGLAB cannot match.

Recognition is treated as relevant or essential for motivation and retention (F = 3, N = 3) appears in three organizations. IGF points to the role of leadership proximity and close contact with staff as a mechanism through which contribution is acknowledged in relatively dynamic teams. SGMSAUDE regards recognition as necessary due to the lack of availability of other forms of motivation, with the leader himself emphasizing that other forms of recognition have to be identified due to budgetary limitations. INA recognizes that there is no doubt about the significance of recognition.

Illustrative excerpts supporting these themes are presented in Appendix D (Table 37 - Recognition Themes).

4.5.2. Level of satisfaction with the organization

The analysis of Question 10 ("How would you describe employees' level of satisfaction with the organization and with their roles?") shows that job satisfaction among employees working in the Portuguese CPA can be seen as moderate to high, although all ten organizations analyzed

positively influence the topic of satisfaction, with their managers usually confirming this fact on the basis of official surveys. At the same time, even such an overall positive view cannot disguise the important internal differences in perceptions, as well as a number of real and tangible elements of operations and organizational culture, which tend to decrease satisfaction in certain organizations and spheres. According to the main analytical results, satisfaction can be achieved due to mission, climate, professional satisfaction, and organizational identification, while it can be undermined by pay problems, resource scarcity, uncertainty, and role misalignment. Table 19 presents the full frequency distribution of employee satisfaction themes by organization.

Satisfaction described as positive, moderate to high, or improving (F = 14, N = 10) has the highest frequency rate and distribution among the themes presented in Table 19 . It can be said that the leaders have a very positive attitude towards their organization. In addition, SGMSAUDE states that the organization has a positive opinion about itself, and most of the employees do not want to leave it. Moreover, the organization conducts annual surveys among employees and found out that most of them remain loyal to the organization for many years; thus, satisfaction is confirmed by behavior retention. The leaders of the organization characterize the level of satisfaction of employees with the organization's activities as medium-high. The positive description of the organizational atmosphere provided by the leaders is nuanced; according to DGAV, employees in general are satisfied working in the organization, and they realize that any operational problems are due to the nature of their activities rather than the management or organizational policy. The leaders of IMPIC believe that the organizational atmosphere can be characterized by a reasonable level of satisfaction, while it increases from year to year. According to the leaders of ICNF, satisfaction with the organization's activities can be generally considered positive. SGMTSSS emphasizes that employees are satisfied with the results of the surveys. DGAEP is located between the two themes discussed above since it presents a negative evaluation of the previous period when employees were moderately satisfied and felt themselves a part of ongoing projects. DGLAB conducted an internal survey recently, and the leaders stated that 86% of staff members declared their satisfaction with the organization. The leaders noted that despite the insignificant change of one percentage point, it is significant because of the organization's complex structure and specific professional skills of the employees.

Table 19 - Frequency of Employee Satisfaction Themes by Organization

Theme	F	N	IGF	SGMSAUDE	INA	DGAV	IMPIC	ICNF	SGMTSSS	DGAEP	DGLAB	DGT
Satisfaction is described as positive, moderate to high, or improving	14	10	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2
Internal surveys or other formal evidence support the assessment	6	6	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
Satisfaction varies across roles, units, or functions	7	5	2	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	1
Pay, incentives, supplements, or monetary comparisons reducing satisfaction	4	4	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
Uncertainty, extinction, or restructuring reducing satisfaction	4	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
Meaning, climate, prestige, or professional fulfillment support satisfaction	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Workload, staff shortages, vehicles, or resource constraints reducing satisfaction	3	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Role mismatch or task expectation problems reducing satisfaction	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0

Note. F = Total frequency (sum of references across all organizations); N = Number of organizations; IGF = Inspeção-Geral de Finanças; SGMSAUDE = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério da Saúde; INA = Instituto Nacional de Administração; DGAV = Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária; IMPIC = Instituto dos Mercados Públicos, do Imobiliário e da Construção; ICNF = Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas; SGMTSSS = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social; DGAEP = Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público; DGLAB = Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas; DGT = Direção-Geral do Território.

Internal surveys and formal evidence supporting the assessment (F = 6, N = 6) reinforces the credibility of the positive satisfaction readings by anchoring them in structured measurement rather than exclusively in leadership perception. IGF conducts annual opinion surveys alongside its activity reports. SGMSAUDE reports an annual satisfaction survey showing a growing trend. DGAV conducts regular satisfaction surveys. ICNF undertakes annual surveys. SGMTSSS reports a mean satisfaction score of 4.23 out of 5 in its most recent survey. DGLAB cites its 86% satisfaction figure directly from a formal internal measurement.

Satisfaction varying across roles, units, or functions (F = 7, N = 5) provides the internal diversity which qualifies the overall positive picture. The IGF highlights the difference in its career satisfaction between the inspection and the administrative support functions, where it suggests that the staff could feel less differentiated because there is some evidence of rotation in the support functions where employees perceive no difference between working for the IGF and somewhere else. The INA states that satisfaction levels vary by team and service directorate and the factor which influences this level is not the function itself, but the availability of resources in each particular directorate. The DGAV highlights that the level of satisfaction among the staff varies greatly depending on organizational unit and on the level of satisfaction with the supervisor directly. The SGMTSSS identifies the category of staff who would like to perform other functions than the ones they are currently performing. The DGT accepts the existence of this subcategory of dissatisfied and criticizing staff among an overall positive picture.

Pay, incentives, supplements, and monetary comparisons reducing satisfaction (F = 4, N = 4) are the topmost cited reasons for employees' dissatisfaction. In addition, according to IGF, administrative support suffers from low comparative remuneration, hence reducing the level of job satisfaction of these individuals. The main contribution that we can make to the existing literature regarding the subject is the distinction made by IMPIC in terms of understanding dissatisfaction. This document states that the dissatisfaction is with regards to lack of incentives as well as unfavorable salary comparisons with the peer organizations rather than with the organization itself, thus sustaining identity of the organization while identifying the source of economic frustration in the public sector. According to DGAEP, moving to a new career without wage supplementation was a cause for decreased job satisfaction. Finally, in DGLAB, monetary matters appear as the only source of economic dissatisfaction cited by workers of this organization, which, considering the fact that these individuals were highly satisfied with their careers, demonstrates how satisfaction is structured.

Uncertainty, extinction, and restructuring reducing satisfaction (F = 4, N = 2) captures a distinct and institutionally specific form of satisfaction erosion linked to organizational instability rather than to chronic operational conditions. SGMSAUDE reports that the threat of extinction generates insecurity that weighs on staff satisfaction levels, even in a context where the internal climate and daily work experience remain broadly positive. DGAEP provides the most acute case in the sample: uncertainty about the organization's future and ongoing organic restructuring have reduced satisfaction considerably, the imminent departure of the director-general with no known successor has added a leadership vacuum to the institutional uncertainty, and the leader explicitly states that most staff are currently not satisfied, distinguishing this interview sharply from the predominantly positive tone of the rest of the sample.

Meaning, climate, prestige, and professional fulfillment supporting satisfaction (F = 3, N = 1) is concentrated entirely in one organization. The leader describes a level of professional fulfillment that is unusually high in the sample: staff work with the leading professionals in their field at the national archival authority, the institution holds European and world reference status in its domain, workers are regularly invited abroad to present best practices, and archivists and librarians are described as doing exactly what they love at the highest possible level.

Workload, staff shortages, and resource constraints reducing satisfaction (F = 3, N = 1) are solely limited to one organization and represent the single worst case of satisfaction problems in operations within the data set. This organization (DGAV) has around 800 employees working at a staff level authorized by management of 1,300, leaving 500 employees short and causing continual overload, especially on the shifts that deal with inspections. The agency has inspectors who have to work from their personal vehicles when conducting tasks at abattoirs and in the field and whose vehicles are older models with high mileage expenses for the personnel involved.

Role mismatch and task expectation problems reducing satisfaction (F = 1, N = 1) is a minor but analytically relevant theme. SGMTSSS reports a case in which employees who expected to perform communication-related functions were instead assigned protocol tasks, creating dissatisfaction because the work they actually carried out did not match the responsibilities they had anticipated.

Illustrative excerpts supporting these themes are presented in Appendix D (Table 38 - Employee Satisfaction Themes).

4.5.3. Level of organizational commitment and belonging

The analysis of Question 11 ("What level of commitment to the organization and sense of belonging do you observe among employees?") reveals that organizational commitment and sense of belonging are among the most consistently and positively described attitudinal outcomes across the sample. Nine of the ten organizations contribute to the theme of high or very high commitment, and the language through which leaders describe this attachment is notably rich, drawing on identity, pride, behavioral demonstration under pressure, and symbolic institutional belonging. At the same time, the data introduces important qualifications concerning generational variation, functional heterogeneity, and the structural conditions under which commitment is both tested and sustained. Table 20 presents the full frequency distribution of commitment and belonging themes by organization.

Commitment and belonging described as high or very high (F = 10, N = 9) appears to be the most extensively dispersed theme in the table. The report from SGMSAUDE indicates that most personnel continue to work for the institution despite the prevailing threat of institutional extinction. According to the report from INA, the institution's commitment level at present is high. DGAV explains a very high level of commitment as being highly noticeable within the institution. In its report on IMPIC, the institution's commitment level can be determined based on the institution's performance. Although having 110 staff members, the institution performs effectively in fulfilling its regulatory obligations and minimizing the time it takes to license. This implies that a very committed staff is contributing to the institution's performance despite their small number. ICNF reports a high level of commitment as an observable phenomenon within the institution. Commitment levels at SGMTSSS are very high. According to the report from DGAEP, the institution has a quite high level of commitment with a high sense of belonging.

Crisis response, staying beyond normal hours, or remaining under pressure revealing commitment (F = 10, N = 5) is a highly significant theme in Question 11, since it changes the basis for assessing commitment from self-assessment of attitudes to observable behavior in difficult circumstances. For SGMSAUDE, the presence of commitment is expressed by the fact that the majority of employees stayed in their positions when undergoing the process of institutional extinction. In this regard, DGAV presents the most operational commitment: staff

operate on Christmas Day and New Year's Day, work through the night in case of emergencies; in five years, there was no case where an employee had refused to come at an emergency call even when it was associated with stressful situations, like mass animal euthanasia, and even though dissatisfied employees always showed up in case of operational need. IMPIC refers to an informal thought experiment according to which if the building were flooded, all employees would come in to assist, thus crossing the line between their personal lives and work and thereby demonstrating strong organizational commitment. According to ICNF, most workers stay longer than prescribed by labor contract, and they do not go out when they can leave. In terms of behavioral signs of commitment, SGMTSSS offers the most prominent case: while experiencing institutional extinction, employees continue to work enthusiastically until the last moment, reject better-paid positions in other organizations, and have regular regional meetings.

Pride, identity, and the language of "vestir a camisola" (F = 7, N = 5) captures the symbolic and expressive dimension of commitment that several leaders invoke to describe the depth of employee attachment. IGF distinguishes between an older generation that clearly wears the jersey and some newer staff who are already beginning to experience the same sense of institutional self. SGMSAUDE uses strong "jersey-wearing" language, describing workers who express great pride in saying they belong to the Secretaria-Geral and who articulate uncertainty and concern about what institutional extinction would mean for that identity. INA introduces the concept of "SOMOS", meaning "we are", as an organizational expression of collective identity that captures the jersey-wearing sentiment in a formally institutionalized form. DGAV links institutional recognition by external stakeholders directly to the love of the jersey visible among its staff, framing commitment as a reputational resource that extends beyond internal culture. DGT describes commitment as very strong with a clear identity undertone.

Table 20 - Frequency of Commitment and Belonging Themes by Organization

Theme	F	N	IGF	SGMSAUDE	INA	DGAV	IMPIC	ICNF	SGMTSSS	DGAEP	DGLAB	DGT
Commitment and belonging are high or very high	10	9	0	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
Pride, identity, or “vestir a camisola” language is used	7	5	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Crisis response, staying beyond normal hours, or remaining under pressure reveals commitment	10	5	0	1	0	3	1	2	3	0	0	0
Commitment is uneven across groups or vulnerable to reform, turnover, or mixed engagement	6	5	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	2	0
Commitment is stronger among longer-tenured groups in some cases	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Newer staff also show belonging, not only older cohorts	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0

Note. F = Total frequency (sum of references across all organizations); N = Number of organizations; IGF = Inspeção-Geral de Finanças; SGMSAUDE = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério da Saúde; INA = Instituto Nacional de Administração; DGAV = Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária; IMPIC = Instituto dos Mercados Públicos, do Imobiliário e da Construção; ICNF = Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas; SGMTSSS = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social; DGAEP = Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público; DGLAB = Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas; DGT = Direção-Geral do Território.

Commitment, uneven across groups or vulnerable to reform, turnover, and mixed engagement (F = 6, N = 5) introduces a necessary counterpoint to the dominant positive narrative. IGF acknowledges that the process of identity formation is gradual for newer staff and that some are not yet fully committed in the institutional sense. INA notes that the creation of a new career structure may have introduced a distortion in commitment patterns. IMPIC explicitly acknowledges that there is always a group that does not pull its weight, described by the leader as the *bad apple*, and that high and lower commitment coexist within the same workforce. DGAEP reports an initial expectation that commitment would be concentrated among longer-tenured staff, an assumption that subsequently proved incorrect. DGLAB identifies high rotation in support service functions such as finance and legal, as a source of weaker commitment in those areas, and notes that the era of spending an entire career within a single institution is largely over.

Newer staff also showing belonging, not only older cohorts (F = 3, N = 2) offers an analytically important corrective to the assumption that institutional commitment is exclusively a function of long tenure. IGF reports that some newer entrants are already wearing the jersey and feeling like IGF, suggesting that identity formation can occur relatively quickly when organizational culture and socialization processes are strong. DGAEP provides the most emphatic account: newer staff are described as showing a high level of commitment and sense of belonging that the leader characterizes as surprising and notable, explicitly stating that the assumption that only long-tenured staff feel this way proved to be incorrect.

Illustrative excerpts supporting these themes are presented in Appendix D (Table 39 - Commitment and Belonging Themes*)*.

Overall, across the three questions in this block, the data reveal a consistently positive picture of recognition, satisfaction, and commitment in Portuguese CPA, sustained primarily through nonfinancial mechanisms and relational organizational conditions rather than through economic reward. Recognition is almost entirely expressed through non-financial forms, with autonomy, involvement, role fit, praise, well-being support, and training investment constituting the dominant repertoire across the sample. For each of the ten organizations included in the study, levels of satisfaction appear to be high to moderately high overall, based on quantitative data in the form of formal surveys collected from six of the organizations but moderated by the presence of significant differences within organizations and by factors that cause low levels of satisfaction such as comparative compensation, institutional ambiguity, lack of resources, and

improper role fit. Levels of commitment and identification have been said to be high and very high in nine out of the ten organizations, with behavioral evidence from crisis management and staying on during adverse conditions as well as rejection of monetary incentives offered from other organizations lending support to this claim.

4.6. Block 5: Location, Commuting, and Work-Life Balance

4.6.1. Importance of location and commuting time

The analysis of Question 13 ("To what extent do your organization's geographic location and ease of access, for example transport options and commuting time, influence public servants' decisions to join the organization?") suggests that geography and access are well known practical aspects of employer appeal, and seven out of ten organizations have contributed to the aspect of location playing a role in either joining or remaining with the organization. The leaders do not perceive location as an issue related to image but rather as a feasibility factor that is determined by ease of commute, accessibility of transport, availability of parking facilities, and juggling work with family responsibilities. Table 21 presents the full frequency distribution of location and accessibility themes by organization.

Location and access clearly influencing joining or staying decisions (F = 8, N = 7) is scattered throughout the sample and supports considering location as an integral part of the value proposition of the employer, rather than an ancillary one. SGMSAUDE mentions that its location in the city center with convenient public transport is just an obvious advantage. The influence of location on decisions is recognized by INA but is not considered as an absolute deciding factor. DGAV says that the influence of proximity is extremely high and defines residential proximity as extremely important factor when candidates make their choice, especially considering positions spread around the country. IMPIC is the strongest statement concerning this factor. SGMTSSS supports the influence of location with two examples: firstly, people joined the organization due to more convenient access than in competing organizations and secondly, the advantage of location is emphasized in contrast with no difference in pay - this way, location becomes an attractive factor that can compensate for the lack of differences in remuneration. DGAEP mentions that it is a well-located organization which affects decisions. DGT emphasizes the importance of location and adds that it has some element of centrality.

Table 21 - Frequency of Location and Accessibility Themes by Organization

Theme	F	N	IGF	SGMSAUDE	INA	DGAV	IMPIC	ICNF	SGMTSSS	DGAEP	DGLAB	DGT
Location and access clearly influence joining or staying decisions	8	7	0	1	1	1	1	0	2	1	0	1
Central transport access, parking, or urban accessibility are described as advantages	12	6	0	2	0	0	3	0	1	1	3	2
Location is described as a disadvantage, barrier, or commuting burden	6	4	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Location matters more through retention or day-to-day feasibility than through initial attraction	4	3	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	0
Telework or hybrid work reduces location sensitivity or commuting burden	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Territorial dispersion makes headquarters location less relevant	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0

Note. F = Total frequency (sum of references across all organizations); N = Number of organizations; IGF = Inspeção-Geral de Finanças; SGMSAUDE = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério da Saúde; INA = Instituto Nacional de Administração; DGAV = Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária; IMPIC = Instituto dos Mercados Públicos, do Imobiliário e da Construção; ICNF = Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas; SGMTSSS = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social; DGAEP = Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público; DGLAB = Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas; DGT = Direção-Geral do Território.

Central transport access, parking, and urban accessibility described as advantages (F = 12, N = 6) is the highest-frequency theme in the table and provides the most concrete and institutionally differentiated account of how location functions as a positive signal. SGMSAUDE describes a city center location with good public transport connectivity and explicitly invokes the contrast with other institutions, noting that nobody wants to go to Alfragide, a comparative reference that illustrates how location advantage is experienced relationally rather than in absolute terms. IMPIC provides the most multimodal description of transport access in the sample: metro at the door at Campo Pequeno, train access for commuters arriving from the south bank and the Azambuja line, and a car park for those who drive, a combination that maximizes accessibility across different commuting profiles. SGMTSSS favorably contrasts its central location with peripheral public sector sites. DGAEP describes multimodal accessibility, including boat, train, and metro at the door. DGLAB provides the most extensive account of locational advantages in the sample, citing proximity to the second ring road, metro access at Campo Grande on both the Green and Yellow lines, proximity to Cidade Universitária and Lisbon Airport, and the availability of parking, described by the leader as a competitive advantage not to be wasted. DGT adds parking availability, outdoor space valued by staff, and the absence of a generalized open-plan layout as complementary locational features that contribute to a workspace perceived as comfortable and dignified.

Location described as a disadvantage, barrier, or commuting burden (F = 6, N = 4) introduces the negative dimension of the location theme and establishes that physical accessibility can undermine rather than support attractiveness when commuting conditions are poor. IGF provides the most emphatic negative account in the sample: the location does not help the organization, climbing the street in the rain is described as unpleasant, most staff would prefer to be elsewhere, only those who live nearby are happy with the current site, and rumors of a potential move circulate internally with the majority of staff reported as welcoming such a possibility. According to INA, the placement of the institution in Algés is a matter that comes up in every recruitment discussion, receiving mixed responses. According to DGAEP, the possibility of relocation to João XXI deterred some potential recruits, with the head of the department stating that an additional bus or metro trip holds weight in the decision-making process. As per DGT, the metro connection is not easy since the walk uphill from the nearest metro station.

Location mattering more through retention and day-to-day feasibility than initial attraction (F = 4, N = 3) captures an important analytical distinction that several leaders draw

explicitly. INA reports that a potential move to central Lisbon is an active internal topic of discussion, suggesting that location shapes the ongoing retention experience of current staff more directly than it shapes the entry decisions of new candidates. DGAV describes this process in the most detailed manner: although the worker may find the new position appealing, they are unwilling to commute from Lisbon to Oeiras, thus suggesting that practical considerations often take precedence over professional ones, and it is also mentioned that the decentralization of the leadership on the regional level serves as a recruiting tool, as it is possible because of proximity. DGLAB makes the difference explicit by stating that place matters only for staying and not for joining.

Territorial dispersion making headquarters location less relevant (F = 2, N = 1) which is uniquely represented by one organization alone, is arguably the most significant structural anomaly in this case study. The organization employs 1,800 people located in 78 different locations around the country. The leader clearly states that the organization's headquarters location does not provide any analysis worth mentioning. This is due to the fact that, on this scale, any answer regarding the organization's location is irrelevant, as each employee is closest to their assigned location according to their geographical location.

Illustrative excerpts supporting these themes are presented in Appendix D (Table 40 - Location and Accessibility Themes).

In summary, the single question posed to organizations in Block 5 shows that geographic location and physical accessibility do represent a real and widely acknowledged element of employer attractiveness in Portuguese CPA, since seven out of ten respondents confirm that their respective locations have an obvious impact on the decision to join or stay. Three location factors can be identified from the available information and operate simultaneously at a relational level in the context of the Lisbon public administration environment. First, central transport connections, parking, and overall connectivity operate as a positive point of differentiation between organizations on a comparative basis as opposed to an abstract benchmark of performance. Second, lack of physical accessibility functions as a retention problem in some cases, as the everyday effort required to overcome inconvenient transport becomes a hindrance to the positive impact of all other organizational advantages. Third, and most importantly from an analytical perspective, location appears to operate more strongly through retention and day-to-day feasibility than through initial attraction, because it imposes an additional cost of leaving on individuals who wish to do so. In terms of structural

considerations, territorial diffusion over the entire national territory makes the headquarters location an insignificant concept for at least one organization, while the ongoing evolution towards remote work arrangements is increasingly making location less relevant.

4.7. Block 6: Leadership-Employee (Mis)Alignment

4.7.1. Ranking the six factors

The analysis of Question 9 reveals that senior leaders in Portuguese CPA overwhelmingly perceive employee motivation as driven by intrinsic, civic, and growth-related factors rather than by economic rewards. Leaders do not frame employee motivation in transactional terms: economic value sits at the bottom in almost every case, while the top positions are occupied by Application-Civic, Application-Knowledge, Development, and Interest. Table 22**Error! Reference source not found.** presents the full value rankings by organization, and Table 23 and Table 24 summarize the distribution and aggregate patterns across the sample.

The most consistent finding across the sample is the persistent weakness of Economic value. In all ten institutions, leaders treat pay as weak, constrained, or secondary. In seven institutions, Economic is explicitly ranked last. Even where it is not last, it still sits in the lower tier, and it never appears in the top three across any organization in the sample.

A second major finding is the split between Civic and Knowledge Application. In technical and knowledge-dense organizations, Knowledge outranks Civic. This is clearest in IGF, DGAV, DGLAB, and DGT. In mission-heavy and public-value-visible organizations, Civic outranks Knowledge. This pattern appears in SGMSAUDE, IMPIC, ICNF, and DGAEP.

Interest and Development are repeatedly placed in the upper tier, especially in organizations where work is specialized, project-based, or intellectually demanding. DGT is the clearest case, with Development first, Knowledge second, and Interest third. DGLAB gives a strong intrinsic profile, with Knowledge first, Interest second, and Development third. IMPIC and DGAEP also place Development and Interest in the upper ranks.

Social value is relatively marginalized in the ranking exercise. Only two institutions place Social in the top tier, SGMSAUDE and SGMTSSS, and SGMTSSS is the only organization where Social appears in the first position.

Table 22 - Value Rankings by Organization

Rank	IGF	SGMSAUDE	INA	DGAV	IMPIC	ICNF	SGMTSSS	DGAEP	DGLAB	DGT
1	Knowledge	Interest	Civic	Knowledge	Civic	Civic	Social	Civic	Knowledge	Development
2	Development	Social	Interest	Civic	Development	Interest	Knowledge	Interest	Interest	Knowledge
3	Civic	Civic	Knowledge	Development	Interest	Knowledge	Interest	Development	Development	Interest
4	Interest	Development	Social	Interest	Social	Development	Economic	Knowledge	Economic	Civic
5	Social	Knowledge	Development	Social	Knowledge	Social	Civic	Economic	Social	Social
6	Economic	Economic	Economic	Economic	Economic	Economic	Development	Social	Civic	Economic

Note. IGF = Inspeção-Geral de Finanças; SGMSAUDE = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério da Saúde; INA = Instituto Nacional de Administração; DGAV = Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária; IMPIC = Instituto dos Mercados Públicos, do Imobiliário e da Construção; ICNF = Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas; SGMTSSS = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social; DGAEP = Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público; DGLAB = Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas; DGT = Direção-Geral do Território. Rank 1 = highest; Rank 6 = lowest. Values: Civic = application-Civic value; Knowledge = application-knowledge value; Development = development value; Economic = economic value; Interest = interest value; Social = Social value.

Several analytically important outliers complete the picture. SGMTSSS is the clearest relational outlier, placing Social first and Knowledge second. DGLAB is the clearest technical outlier, with Civic placed last, while Knowledge and Interest lead the order. DGT is distinctive because Development is ranked first, producing a profile centered on growth, challenge, and specialist work. Table 22.

Table 23 - Distribution of Value Rankings Across Organizations

Factor	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5	Rank 6	Total
Civic	4	1	2	1	1	1	10
Knowledge	3	2	2	1	2	0	10
Interest	1	4	3	2	0	0	10
Development	1	2	3	2	1	1	10
Social	1	1	0	2	5	1	10
Economic	0	0	0	2	1	7	10

Note. Values indicate the number of organizations (out of 10) that assigned each rank to each factor. Rank 1 = highest priority; Rank 6 = lowest priority. Civic = application-civic value; Knowledge = application-knowledge value; Development = development value; Economic = economic value; Interest = interest value; Social = social value.

Table 24 - Summary of Value Rankings: Mean Rank and Placement Frequency

Factor	Mean Rank	Top 3 Placements	1st Place frequency
Interest	2.6	8	1
Civic	2.7	7	4
Knowledge	2.7	7	3
Development	3.3	6	1
Social	4.2	2	1
Economic	5.5	0	0

Note. Mean rank is calculated across 10 organizations (Rank 1 = highest priority; Rank 6 = lowest priority). Top 3 placements = number of organizations ranking the factor first, second, or third. First-place placements = number of organizations ranking the factor first. Civic = application-civic value; Knowledge = application-knowledge value; Development = development value; Economic = economic value; Interest = interest value; Social = social value.

Interest is the factor with the best overall average position, with a mean rank of 2.6, appearing in the top three in eight institutions. Civic and Knowledge are tied on mean rank at 2.7, but they play different roles: Civic is ranked first in four institutions, while Knowledge is ranked first in three and remains highly salient in technical bodies. Social is ranked first only once and appears in the top three only twice. Economic is ranked last in seven of the ten institutions and never appears in the top three.

4.7.2. Overall strengths and weaknesses

The analysis of Question 14 ("When you consider all factors that help explain why this institution is attractive to prospective employees, what strengths help attract strong candidates, and what weaknesses reduce attractiveness for future strong candidates?") provides a comprehensive synthesis of what attracts employees from the point of view of leaders, who are asked to take a step back and provide an overview of the overall institutional picture. It turns out that the thematic structure generated here is virtually identical to the structure found in previous interview sections, which suggests that the attractiveness dimensions found through specific questions are indeed the same as the ones that leaders find spontaneously when summarizing their institutions' overall profile. As far as strengths are concerned, they include: climate, flexibility, and supportive management; mission and public value; reputation and technical prestige; learning and career capital. Weaknesses consist of: pay limitations and lack of supplements; rigid management methods; structural recruitment difficulties. Table 25 presents the full frequency distribution of employer brand strengths and weaknesses themes by organization.

On the strength side, climate, flexibility, and supportive management (F = 12, N = 7) is the theme that occurs with the highest frequency and has the greatest dispersion across organizational categories. In SGMSAUDE, a positive climate is regarded as an attraction to potential candidates. According to INA, there are two strengths: strategic fit with active participation of employees, both when defining the strength and monitoring its development, as well as a positive overall climate of well-being. In IMPIC, collaborative climate and the prospect of growth are cited as two complementary strengths. In ICNF, the HRM strategy based on putting people first is presented as a strength supported by practical actions in organization management, in particular the inclusion of vehicle and computer provision as part of the HR strategy. SGMTSSS describes open and transparent management, proximity to workers in decision-making, and participatory processes as interconnected features of a management style that constitutes a genuine employer differentiator. DGAEP identifies a good work environment alongside the perspectives on offer within the organization. DGT describes a conciliation culture in which facilitating people's personal lives without compromising work performance is treated as an organizational strength.

Table 25 - Frequency of Employer Brand Strengths and Weaknesses Themes by Organization

Theme	F	N	IGF	SGMSAUDE	INA	DGAV	IMPIC	ICNF	SGMTSSS	DGAEP	DGLAB	DGT
Strengths include …												
climate, flexibility, or supportive management	12	7	0	1	2	0	2	2	2	2	0	1
mission, public value, or social purpose	7	5	0	2	0	2	1	1	0	1	0	0
reputation, authority, or technical prestige	5	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
learning environment, training, or career capital	4	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1
location or access as a practical advantage	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Weaknesses include …												
pay limits, weak competitiveness, or missing supplements	15	7	2	0	2	0	2	3	1	0	3	2
rigid management tools, bureaucracy, or recruitment structure limits	9	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	3
workload, resource shortages, or poor physical conditions	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
uncertainty from reform, extinction, or relocation	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Note. F = Total frequency (sum of references across all organizations); N = Number of organizations; IGF = Inspeção-Geral de Finanças; SGMSAUDE = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério da Saúde; INA = Instituto Nacional de Administração; DGAV = Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária; IMPIC = Instituto dos Mercados Públicos, do Imobiliário e da Construção; ICNF = Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas; SGMTSSS = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social; DGAEP = Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público; DGLAB = Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas; DGT = Direção-Geral do Território.

Mission, public value, and social purpose (F = 7, N = 5) captures the civic dimension of the employer value proposition in its synthesized form. SGMSAUDE describes its position as a central service within the ministry with genuinely central impact, emphasizing proximity to government members and a long institutional history. DGAV contributes two distinct mission-related strengths: the substantive content of its knowledge domains, including public health, animal welfare, and sustainability, which attract interest and internship requests, and the variety of its field and border control work, described as compelling because no two working days are the same. IMPIC describes its mission as the primary organizational strength, emphasizing its importance and reach as an attraction factor that leaders believe would be more powerful if more widely known. ICNF frames its social significance explicitly, characterizing what the organization does as being for everyone and identifying social valorization as a strength that gives organizational work a meaning beyond technical function. DGAEP presents its mission related to human resources and public administration as a recognized strength, noting the institutional knowledge the organization holds as a complementary asset.

Reputation, authority, and technical prestige (F = 5, N = 3) is spread across three organizations. The first one speaks of the power of its institution's name to still make people think before acting. Moreover, media exposure and institutional reputation create the impression of something interesting and relevant for future candidates to do. In the second organization, reputation and credibility come hand in hand with competence and serve as employer branding components. Thirdly, the strongest example is given of how the reputation contributes to organizational strengths. Indeed, being the authority on two different professional topics, it attracts the best professionals in the sphere, who leave the organization having skills to be successful in different administrations and to develop themselves as leaders.

Learning environment, training, and career capital (F = 4, N = 3) represent the next category under strength. In one case, an organization refers to being a good school as a development center for people that will leave, considering the impact of such learning center as a continuous attraction factor regardless of the lack of competitive financial advantage. The second organization highlights the strength of its capacity to develop by emphasizing that the vision of workers after being hired is transversal, which means the ability to develop beyond the professional specialization acquired is a huge added value. The third organization considers that projects and innovation represent the key strength regarding attraction.

On the weaknesses side, pay limits, weak competitiveness, and missing supplements (F = 15, N = 7) is the theme most frequently mentioned across the table and the most widespread

weakness type overall. One organization highlights two interconnected pay weaknesses, namely lack of participation in a ministry-based evaluation exercise and the absence of an inspection-related supplement which other similar agencies enjoy, and states it is the primary weakness currently faced by it. Another mentions complete inability to remunerate employees for high performance and the lack of any kind of pay difference between it and other public bodies. The next organization discusses economic and financial weakness in terms of the organizational structure, explaining that if pay was competitive, many more individuals would opt for joining it. Another one offers the most socially oriented description of a pay weakness - low compensation rates forcing assistants (operational and technical) earning roughly €900 a month to leave their positions due to inability to sustain themselves economically; lower-grade specialists are highlighted as the group being impacted the most. Yet another one refers to trained specialists leaving the organization and feeling the difference between salaries offered by the agency in question and its competitors. The final organization mentions economic weakness as the primary one in terms of salary supplements provided by competing agencies and affecting accounting, HR, and legal profiles; inability to compete for knowledge niches sought after by the private sector and recruit IT professionals without developing a separate IT profile are also mentioned.

Rigid management tools, bureaucracy, and recruitment structure limits (F = 9, N = 3) represents an entirely different type of structural constraint that works separately from any lack of pay, as discussed above. The first organization mentions that external recruitment was not possible for years due to the Ministry of Finance always providing negative assessments of the process irrespective of which government is running the country, hence creating an inability to fill positions that are necessary to avoid serious organizational problems over the coming five years. The second mentions that management mechanisms are few and inadequate, processes are highly bureaucratic and cumbersome, and that the high effort-to-effectiveness ratio serves as a source of discouragement. The third organization mentions that one of the main reasons for the recruitment problem lies in the inability to conduct external competition, and that the organization relies heavily on internal promotions.

Location as a practical advantage (F = 1, N = 1) is contributed by one organization alone, which explicitly cites its location at Campo Pequeno as a strength in its overall attractiveness summary, consistent with the detailed transport and accessibility account provided in Question 13.

Illustrative excerpts supporting these themes are presented in Appendix D (Table 41 - Employer Brand Strengths and Weaknesses Themes).

In general, as far as both questions in Block 6 are concerned, there emerges a well-integrated and highly coherent structure of how leaders think about employees' motivations and employers' attractiveness when faced with the need to rank and synthesize these aspects explicitly. First, Question 9 shows how, in all cases, leaders view motivations as predominantly intrinsic, civic, and growth-related, while the Economic value is consistently ranked in seven of ten organizations as last in importance and is not included in any organization's top three rankings. Second, there appear to be distinct clusters within the motivation structure as follows: Interest, Civic, and Knowledge Application rank highly in all cases; Development ranks as a strong middle-ranking factor; Social Value becomes a marginal concept in this context altogether. Third, the synthesized structure in Question 14 corroborates the above structure with respect to the strengths leaders associate with their organizations: namely, climate, mission, reputation, and learning value represent the key positive aspects mentioned in all the cases in relation to employer attractiveness. As far as weaknesses are concerned, the seven organizations mention pay as a limiting factor, while three remaining organizations focus on recruitment and management rigidity. These weaknesses give the most explicit illustration found among all the interviews on the dynamics of attractiveness erosion in Portuguese CPA. Thus, two questions from Block 6 provide the missing link between the specific conclusions made on various themes throughout the study and the general theory of employer attractiveness in Portuguese CPA.

5. Discussion

Study 2 explored the interpretation of employer attractiveness, attraction, and retention from the perspectives of senior leaders of Portuguese CPA organizations. Following Study 1, which established an alternative 6-factor structure of the EmpAt, this study employed qualitative interview data to explore whether there is any substantial evidence supporting the dimensions uncovered among employees. The study focused on Application-Civic value, Application-Knowledge value, Development value, Interest value, Social value, and Economic value; however, other factors outside the classic EmpAt model were highlighted as well, such as location-related WLB, organizational prestige, organizational flexibility, and organizational constraints.

The main finding of Study 2 is that Portuguese CPA organizations construct employer attractiveness based on the compensatory employer value proposition, considering the structural financial limitations. First, all interviewees consistently pointed out that pay and monetary benefits are not significant differentiators for Portuguese CPA organizations, primarily because remuneration, career policies, and most of the reward schemes are defined by the wider framework of public employment legislation and organizational policies. It does not mean that pay is not important. It only means that pay seldom serves as a unique sign of employer branding in the CPA organizations of Portugal. As a result, organizations build employer attractiveness relying on the other value sources such as organizational prestige, employer mission, personal development opportunities, innovativeness, flexibility, supportive management, recognition strategies, and geographic proximity. Overall, the results are aligned with employer branding theory, according to which employer attractiveness is viewed as a set of attributes rather than a particular employment condition (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Berthon et al., 2005; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003).

This discussion will address six thematic blocks. First, the discussion will focus on economic value and the compensatory architecture organizations built to counteract poor financial differentiation. Second, mission and civic value are discussed in terms of organizational attractiveness depending on its importance, organizational type, and professional identity. Third, the issue of organizational culture and its asymmetric strength as a retention factor will be raised. Fourth, recognition, satisfaction, and affective commitment will be discussed to explain the role of non-monetary recognition in the maintenance of positive

attitudes regardless of resource limitations. Fifth, the topic of location-based WLB will be analyzed from the perspective of commute time, accessibility, and telework. Finally, the leader-employee convergence/divergence analysis will determine where and how the interpretations of leaders converge with employee evidence from Study 1 and what gaps remain in that regard.

This qualitative approach allows us to confirm our understanding of the six-factor structure and identify additional organizational characteristics related to it. Thus, while we may see that mission and civic value are two different dimensions, the evidence from Study 2 helps us to specify the nuances with which leaders discuss their differences. Overall, Study 2 shows that the phenomenon of employer attractiveness in Portuguese CPA is driven by the combination of institutional constraints and organizational agency.

5.1. Economic Constraints and Compensatory Employer Value Propositions

A key finding relates to the importance of Economic value as a critical vulnerability in the design of the employer value proposition within the Portuguese CPA. All participants referred to salary and economic rewards as weak differentiation elements of attraction and retention efforts. This converges with findings from Study 1 where Economic value received the lowest mean score among the six dimensions. In terms of rank order exercise conducted in Study 2, Economic ranks last in seven out of the ten organizations studied and was never in the top three positions. Such convergence between employees' evaluations and the leadership perspective suggests that the lack of Economic value is a problem both for employees and managers.

This does not mean that the issue of pay should be ignored. It indicates, however, that compensation has a limited capacity to work as a branding element because there is very little space for differentiation provided by the Law. Indeed, in all cases, the leaders mentioned economic benefits as something they must consider but cannot fully control to attract employees. In other words, Economic value plays more of a hygiene factor role rather than an attraction one. As proposed by Herzberg (1966), the fact that the remuneration is decent is not sufficient for creating job satisfaction and therefore, hardly works for attraction purposes. Its perceived deficiency leads to dissatisfaction, eventually causing people to exit.

Given this restriction, leaders spoke about the attractiveness of the employer as a compensatory strategy based on noneconomic factors. First, it concerns the reputational and symbolic value of the organization as a tool for recruitment. There are several organizations that rely on their high status, visibility, prestige, or technical importance to appeal to applicants.

Here, the brand name serves as an indicator of credibility and learning opportunities provided by the institution. This is in line with the instrumental-symbolic framework of Lievens and Highhouse (2003), according to which the evaluation of organizations is performed in terms of employment attributes and symbols. The relevance of reputation appears in cases where the pay structure does not allow for differentiation since reputation can serve as another factor indicating the uniqueness of the organization.

Second, flexibility and telecommuting are mentioned as part of the employer value proposition. These attributes appeared among the leaders' answers as something highly visible in the context of constrained salary growth and incentives. There were some leaders who emphasized the practical benefit of telecommuting and flexibility: they help to save on transportation, accommodate the needs of family, and positively impact the quality of work-life. In this case, flexibility serves as an indirect form of compensation since although it does not involve money, it changes the perception of the employment package. From this perspective, it is possible to revise the definition of Economic value obtained from Study 1: while pay might be viewed as weak, overall satisfaction with the package could still occur due to flexibility.

This view follows the concept of total rewards approach that perceives compensation as an overall employment offer than just payment. According to Fulmer and Li (2022), total rewards comprise monetary and non-monetary components that the employee values in the relationship with the employer. In this regard, flexibility, teleworking, reduced commuting time, and balancing life and work represent indirect rewards since they lower the cost of living and create indirect economic value for employment. This explains the role of flexibility as a means of compensation by the leaders in Study 2 during pay constraints. It further makes sense why Economic value is not restricted to salary because employers may offer high value outside of monetary terms.

People-centered management is the third compensatory mechanism. Leaders mentioned employee participation, supportive leadership, psychological safety, role fit, training programs, and caring for employees as means to generate value without additional salary increases. It is important to note that people-centered management represents a shift towards the generation of value in the employment relationship exchange. In those situations when it is impossible to reward employees economically, leaders try to create value through the use of voice, trust, recognition, autonomy, and respect. The findings also reinforce the multidimensional approach in the concept of employer attractiveness in the EmpAt model, according to which employer

attractiveness is a bundle of economic, developmental, social, interest and application-related values (Berthon et al., 2005).

In terms of the importance of stability, the results provide an explanation for the job stability paradox. Usually, stability is considered a conventional benefit of public employment. Nevertheless, the interviews showed that stability is not distinctive for public employers and can hardly distinguish organizations in the public sector from each other. Leaders did not consider stability to be an organizational advantage. Rather, they perceived it as a common feature of all public organizations since stability is offered by all of them to a similar extent. Thus, stability has low potential for differentiation among employer attractiveness attributes.

There are two more dimensions of the stability paradox. On the one hand, leaders indicated that younger, mobile, and employable individuals do not pay much attention to this aspect compared to older generations. This is consistent with the literature on generational differences in work values (Twenge et al., 2010). On the other hand, institutional changes, reforms, extinction processes, and the political cycle undermine the attractiveness of this concept. This has been challenging the belief that stability is a guarantee in public service. Hence, it can be concluded that moderately rated stability-related items in Study 1 reveal ambiguity regarding the importance of stability.

Professional development leads to the second paradox. Leaders mentioned their substantial investments in professional training, education, technical exposure, and learning experiences. This reinforces the role of Development and Knowledge value in the positive employer image found in Study 1. On the other hand, the leaders also stressed the fact that development does not necessarily lead to career progression inside the organization. Advancement is slow and weakly differentiated in an environment constrained by regulations and budgets. As a consequence, a temporal contradiction appears. Development makes people want to join the organization in the beginning, while increasing their external employability as well. Leaders of organizations such as IGF, DGAEP, and DGLAB characterized development as a kind of school or springboard, which develops employees' skills before they move on to higher-paying jobs elsewhere.

This is significant for theoretical understanding of employer attractiveness in CPA in Portugal because the investment in employee development shows support from the organization and enhances the perception of its value as an employer in terms of the career development theory and employer perceived investment model (D. G. Allen et al., 2003; Kuvaas, 2008). Yet when the organization cannot convert development into career differentiation, pay

improvements, or advancement, it results in exit risks. Study 1 captures the current evaluation of development in one moment in time, while Study 2 clarifies the organizational risk associated with that particular value.

These results illustrate that the employer attractiveness strategy used by Portuguese CPAs employs a compensatory model rather than an economic differentiation one. While salary, promotion, and job security continue to matter, they do not create a distinct image for the employer because their impact depends mostly on systemic factors. Thus, the executives depend upon the organization's institutional reputation, flexibility, meaningfulness of the job, professional development, participatory environment, and people-oriented management to maintain employer attractiveness and employee retention. These data lend themselves to a contextual interpretation of employer attractiveness within public administration as the employer’s offer may be no less valuable despite its non-economic character.

5.2. The Conditionality of Mission and Civic Meaning

Another main result of Study 2 is that both mission and civic meaning are important for employer attractiveness within Portuguese CPA, but they act differently in their strength and mechanism of operation depending on the specific organization. The leaders recognize societal contribution, public value, and citizen orientation as relevant elements in attracting and retaining staff members. In Question 4, eight out of ten organizations mentioned society contribution or public value as being relevant factors to attraction and retention. In Question 8, leaders stated that mission and core values are also significant and meaningful in eight organizations. Hence, public service motivation and public value theories have clear applicability to the issue of employer attractiveness in CPA in line with Perry and Wise (1990), Ritz et al. (2023), and Vandenabeele (2007). However, the qualitative results reveal that civic meaning depends on the specific circumstances. It operates conditionally on organizational type, visibility of impact, professional identity, and career stage.

This result improves the interpretation of findings of Study 1. In the survey among employees, the dimension of Civic value was identified as one of the most prominent in the revised version of the EmpAt instrument. While the results of Study 2 confirm that civic contribution is relevant and significant in practice, they also reveal the conditional nature of this concept. Specifically, a high score on the dimension does not mean that every CPA organization uses the same mission-based narrative to attract people. On the contrary, the leaders' responses show that the recognition of public value and its utilization as a tool for distinction are two

different actions. There is no contradiction in acknowledging that public institutions have a societal contribution but that this contribution does not function as a distinguishing factor. This idea is especially relevant for support, technical, and transversal bodies.

It should be noted that the distinction between mission intensive and technical/support organizations is critical in this context. Mission intensive organizations have more civic meaning than others due to employees' and candidates' belief in a strong relationship between what candidates do and what happens socially. Relevant examples include organizations dealing with such aspects as public health care, consumer protection, environmental protection, transparency, conservation, and citizen complaints. In these organizations, mission has higher signaling value for candidates as they can better realize how the organization helps solve important societal issues. It supports the instrumental and symbolic model of employer attractiveness, which means that applicants appreciate both concrete characteristics of jobs and meanings of organizational work (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003).

Technical and support organizations, in turn, have civic meaning indirectly due to institutional prestige, professional authority, and enabling identity. In some cases organizations emphasize their indirect contribution to society, namely, their assistance to governmental organizations in performing their functions, improvement of system efficacy, development of reference knowledge, and enabling other organizations to help citizens. It means that attraction narratives are associated less with social contribution than with being part of a respected institution, working with special knowledge, and helping to develop the public administration system. The latter statement finds support in social identity theory as employees receive a sense of identity by identifying themselves with the organization or profession (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

The distinction is also supportive of the Civic/Knowledge dichotomy found in Study 1. For leaders, there seems to be no confusion between civic contribution and knowledge application. While the former involves serving the community, defending the interests of citizens, contributing to the general welfare of the population, and creating public value, the latter includes applying skills, excelling in a technical field, handling complicated issues, and achieving professional status. In mission driven organizations, the importance of Application-Civic value is more noticeable. Conversely, in knowledge intensive organizations, the attractiveness of Application-Knowledge value can be more pronounced. The qualitative difference makes another point in favor of maintaining Application value as two distinct factors within the CPA framework.

Interview findings also indicate that generational and career considerations affect the significance of civic meaning for younger individuals. Leaders explained that younger employees were unlikely to consider mission or stability as sufficient factors of attraction if their expectations regarding economic gains, personal development, and WLB were unmet. However, this statement must not be understood to imply that younger employees did not share public service ideals. On the contrary, civic orientation seemed to become more conditional. This type of motivation was expected to coincide with the opportunity to enjoy decent working conditions, learn something useful, gain flexibility, and benefit from professional growth.

Task visibility explains why the civic meaning is stronger in certain organizations in comparison to other institutions. When the results produced by a certain organization are tangible, quantifiable or observable in society, it will be easier to tie the employees' work with public-good creation. Several examples included citizens' complaints and clarifications, building regulation and real estate mediation, procurement transparency and public goods' conservation-related tasks. Such examples provide the mission with a tangible meaning. It aligns with the findings of Grant (2008) who highlights task significance as the factor that fosters prosocial motivation. People will more easily experience this kind of motivation when they recognize the positive effect of their efforts on others. Otherwise, leaders must translate organizational activities into an easily understandable language of public value.

Overall, Study 2 shows that mission and civic meaning are important factors that influence employer attractiveness in Portuguese CPA. However, the importance of these factors depends on context and specific aspects that should be considered. For example, the public service motivation theory (Perry & Wise, 1990; Vandenabeele, 2007) helps us understand why civic contributions matter, the P-O fit model (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005) allows us to explain why mission alignment is an important criterion of attraction and retention, and the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) is necessary to understand under what circumstances technical prestige and institutional power will substitute the direct influence on citizens as the source of meaning. Thus, the contribution of Study 2 was not limited to proving the importance of mission for employer branding purposes. It consisted in explaining how and under what conditions mission became an important employer attractiveness indicator. In mission-oriented bodies, the employer brand should highlight public impact. In technical bodies, emphasis should be placed on expertise, authority and professional mastery. Finally, in support bodies the focus should be put on explaining how indirect work contributes to public value.

5.3. Organizational Culture as an Asymmetric Retention Mechanism

Based on the results obtained in Block 3, it is clear that organizational culture and working environment play a significant part in making the employer appealing among the CPA organizations in Portugal. However, the importance of these two factors lies in asymmetry, because the organizational culture retains more effectively than attracts new applicants. The organizational characteristics mentioned by the interviewees include positive organizational climate, open communications, participation in decisions, leader accessibility, cohesion, and flexibility. These are the aspects of organizational culture, but they tend to be revealed only after a candidate joins the organization or gets recommendations from employees. In this sense, organizational culture cannot serve as a proper signal of recruiting but rather plays a role in retaining employees based on their accumulated experience of the work at the organization.

It becomes clear why the relational and social aspects of the employment relationship are fundamental even if they are not identified as the most important attraction factors. The organizational culture influences employees' opinions regarding the work at the organization as a result of personal experiences, such as supportive environment, involvement in decision-making process, and respect for employees. This interpretation can be explained through the prism of P-O fit theory, according to which the individual values fit into organizational culture and lead to high retention rates (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). At the same time, the theory of job embeddedness proves relevant to this study as well (Mitchell et al., 2001).

It becomes evident that such cultural retention occurs predominantly within informal contexts. In several organizations, for example, references were made to word-of-mouth, the return of former employees, positive feedback from current employees to candidates, or the fact that employees stay because they consider the working environment better than alternative organizations. What follows is the conclusion that culture does have employer brand value in Portugal, even though most of the value is implicit. The value spreads through networking, rather than through employer branding. This means that while there is a competitive advantage for CPA organizations in terms of authenticity, there is also a disadvantage related to strategic invisibility, in the sense that organizations invest in culture without necessarily creating an employer brand through culture.

Participation is one of the most relevant cultural mechanisms identified in this section. Leaders described open-door practices, staff involvement in decisions, internal transparency, participatory meetings, and opportunities to propose improvements. These practices show that participation is not merely a leadership discourse, but also a concrete organizational routine in

several institutions. This finding connects with Cameron and Quinn's (2011) competing values framework, especially the idea that more collaborative and participative cultures support commitment and engagement. In the CPA context, participation also has a compensatory function: when organizations cannot differentiate through pay, they create value through voice, involvement, and respect.

Proximity in leadership and psychological safety elaborate on this mechanism. Even though this topic was found in fewer organizations, it is very significant theoretically. The leaders gave examples such as availability, delegation, joint work with employees, non-blaming and support for employees under pressure. This information helps understand why culture leads to commitment. The practices listed above allow the creation of a safe environment for the employees, which means that they feel protected, heard, and valued. All the examples presented above correspond to the concept of psychological safety proposed by Edmondson (1999) and are associated with the idea that employees will voice their ideas as concerns, participate, and risk without fear of punishment. Reciprocity, as a key feature of social exchange (Blau, 1964), is relevant in this situation because it is obvious that most employees will be loyal to the organization in response to support.

The last sub-theme can be described as cohesion and pride in institutions. Many leaders compared the concept of retention to the phrase "wearing the jersey" as a sign of belonging to a group and identification with it. Thus, one should assume that it is possible to retain employees not only due to personal interaction with leaders and other members of an organization but also through the process of identifying the organization with its employees. Social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) explains the phenomenon mentioned above quite well because employees start to identify with their organization.

In terms of organizational culture, flexibility manifests itself through signals about trust. In other words, while in previous parts flexibility was viewed through the prism of its instrumental value in providing indirect benefits to employees (as an alternative to economic benefits), in Block 3 flexibility is perceived as an organizational symbol. By giving telework options, being flexible to employees' needs, and adjusting schedules, the employer creates an image of seeing workers as responsible adults who can be trusted rather than just workers who need constant supervision. Thus, the symbolic dimension of the employer value proposition is reinforced, which fits into the framework of the instrumental-symbolic perspective on attractiveness of employers (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003).

At the same time, it is noteworthy that there are also negative cases of organizational culture acting as a retention tool. Two organizations described hierarchical structure, separation between different professional groups, conservatism, and resistance to change as cultural barriers that limit the value of internal corporate culture as a retention mechanism. The importance of good internal communication, lack of a silo culture, and a willingness to innovate and change in order to improve were highlighted here, similar to those seen in Block 1 in regard to Innovation value. Culture is thus beneficial for retention purposes only when it is participatory, cohesive, and flexible.

5.4. Recognition, Satisfaction, and Commitment Under Resource Constraints

The results from Block 4 indicate that satisfaction and commitment can be maintained within the scope of Portuguese CPA organizations, where there is little possibility for financial differentiation among employees. Recognition, satisfaction, and commitment seem to represent another series of interlinked results, stemming from the same compensatory approach already reported. As leaders cannot differentiate financially (with pay, bonuses, and career advancement opportunities), they turn to other types of recognition approaches to convey care, respect, and trust. In Question 5, recognition was represented by well-being initiatives, flexibility, personal assistance, autonomy, involvement, role fit, praising, communication, training, and investment in one's career.

Therefore, recognition emerges as another means of compensation. Leaders mentioned different practices that make employees feel valued without any financial rewards. These include postgraduate studies, international training, competencies mapping, participation in decision-making, appreciation, flexibility, initiatives concerning health and well-being, as well as personal/family support. Such practices are important since they fulfill the three psychological needs outlined by self-determination theory: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Furthermore, recognition is a sign of organizational support since the employee receives evidence of investment, attention, and care from the organization's side. In this context, recognition is not solely about praising. Instead, it represents an employment relationship aimed at sustaining motivation and engagement in the absence of financial rewards.

This interpretation can help account for the findings regarding satisfaction. For Question 10, leaders described employee satisfaction in all ten organizations as positive, moderate to high, or improving, though many organizations reported differences within their organizations

in terms of role, unit, function, salary comparison, uncertainty, workload, organizational resource constraints, and role fit. It is not important that dissatisfaction is absent; rather, what is important is that both the dissatisfaction arising from pay or structural factors and the positive satisfaction derived from mission, climate, prestige, professional development, recognition, and interpersonal relationships exist at the same time. This reflects Locke's (1976) multidimensional theory of job satisfaction, in which job satisfaction arises out of multiple facets of the job.

It also explains the relationship between this study and Study 1. Economic value was relatively low in Study 1, but Interest, Application, and Development were higher. The analysis in Block 4 provides an explanation for the possibility of this pattern of results. Employees may express dissatisfaction with their pay but remain satisfied with the broader employment experience because of the meaning of the work, interpersonal relations, learning opportunities, flexibility, and recognition available through the employment experience.

Commitment is the best example that provides support for this mechanism. As mentioned in Question 11, commitment and sense of belonging were reported by the respondents from nine out of ten organizations as high or very high. The leaders did not just speak about attitudes but gave examples of behaviors that indicated the presence of commitment, such as staying through the period of institutional ambiguity or crisis, putting extra hours, rejecting the offers of better compensation, and coming back when facing adverse conditions elsewhere. These findings are coherent with Meyer and Allen's (1991) definition of affective commitment because employees are attached emotionally or identity-wise rather than based on calculations.

The evidence also suggests a pathway linking the constructs already discussed. Mission attracts or gives meaning, culture socializes employees into the organization, and recognition sustains the employment relationship over time. When these elements reinforce each other, employees develop stronger organizational affective commitment. This pathway is theoretically supported by both social identity theory, since organizational belonging becomes part of how employees understand their professional identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) and by social exchange theory, because employees reciprocate perceived support with loyalty, effort, and commitment (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Nevertheless, the results indicate boundaries to the use of compensation based on non-economic value. In cases where institutional uncertainty, resources shortages, poor working conditions, or mismatched role are too salient, satisfaction falls. The reason why the presence of strengths at the symbolic and relational levels does not overcome the impact of weaknesses in material and structural dimensions is that such strengths are effective only if the basic

organizational preconditions for work continue to be met. This idea is very important to avoid idealized perspectives about non-economic compensation through recognition. Recognition compensates for low wages; however, it cannot neutralize the consequences of poor conditions, unfulfilled career potentialities, or institutional instability.

5.5. Location-Based Work-Life Balance as an Additional Factor

According to the Block 5 findings, geographic location, access, and commuting time emerge as an additional factor. The leaders did not consider location as a symbolic or imagistic attribute. Instead, they considered location as a tangible condition of employment, which has something to do with access, transport, parking, commuting time, family issues, and the day-to-day possibility to stay with a given organization. In Question 13, seven out of ten institutions recognized that their location or geographical access plays a positive role in attracting employees or keeping them in the institution. Thus, the addition of location-based WLB as another dimension becomes appropriate outside the EmpAt classic scope.

The current study expands the results found in the previous study because the initial EmpAt framework does not specifically address commuting and geographic access. The dimensions comprised in EmpAt overlook any location-based conditions of the employer. According to findings in this study, location is important because commuting time, transport access, parking, and teleworking have both an economic value and a personal quality of life value. This finding echo literature as it is already known that longer commuting is linked with lower life satisfaction and more stress, and commuting was identified as one of the everyday activities that have the worst emotional valence (Chatterjee et al., 2020; Kahneman et al., 2004). Similarly, Kim and Wiggins (2011) reported that long commuting is associated with lower job satisfaction in the public sector and flexible working hours help mitigate this problem.

Based on the results from the interviews, there are two complementary dimensions associated with WLB that have been highlighted. The first one is flexibility and telework, evident from earlier parts as an indirect advantage and a characteristic of people centered management. The other dimension is geographic accessibility, which minimizes the time, expense, and effort associated with commuting. Both dimensions act simultaneously: flexibility makes employees feel less pressure since they have more freedom of choice about where and when they perform their jobs. Meanwhile, a convenient location also decreases pressure in terms of making work physically less costly for the employee. Such interpretation aligns with the existing theories on WLB (Ashforth et al., 2000; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). This suggests

that location works better as a retention factor than as a motivating factor. Although some interviewees have claimed that both candidates and employees evaluate commuting costs as part of comparing different institutions, the impact seems more pronounced once individuals start realizing what commuting means and how difficult it is to endure. In this sense, location acts similarly to job embeddedness and influences the decision to stay in or leave the institution depending on the ties and fit in the specific workplace and its surrounding (Mitchell et al., 2001). The convenient location makes leaving a job more costly; at the same time, inconvenient location makes it more costly to stay at the workplace. From such a perspective, the issue of geographic accessibility is similar to that of organizational culture mentioned in the previous section.

Likewise, location acts as a hygiene factor. A good location makes sense and can be considered valuable but does not create any intrinsic attraction by itself. However, a bad location increases dissatisfaction significantly and limits the impact of other dimensions. Examples provided in the file show that difficult access, better transport infrastructure, worse commuting conditions, or less favorable location become barriers to both attracting and retaining employees. Therefore, location based WLB should not be treated as a mere contextual element; like pay and working conditions, it becomes noticeable precisely when something goes wrong. This position corresponds with the distinction between motivating factors and factors that create dissatisfaction made by Herzberg (1966).

The compensatory role of location may be even more important when the salary is relatively modest. Specifically, some leaders emphasized that good location became an attractive feature precisely because salaries could not differentiate between the organization and its competitors. Overall, this result shows that in addition to the general compensatory logic discussed in the previous section, location plays a special role in compensating low pay. Judging on these findings, Portuguese CPA organizations seemingly do not rely only on mission, culture, or development opportunities as compensations for economic limitations. They use employment conditions, including location and telecommuting, to add value to the compensation package.

It is worth mentioning that the importance of location can hardly be generalized across organizations. For territorially dispersed bodies (such as ICNF and DGAV), location of the headquarters becomes less important since people will operate from different offices. Rather than asking about accessibility of the central office, it makes more sense to focus on whether the employee is assigned a job location that corresponds to the residence and other individual characteristics of the employee. This leads to an added need for organizational segmentation.

As mission value depends on mission intensity, technical nature and supportive function of an organization, location value depends on whether the body is headquarters based, field based or geographically dispersed.

Finally, telework cannot be ignored as it decreases the sensitivity to commuting distance, as it reduces the number of trips and enhances the value of flexibility. Consistent with the findings of Bloom et al. (2015) showing that telecommuting leads to high levels of job satisfaction and lower quit rates in individuals with long commuting distances, Portuguese CPA uses telework in two ways. First, it is an instrument of improving WLB of employees; second, it works as a compensator of low accessibility. Thus, the accessibility of organizations requires to consider both location and telework.

5.6. Convergence and Divergence of Leader and Employee

When comparing the results of Studies 1 and 2, there is a great deal of convergence between employee views and the leader's perspective on what drives attractiveness. This mostly applies to Economic value as employees gave it the bottom of the hierarchy of attractiveness and leaders also ranked Economic value last in terms of attractiveness in seven out of ten organizations. It thus seems that the relatively poor rating of Economic value by employees is due not to measurement problems but reflects a common perception of the structural limitations of public employment in Portugal. It means that while both parties consider money as an important factor, its impact is quite limited as it cannot differentiate the CPA organizations.

Secondly, it is important to note that some dimensions, such as Interest, Application-Civic value, and Application-Knowledge value are rated high in both studies. In particular, these dimensions were put in the top-tier in the ranking exercise conducted among the leaders, which corresponds to their high performance relative to Economic value found in Study 1. Such convergence is indicative of a good understanding of the substantive core of CPA attractiveness among both groups of research participants. It means that they appreciate meaningful work, public contribution, challenging tasks, and the role of knowledge in job satisfaction which is perfectly aligned with predictions based on theories of public service motivation (Perry & Wise, 1990), self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

As stated, the split Application between Civic and Knowledge value was observed in both studies thus indicating convergence. Although the approaches are methodologically different (one reveals the split based on quantitative factorial analysis, and the other based on qualitative

thematic analysis) the conceptual distinction between both dimensions is very clear. Having been the last factor extracted in the original Berthon et al. (2005) study, it could be reasonable to infer that it did not achieve sufficient conceptual clarity as the sample were non-experienced individuals as regards public service.

The topic of Development is aligned as well; however, there is more tension involved in it. Both employees and leaders agree that it is a valuable resource that contributes to attraction and retention, but Study 2 suggests that leaders consider development a double-edged strategy. On the one hand, it enhances the overall offer made by an organization in the short-term perspective, yet, on the other hand, it makes employees more attractive to potential employers when career advancement and compensation growth are limited within an organization. Consequently, despite convergence in the recognition of value, it is possible to identify a temporal risk factor in this context.

The topic of Social value is where the greatest divergence takes place. In the ranking, it took less prominence compared to Interest, Application-Civic value, Application-Knowledge value, and Development value. Social value reached the top three positions in only two of the ten organizations. Nevertheless, the earlier discussion suggests that leaders put significant emphasis on building relationships at a workplace, promoting participation and proximity, and creating a positive work climate in an organization. As a result, there is a discrepancy between what leaders say and do in terms of social relations. While the former focus on mission, knowledge, and development, the latter emphasize culture, relationships, and social capital. It thus becomes evident that some organizations enjoy social strengths which are not reflected in their communication.

Another area where divergences can be traced refers to location-based WLB. Location, commuting, and accessibility received significant mentions from leaders in seven organizations out of ten, and yet the rating in Study 1 shows less emphasis on these issues. It implies that leaders experience these issues as managerial concerns, which are important for recruitment and retention, and employees have different perceptions of it because of telework, residential, commuting, and assigned location. Telework seems to compensate for commuting costs mentioned in the file.

All in all, it becomes evident that there are more similarities than differences. There is a common identification by leaders and employees alike about the structural weakness of Economic value and the significance of intrinsic, civic, knowledge based, and developmental dimensions. Yet, the differences, while less in quantity, are highly significant from a theoretical

perspective, because they indicate that leaders tend to overlook some aspects of relationality and space while engaging in formal evaluation processes, although such aspects significantly contribute to the retention practices of organizations. Thus, the findings once again stress the importance of internal employer branding, in accordance with the idea that it is necessary to ensure consistency between what leaders say, do, and what employees feel (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Mercer, 2024).

5.7. Theoretical Contributions

Study 2 contributes to the literature on the attractiveness of public employers on five levels. First, the qualitative results of Study 2 confirm the six-factor EmpAt structure hinted empirically in Study 1. Leaders' accounts substantiate the distinction between Application-Civic value and Application-Knowledge value, confirming that these factors represent different motivational mechanisms. Application-Civic value is related to public contribution, citizen orientation, and social meaning, while Application-Knowledge value is concerned with skills, expertise, and professional mastery. This evidence further reinforces the argument presented in the first part that the construct of Application value proposed by Berthon et al. (2005) should be refined for use in Portuguese CPA.

Second, the study advances public service motivation theory in terms of context dependence of the civic element. PSM is relevant in explaining CPA employment attraction and retention where public value is visibly manifested in emotional appeal (Perry & Wise, 1990; Vandenabeele, 2007). However, the findings of the current research indicate that mission plays a somewhat different role in different types of organizations. Specifically, in mission intensive organizations, civic contribution serves as a primary attraction mechanism. In technical or support bodies, mission-related values can be sensitive to organizational prestige, professional identity, or organizational enabling capacity.

Third, in terms of employer branding, the study provides empirical support to the need to develop a compensatory model of employer attractiveness under constraints. Namely, compensation-based in Portugal CPA, pay and career development are structurally constrained, which means that they cannot serve as key interinstitutional distinguishing employer brand signals. Instead, leaders create value in a number of other aspects of public employment, namely reputation, mission, learning opportunities, flexibility, organizational culture, recognition and location. This contribution to employer branding theory supports the multi-dimensional

approach to employer attractiveness and the instrumental-symbolic framework proposed by Lievens and Highhouse (2003).

Fourth, the study reveals a somewhat asymmetric role of some attraction vs. retention mechanisms. For example, institutional reputation, mission visibility, and technical prestige play a prominent role in pre-entry decision making, while organizational culture, relational climate, leadership proximity, and location provide the basis for post-entry retention. This finding contributes to the P-O fit and job embeddedness approaches (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Mitchell et al., 2001) because it confirms that employees appreciate some benefits of employment only due to their everyday experience.

Finally, the current study advances employer attractiveness theory by introducing location-based WLB as a new construct. Travel time, commuting options, parking facilities, proximity of work location, and remote working are essential aspects of WLB because salary differentiation is limited in Portuguese CPA. On the theoretical level, location-based WLB links employer attractiveness with WLB and boundary management, since commuting influences time pressure, strain, recovery and balancing work and personal life (Ashforth et al., 2000; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Overall, the main contribution of this study to theoretical discussions is revealing how employer attractiveness in Portuguese CPA emerges as a result of institutional constraint vs. organizational creativity nexus. Public organizations have structural limitations in creating value through pay, career advancement, and recruitment flexibility. However, mission-driven, knowledge-intensive public organizations create value for employees through mission, expertise, organizational culture, recognition, flexibility, and accessibility in a model that puts together structural constraints and compensatory strategies.

5.8. Practical Implications for Portuguese CPA

One practical implication that can be drawn relates to the importance of managing employer attractiveness within Portuguese CPA as a segmented and compensatory employer value proposition. With pay and career progression being tightly constrained at the level of system rules, it is recommended that individual organizations stop trying to use economic value as a significant attraction lever and treat it as a fairness and transparency issue. In other words, CPA organizations gain from clarifying the limits of their control in terms of SIADAP and existing progress opportunities, addressing perceived inequities associated with better supplementations offered by other public organizations or quicker advancement.

Secondly, employer brand communication should focus on certain features of organizations beyond the general statement about public service. Leaders recognize mission, knowledge, development, and reputation as major organizational strengths, while the results show that the latter manifest themselves differently depending on the organizational type. Organizations that operate as mission intensive should highlight their impact on citizens' lives and tangible benefits. At the same time, technical organizations should focus on their competence, mastery, institutional status, and educational opportunities. Support organizations should stress how their contribution serves as the basis for the functioning of the whole public administration system.

Furthermore, the importance of relational climate should be addressed explicitly in employer branding. According to findings, organizational culture, participation in decision making, proximity of leadership, psychological safety, flexibility, and supportive managerial practices form an integral part of employer attractiveness, which, however, tends to be communicated through informal channels rather than formal communication practices. As long as it remains an important factor that retains employees in a position, its presence should be highlighted formally.

Finally, it might be necessary to incorporate WLB related to the geographical location of organizations into the overall picture of employer attractiveness. Organizations that enjoy convenient location, efficient transportation, comfortable parking, or other positive characteristics may benefit from highlighting them as tangible aspects. Other organizations should communicate compensatory mechanisms based on telework, flexibility of working schedule, predictable attendance regulations, and management of commuting expenses.

However, there are certain problems that go beyond organizational discretion. It includes pay grids, career-related policies, rigidness of recruitment practices, and inequality of supplements that are to be solved via changes within the system. Nevertheless, organizational leaders still can work with organizational culture, communication, flexibility, recognition, and development.

5.9. Limitations

There are several limitations that need to be considered while interpreting the outcomes of this study. To start with, we used purposive sampled to select ten CPA organizations in Portugal to comprise different types of organizational missions, structures, and workforces. Although it is appropriate for identifying patterns that can be analytically transferable from one CPA

organization to another, it does not guarantee the generalization of results to the entire population of such organizations.

Furthermore, the perspectives of only one informant were used in the study: those of a senior leader in the organizations. They are key interlocutors that have a comprehensive understanding of how an organization develops its strategy, what factors restrict recruitment, what approaches organizations use to retain staff members, and what their views on attraction as a theory are. Nevertheless, their viewpoints are also sensitive to the position occupied, which means that potential for positional bias and impression management cannot be ruled out since both organizations and informants in this research were identified. Moreover, the comparison was performed at the level of constructs and aggregated patterns and not of individual leader-employee pairs within each organization; hence, the identification of convergence and divergence at the organizational level is possible but the claim about alignment at this level is tentative.

Another limitation of the study was that an interview guide was partially deductive as it was based on the revised EmpAt structure and associated constructs. It was necessary in the process of triangulation with Study 1, but it might have made some dimensions less visible compared to others. This problem is particularly pertinent to location-based well-being because, despite its explicit inclusion in the interview protocol, this dimension was not originally considered in Study 1. However, in coding a hybrid approach was used (Bardin, 1977) and all the corpus that conveyed any new category was coded outside *a priori* categories emerging from EmpAt.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Answering Research Questions

Due to the complexity of the topic and the multiple findings, the conclusions will be written according to each motivating research question.

The first research question pertains to which dimensions of employer attractiveness do senior officials consider most important. Findings showed that no dimension stands out because the institutional reputation, flexibility, and people-oriented leadership are found to be the most consistent pull factors, whereas organizational culture and relational climate serve more as retention tools. However, there seems to be an answer to the least important: Economic value, which consistently ranked last (in seven of the ten organizations) and never appeared among the top three factors.

The second research question pertains to how senior officials assess the relative importance of the six EmpAt dimensions. The explicit ranking exercise produces a clear hierarchy. Interest ranks top three in eight organizations, followed by Application-Civic and Application-Knowledge ranked very closely. Development occupies a strong middle position. Social value is marginalized in the ranking despite its prominence in day-to-day management practice. Again, Economic value is ranked last in seven organizations and never appears in the top three.

The third research question pertains to how leaders interpret the distinction between civic contribution and knowledge application. Leaders in organizations where the mission plays a key role regard civic contribution as an emotionally laden pre-entry attraction device, with one such organization having 4,000 candidates for 50 positions, mainly because of the salience of its mission. In organizations characterized by technical complexity, knowledge utilization functions via a distinct mechanism: employees are attracted by the prospect of using unique skills to accumulate professional capital. These two facets reflect distinct organizational commitments and appeal to different types of candidates via equally distinct psychological processes, thereby substantiating the six-factor structure revealed in Study 1.

The fourth research question pertains to the extent leadership perceptions align with employee priorities from Study 1. Findings show convergence of leadership ranking and rating by workers clearly at the two extreme ends of the hierarchy. It can be observed that leaders and workers unanimously rate Economic value as the least ranked dimension, while Application-Civic, Application-Knowledge, Interest, and Development rank at the top end.

The fifth research question pertains to eventual additional factors beyond the classic EmpAt framework that could emerge from leadership narratives. Three additional factors did emerge from leaders' speech beyond the classic EmpAt framework. The first is location-based work-life balance, which comprises commuting time, transport access, parking, and telework arrangements. It was recognized as a relevant element of the employment offer in seven of the ten organizations and theoretically anchored in commuting and WLB research. The second is institutional instability, including organizational extinction, restructuring, and political cycles, which erodes the traditional stability signal of public employment. The third is the development springboard effect, in which organizational investment in training and qualifications raises external employability and exit risk because internal career progression is structurally constrained. Non-financial recognition systems and recruitment or management rigidity also emerged from the analysis, but they seemingly operate as implementation mechanisms within

existing EmpAt dimensions and as structural constraints respectively, rather than as additional attractiveness factors.

The last research question pertains to the implicit theories on employer attractiveness that guide senior leaders. Findings show that the leaders maintain a compensating and multi-dimensional theory. They know the concept of attractiveness for public sector employers as a set of reinforcing non-financial features that counterbalance for the lack of economic differentiation which their institutional structure of Portuguese public employment does not allow. In this bundle, they discriminate tacitly with the attraction instruments, based on the organization's reputation, visibility of its mission, and opportunities for learning; and the retention instruments, based on the relational asset, compatibility, and embeddedness derived from proximity to workplaces and valuable interpersonal connections. Furthermore, they perceive commitment as a developmental process in which socialization and organizational experience play a key role instead of being already built upon joining the organization. Among the sample organizations, the best positioned are those with the most consistent exploitation of discretionary power through culture, communication of mission, development, recognition, and flexible work.

6.2. Relationship to Study 1 and Connection With Future Studies

This study helped understand why the perception patterns that emerged in the previous study (namely the six-factor structured that split Application dimension of employees perceived attractiveness of their employers in Portuguese CPA, Application-Civic, Application-Knowledge) occurred. Qualitative findings showed that the quantitative-based decision made in the previous study about the employer attractiveness dimensionality was substantively reasonable especially because leaders distinctly distinguish between concepts of public contribution, citizen orientation, and social purpose, on the one hand, and knowledge mastery, expertise, and application, on the other.

This study additionally calls attention to the potential limitations of treating employee attractiveness measured in a universalistic way within CPA. While the previous explained what value employees attach to different aspects of employer attractiveness, this study shows that the same value dimension may operate differently depending on organizational settings. For example, Application-Civic meaning may become more central when the importance of the organization to the public sphere increases, while Application-Knowledge value will likely prevail in technical organizations. Likewise, it highlighted that the role of culture will become

more significant after entering the organization, while location-specific WLB will depend on commuting convenience, teleworking opportunities, and spatial spread of the organization.

The connection to future studies relates to the shift from organizational mechanisms to model testing. First, this study identified potential mechanisms through which employer attractiveness is expected to have an effect on P-O fit, job satisfaction, affective commitment, and location-based WLB. Second, our results imply that Application-Civic and Application-Knowledge values might influence different outcomes through different psychological pathways. While Civic value can influence commitment and satisfaction through public purpose, Knowledge value will exert an effect on commitment due to professional mastery and task relevance. Finally, cultural values, recognition, and flexibility were found to explain employees' commitment despite low levels of Economic value.

The results from this study further indicate that future studies should consider commuting time, accessibility, availability of parking space, workplace location, and telework because these factors were discussed by leaders as parts of the employment offer. This implies that, in future studies, location-based WLB can be interpreted as more than simply a control variable, but as an independent outcome or predictor.

6.3. Final Synthesis

Overall, this shows that employer attractiveness in Portuguese CPA is shaped under strong structural legal constraints, particularly regarding compensation, career mobility, and staffing practices. These constraints do not eliminate interinstitutional employer attractiveness, but they change how it is generated. Since Economic value cannot function as a differentiating feature, organizations rely on non-economic sources of value, including mission, institutional reputation, technical expertise, development opportunities, organizational culture, recognition, flexibility, and location-based WLB.

The six-factor model of EmpAt structure gained some support but future studies should quantitatively replicate this factorial testing so to gauge if indeed the application dimension split holds with an equally experienced sample (public servants).

In addition, this study suggests that some factors may operate mostly as retention rather than attraction mechanisms. Organizational culture, relationship climate, proximity of leaders, recognition and location may all contribute to employer attractiveness after people experience their benefits in day-to-day work.

Therefore, future studies should not only test the factor structure of EmpAt by comparing the original with the revised six-factor structure, but also assess the true importance of employer attractiveness in the interinstitutional CPA environment, namely by examining its predictive power upon attitudinal central variables such as Person-Organization fit (Kristof, 1996), job satisfaction (Spector, 1997), organizational commitment (Meyer et al., 1993), and location-based work-life balance.

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Study 3
Employer Attractiveness, Work-Life Balance, and Commitment: Sequential Mediation Model

1. Introduction

The question posed by Study 1 is one of measures: does the original five-factor EmpAt structure remain valid when applied to Portuguese central public administration? The answer is negative. A confirmatory factor analysis on a sample of 490 civil servants revealed lack of fit, and further exploration resulted in a revised structure of six factors, whereby the original factor of Application split into Application-Civic and Application-Knowledge. This split was theoretically meaningful in this institutional context, where working for the benefit of citizens and conveying professional knowledge were experienced as distinct motivational phenomena that had different underlying processes. In addition, the results showed that the role played by Economic value in the structure was categorically different from its place in the private sector samples of Study 1. Namely, economic benefits are taken for granted here as institutional basics rather than signals by employers, and therefore Economic value comes last in the revised scale.

Study 2 examined the same question from the leadership perspective. Ten senior representatives in the Portuguese public sector were interviewed about how they created and managed the employer value propositions (EVP), what they valued, and what the institutional constraints were that shaped their decision-making process. The results provided strong support for the six-factor structure: the leaders' narratives were organized into categories associated with social purpose, knowledge growth, relational quality, energizing activities, and working conditions, with economic value being ranked the lowest consistently. Four major findings of Study 2 have been identified as particularly pertinent to the present research. First, the qualitative evidence corroborates that of Study 1 concerning the structural marginalization of Economic value, since this is ranked lowest by leaders in seven of ten organizations interviewed and rated lowest of six dimensions by employees. Second, Application-Civic, Knowledge, Interest, and Development have all maintained their place as upper-level values across both data sets, thus supporting the idea that the distinction between civic contributions and knowledge is crucial to EmpAt theory. Third, while leaders invest substantial effort into building positive and relational climates, even here, they do not view Social value as being more motivating than the mission, knowledge, and tasks performed, considering the relational climate a valuable resource but one which is not explicitly used in motivating others. Finally, location-based Work-Life Balance was found to be a component of the employment offer in seven of ten organizations interviewed, despite its exclusion from traditional EmpAt.

Study 3 extends the previous two studies by examining the translation of the employer attractiveness construct into more fundamental employee attitudes towards their organization in the case of the central public administration of Portugal. Study 1 established the measurement foundations for this research by demonstrating that the originally proposed five-factor structure of the EmpAt scale was inadequate in the context of Portuguese civil servants and that a six-factor version, with separate Application-Civic and Application-Knowledge dimensions, was needed instead. In Study 2, the concept of organizational attractiveness was advanced by examining how the top-level management perceives and handles the organization's value proposition. The findings of this study raised two questions that are key in the current study; the difference between what the leaders say they motivate themselves with and the daily investment that goes into relational climate, and the concept of location-dependent WLB which falls beyond the EmpAt construct.

This study examines whether employer attractiveness and location-based WLB are associated with OAC through a sequential attitudinal process. In such a case, employer attractiveness and location-based WLB form the upstream variables while P-O fit and job satisfaction are specified as sequential mediators. Organizational affective commitment (OAC) becomes the final outcome variable. Employer attractiveness refers to employees' evaluation of the organization as a desirable and valuable employer whereas location-based WLB is the construct that focuses on the impact of factors like commuting and accessibility at the workplace. Therefore, this model aims at finding out whether the symbolic and relational evaluation of the organization, on the one hand, and location-based factors, on the other hand, exert their influences on the OAC through similar psychological processes.

The study tests seven hypotheses. H1 examines whether job satisfaction mediates the relationship between P-O fit and OAC. H2 tests whether employer attractiveness is positively associated with P-O fit. H3 tests whether employer attractiveness is positively associated with OAC. H4 examines whether employer attractiveness is associated with OAC through the sequential mediation of P-O fit and job satisfaction. H5 tests whether location-based WLB is positively associated with P-O fit. H6 tests whether location-based WLB is positively associated with OAC. Finally, H7 examines whether location-based WLB is associated with OAC through the sequential mediation of P-O fit and job satisfaction.

A sample of 431 employees was surveyed in Study 3 using the six-factor version of the EmpAt scale adapted in Study 1. The model also includes established measures of P-O fit, job satisfaction, OAC, and location-based WLB. Therefore, through testing these relationships,

Study 3 moves the thesis from the measurement and interpretation of employer attractiveness to the explanation of how employer attractiveness becomes linked to commitment.

The study is organized into four main sections, each building on the previous one.

The literature review comes first. It develops the theoretical foundations for all five constructs in the conceptual model: employer attractiveness in its six-factor adapted form, P-O fit, job satisfaction, OAC, and location-based WLB. Instead of approaching the constructs separately, the review considers their connections via the underlying theories behind the hypothesized associations. Employer attractiveness signals influence P-O fit through signaling theory and value congruence concepts, P-O fit leads to job satisfaction based on Locke's value-percept framework and increasing job satisfaction enhances affective commitment drawing on social exchange and social identity theories. Location based WLB is introduced through commuting research and needs-supplies fit theory. The review makes direct use of the six-factor structure from Study 1, differentiating between Application-Civic and Application-Knowledge as two separate constructs, contrary to the original one, and conducts an independent test of this structure against the original 5-factor.

The method section describes the research design, sample, measures, and analytical strategy. The study adopts a positivist, hypothetico-deductive approach, testing a pre-specified structural model against data from a sample of civil servants in Portuguese central public administration. The six-factor adapted EmpAt scale from Study 1 operationalizes employer attractiveness. P-O fit is measured with the three-item value congruence scale by Cable and DeRue (2002). Job satisfaction is measured with a five-item global measure adapted from Agho et al. (1993). OAC is measured with a three-item scale drawn from Meyer and Allen (1991). Location-based WLB uses three items from Stutzer and Frey (2008) capturing how commuting and location conditions shaped the choice of the current job. Before testing the structural model, the method section reports the measurement model fit and a systematic comparison of nine competing model specifications. That comparison establishes that the five latent constructs in the structural model are empirically distinct, which is a necessary precondition for interpreting the mediation paths as meaningful rather than as artifacts of construct overlap.

The results and discussion sections are organized by hypothesis. For each hypothesis, the empirical result is presented first, followed by its theoretical interpretation and its connection with Studies 1 and 2. These sections are organized around the two pathways tested in the model: the employer attractiveness pathway, and the location-based WLB pathway. Before hypotheses testing, the results section presents descriptive statistics and bivariate associations involving the

main constructs, demographic controls, commute time, and commuting mode, illustrating differences in the perceptions of the employer attractiveness and attitudes of civil servants.

The study concludes by interpreting the pattern of supported and unsupported hypotheses and by discussing what this pattern reveals about the formation of OAC among employees of Portuguese central public administration. The conclusion brings together the employer attractiveness pathway and the location-based WLB pathway, assessing whether both operate through the same sequential mechanism involving P-O fit and job satisfaction. In doing so, Study 3 clarifies the extent to which employer attractiveness and location-related working conditions contribute to employees' emotional attachment to their organizations.

2. Literature Review

This literature review examines five constructs that research consistently identifies as interrelated drivers of employee attitudes and organizational attachment: employer attractiveness (EmpAt), person-organization fit (P-O fit), job satisfaction, organizational affective commitment (OAC), and work-life balance (WLB). The review draws on the theoretical and empirical foundations used across three studies conducted within Portuguese central public administration. Study 1 developed and validated a six-factor adaptation of the EmpAt scale for this institutional context. Study 2 examined how commuting and location-based WLB relate to employer attractiveness perceptions and employee attitudes. Study 3 tested a sequential mediation model linking EmpAt and location-based WLB to OAC through P-O fit and job satisfaction.

The five constructs do not operate in isolation. Employer attractiveness shapes how employees perceive organizational compatibility. That perceived compatibility feeds into job satisfaction. Accumulated satisfaction deepens or weakens affective commitment. WLB, and specifically the location-based demands of commuting, cuts across all three by influencing the resource availability and psychological energy employees bring to each attitudinal relationship. Together, these constructs form an interconnected system that this review examines construct by construct before addressing the theoretical linkages between them.

2.1. Employer Attractiveness

2.1.1. Concept and theoretical foundations

Employer attractiveness refers to the perceived benefits that a prospective or current employee associates with working for a particular organization (Berthon et al., 2005). The concept is based on the theoretical framework of employer branding. This entails the idea of an

organization as a brand that creates an employee value proposition both in symbolic and instrumental terms (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). An organization fights for itself in the labor market, not only in terms of salaries or tasks performed, but also through affecting the meaning behind employment, as well as through creating a particular image and addressing needs of individuals (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). The attractiveness of employers becomes the basis for such competition.

Lievens and Highhouse (2003) identified a key difference between instrumental and symbolic characteristics of employers. Instrumental characteristics consist of tangible and objectively verifiable features related to employment, such as pay, promotion, and security. Symbolic characteristics are related to abstract traits like prestige, innovation, and sincerity. Although both instrumental and symbolic characteristics impact the assessment of the employer image by employees, they affect evaluation through distinct processes. While instrumental characteristics enhance fit assessments, symbolic characteristics facilitate identification-related evaluations by conveying meaning about what the organization represents and who fits into its culture. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) indicated that these cues influence not only recruitment but also the internal branding experience of existing employees.

Spence (1973) is the signaling theory behind this economic concept. Since it is impossible for employees to know anything about organizational values and culture prior to or while working within the organization, they have to look out for certain signals, like communication, reputation, work structure, etc., and make assumptions based on that, about whether they are compatible enough to fit within the organization. The more accurate these assumptions, the better their attitude towards work and commitment levels would be (Cable & Turban, 2001). In public administration, since there is institutional control over remuneration and career opportunities, symbolic signals are significant as distinguishing employer characteristics.

2.1.2. The Berthon, Ewing, and Hah (2005) Five-Factor Model

Berthon et al. (2005) devised the Employer Attractiveness scale called EmpAt, which was the first ever multidimensional measurement tool for gauging the attractiveness of an employer. Based on a collection of qualitative and quantitative research, these researchers came up with five value dimensions utilized by people when judging organizations as attractive employers. The development dimension focuses on career progression, self-assurance, and recognition derived from engaging in productive activities. The social dimension centers on the nature of interpersonal relations within the working environment, particularly with peers and superiors,

and feelings of affiliation. The interest dimension emphasizes creativity and innovation in relation to work processes and products. The application dimension revolves around opportunities for applying knowledge and skills, and humanitarian and prosocial aspects of the organization. Finally, the economic dimension deals with salary and job security.

This five-factor model was originally tested using samples of students who rated imaginary employers. Further studies have since generalized this scale to actual employees and other national settings. This model has been applied in studies on employer branding as a tool for measuring both internal and external attractiveness, gauging the perceptions of current employees and potential applicants concerning the organization according to its five values (Tanwar & Prasad, 2017).

The construct, based on this scale, has been adopted within the public sphere to analyze the nature of competitive public organization employment despite the institutional environment, which restricts their ability to maneuver issues of economic value. Public service has some unique benefits when compared to other organizations on parameters of social value, mission-oriented Application, and job stability that will help neutralize any lack of strength on salary and promotion speed. Literature has found, based on work by Perry and Wise (1990) and Vandenabeele (2007), that the more public service motivated individuals are likely to be, the more sensitive they are to the non-economic aspects of an attractive employer (Perry & Wise, 1990; Vandenabeele, 2007). The five-dimensionality has not received strong support in empirical studies as some psychometric issues occasionally led to changes in its structure, namely dropping the last dimension “application”.

The exact dimensionality of the construct as measured with EmpAt has motivated Study 1, where the initial five-factor model was found to have inadequate fit when subjected to a CFA. An exploratory factor analysis based on the same sample yielded a six-factor model, comprising 15 items, which was corroborated with another CFA. The most consequential change was the separation of the original Application dimension into two facets (application-civic and application-knowledge). The interpretation of this finding focusses on the nature of the sample used to test the model (private sector or student samples) where one can reasonably cast doubts as regards participants ability to distinguish between mission-driven and knowledge-driven contribution within an institutional framework. Still, this finding requires independent testing to gauge its consistency across public service samples. The six dimensions matched those developed originally (social value, interest value, development value, economic value) plus the split application dimension.

The importance of this six-factor solution is theoretical in nature as it illustrates the idea that public sector employer attractiveness is predominantly a symbolic and relational concept. The importance of distinguishing between Application-Civic and Application-Knowledge factors lies in their use for predicting subsequent attitudes. The former factor is more likely to correlate with personal identification and organizational commitment using PSM approaches, while the latter correlates more strongly with job satisfaction based on job significance and skill utilization. Combining these factors into one dimension will make their separate correlations impossible.

2.2. Person-Organization Fit

2.2.1. Definition and conceptualization

The P-O fit is used to refer to the degree to which there is a perception that a worker is well matched with their organization in terms of value, goal, and preference similarities (Chatman, 1989; Kristof, 1996). The P-O fit can be achieved through two mechanisms. Supplementary fit involves the similarity in values and identity-related attributes between the worker and the organization. Complementary fit involves both the needs-supplies fit and demands abilities fit of the organization and its workers (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). Both forms of P-O fit are important due to their distinctive roles.

The concept of value congruence represents the most popular definition of fit in the academic research (Verquer et al., 2003). Cable and DeRue (2002), for example, developed an operationalization of this fit involving three measures of the employees' perception of matching their personal values with those of the organization. The authors based their work on Kristof's (1996) defining fit as compatibility of individual and organizational values. According to Edwards (2009), value congruence constitutes the fit with motivational importance that impacts trust, assessments, and attitudes of people. Finally, Chatman (1991) discovered that fit develops due to experience checking initial perceptions with reality.

2.2.2. The role of P-O fit in shaping work attitudes

A meta-analysis has found that P-O fit accurately predicts employee commitment, satisfaction, and engagement, and retention indicators (A. L. Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). The greater the perceived value fit with one's organization, the higher the levels of work attitudes reported. In the context of public sector organizations, Kim (2012) argued that P-O fit was an important intervening factor explaining work attitudes and motivations. The studies by Bright (2007, 2008) demonstrated that the association between PSM and work attitudes was often mediated

through value fit (workers were more satisfied and committed to their jobs when they aligned with organizational behavior). This was verified by the study conducted by Wright and Pandey (2008), which showed that PSM positively influenced employees' work attitudes through value congruence. Consequently, P-O fit can be considered not only as an important aspect of employee selection but also as an attitude gateway in the public sector.

The idea of P-O fit is also related to the concept of social identity. According to the research by Ashforth and Mael (1989) and Tajfel and Turner (1986), people receive some parts of their self-concepts from their memberships in groups and associate with other people in such a way that their self-concepts are positively defined. Organizational members who feel that they have high fit within the organization are more likely to internalize themselves as organizational members, and consequently, there is a straightforward link between value congruence and affective commitment.

2.3. Job Satisfaction

2.3.1. Definition and theoretical foundations

According to Locke (1976), job satisfaction is a positive feeling state based on an employee's assessment of his/her work experience. The definition of job satisfaction posits that the phenomenon represents a cumulated perception in that the overall level of satisfaction is determined by the total sum of employees' perceptions about the compatibility of actual work experience and their needs or wants. Agho et al. (1993) adopted Locke's value-percept theory in defining job satisfaction by measuring employees' enthusiasm and pleasure associated with their work. Another perspective that explains job satisfaction is affective events theory (AET). According to Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), AET is useful in understanding the process involved in job satisfaction such that job satisfaction can be explained by daily events occurring in the work environment.

2.3.2. Work design and satisfaction

Work characteristics studies indicate a stable pattern of characteristics which determine job satisfaction. According to Hackman and Oldham (1976), characteristics such as autonomy, feedback, skill variety, and task significance create states leading to job satisfaction. Additionally, according to Humphrey et al. (2007) and Morgeson and Humphrey (2006), it was found that social job characteristics play an important role in predicting job satisfaction. Value-fit enhances the effectiveness of such work characteristics in predicting satisfaction. When workers see that there is value congruence within the organization, they view work

characteristics in a positive manner, and they believe that any organizational actions are done with good intent. The study by Edwards and Cable (2009) confirmed this effect on satisfaction.

2.3.3. Job satisfaction in public organizations

The construct of job satisfaction is one that has been commonly employed as an important dependent variable in studies about attraction to employment organizations and public service motivation (Kim, 2012; Pandey & Stazyk, 2008). In the literature on PSM, there is evidence that the positive association between PSM and job satisfaction exists among public organizations as long as certain value-based conditions hold (Bright, 2008; Kim, 2012; Steijn, 2008; Wright & Pandey, 2008). It is well known (Mathieu & Farr, 1991) that job satisfaction and organizational commitment have discriminant validity in relation to each other because although correlated, they are distinct psychological states. Job satisfaction is the more immediate evaluative state than commitment.

2.4. Organizational Affective Commitment

2.4.1. Definition and measurement

Organizational commitment was categorized by Meyer et al. (1993) into three different types including affective commitment based on feelings of affiliation and identification, normative commitment based on feelings of obligation to stay, and finally, continuance commitment based on the cost of departure. Among these different types, however, affective commitment has shown strong correlations with outcomes associated with the organization. Meta-analytic evidence by Meyer et al. (2002) indicated that affective commitment significantly predicted presence, performance, and organizational citizenship behavior. With respect to the public sector, affective commitment exhibits stronger correlations with organizational characteristics compared to other types (Steijn & Leisink, 2006).

2.4.2. Theoretical mechanisms underlying affective commitment

According to O'Reilly and Chatman (1986), identification and internalization were found to be deeper roots of organizational identification than mere compliance. The underlying theory is social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986): People derive an aspect of their own identities by belonging to certain groups and strive for affiliations that enhance their self-concepts. If organizational membership enhances their self-concept positively, they identify with the organization psychologically and have a vested interest in its survival and success. The differentiation between identification and commitment was made empirically by

van Dick (2001) and van Knippenberg and Sleebos (2006): While commitment includes the willingness to stay, identification entails defining oneself through the organization.

Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) offered a complementary account through social exchange theory. When workers believe the organization provides valuable resources and treats them fairly, they reciprocate with favorable attitudes and closer ties. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) and Ambler and Barrow (1996) drew on this logic directly, arguing that a compelling employer value proposition functions as a signal that the organization appreciates its workers, which increases affective connection beyond instrumental calculations. In public organizations, Perry (1996), Perry and Wise (1990), and Vandenabeele (2007) showed that mission, civic contribution, and public service values form additional roots of affective commitment that go beyond market-based reciprocity.

Mowday et al. (1979) explained how tenured individuals can still be bound to organizations not due to the way the organizational link is fulfilling their professional demands but rather by virtue of institutional ties, sunk cost investments, and socialization processes. Schneider et al. (1995) anticipated in his attraction selection attrition framework that organizational homogeneity increases over time because people who do not belong are weeded out. Bauer et al. (2007) identified early mentoring, role clarity, and socialization as the main processes preventing erosion of commitment within the critical onboarding window.

2.5. Work-life Balance and Commuting

2.5.1. Conceptual Foundations

The study of WLB starts with the assumption that work and non-work roles have some connections among each other and imbalance often occurs because demands in one area are not compatible with demands in another area (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The first type of conflict is time-related conflict which means that demands related to work take up too much time that should be used for performing activities outside the working environment. Strain-related conflict occurs when stress created by one role influences the ability to fulfill obligations of the other role. An alternative approach called boundary theory can be proposed (Ashforth et al., 2000). Every individual perceives work/non-work boundaries differently. Organizational structures giving employees the power to control those boundaries will decrease their stress and help to stabilize the situation. One of the key organizational tools to achieve this goal is workplace flexibility (Hill et al., 2008; Kossek & Lautsch, 2008).

2.5.2. Commuting as a work-life balance determinant

WLB based on location looks at an aspect of WLB that most organization studies tend to consider as context but not as the topic at hand (the location of the job and the cost of traveling to it on a daily basis). The process of commuting eats up time and causes stress, leaving workers with little time to interact with their families and recover from stress. It is one of the most important aspects of WLB in the contemporary world of today (Chatterjee et al., 2020). Stutzer and Frey (2008) found out that commute time has been consistently and negatively related to subjective well-being and that time stress caused by commuting decreases people's satisfaction in various areas of their lives.

Transport geography literature adds to this image. Commuting for urban residents, especially when it is long, rigid, and uncertain, endangers WLB since the transition process itself consumes resources and energy even before the workday begins (Chatterjee et al., 2020). Wheatley (2021) assessed commuting as part of overall employment evaluation, finding that actual commuting variables indeed correspond to evaluations of job satisfaction and desirability of the employer. The findings of Allen et al. (2013) indicate that support for WLB becomes particularly meaningful in places where people actually perceive them as tangible and present, thus making short commuters, who take advantage of proximity and flexibility, value these aspects as important employer attributes since they experience them personally.

The use of technology for communication has changed the equation regarding locations. According to Denstadli et al. (2013, 2017), the use of technologies that help engage in interactions from afar leads to changes in behavior and reduced need for physical commuting. Bloom et al. (2015) found that remote workers are more satisfied and had lower rates of turnover, proving how changing the location of work affects attitudes regarding job satisfaction and turnover intentions.

2.5.3. Work-life balance in public organizations

There is a special WLB environment for public organizations. Organizational constraints, bureaucracy, and institutionalization affect the degree to which public agencies allow real flexibility. Public servants in European countries have a bias toward women and experienced professionals, who tend to be more sensitive to the issues of WLB. According to Allen et al. (2000) and Byron (2005), women have to bear the major share of domestic responsibilities, which makes them especially concerned about the WLB situation at their workplace. According to Karasek (1979), who used the demand-control model, workers in high-pressure-low-control

situations feel an acute need for control, and that is why job roles in which scheduling freedom is technically impossible are more relevant to WLB concerns.

Kim and Wiggins (2011) argued, even under restrictive institutions, family-friendly and flexible policies still provide important signals in the relationships of employees in the public sector. As stated by Perry and Wise (1990) and Vandenabeele (2007), mission commitment is no guarantee that constraints do not matter, since even people driven by mission can experience emotional depletion due to location-related issues that prevent relaxation and impose difficulties for dealing with family responsibilities. Location-based WLB is thus a two-way process in public administration, a tool that influences performance in daily tasks as well as a symbol of organizational support for sustainable public service.

2.6. Linking the Constructs

2.6.1. Job satisfaction mediates the positive relationship between P-O fit and OAC

Both P-O fit and affective commitment have been identified as proven predictors of attitude towards work. However, considering them as directly related to each other overlooks an essential mediating factor. Workers that feel high levels of congruency with the organization do not develop instant affective commitment; rather, they see the tasks at hand from a more positive evaluative standpoint. It is through this consistent positive evaluation of their experiences that they eventually develop a connection with the organization, and this positive evaluation of experience can be explained using the construct of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was conceptualized by Locke (1976) as the summation of appraisals of work experience in relation to personal values.

There is substantial evidence for the first link in this chain, from P-O fit to job satisfaction. Satisfaction arises out of the feeling of coherence when an employee finds their personal values in agreement with those of the organization. Edwards and Cable (2009) have demonstrated this effect across various samples and Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) found the same result in a meta-analysis. With regard to the particular case of public administration, Bright (2007, 2008) and Steijn (2008) have found that the value congruence concerning PSM makes employees feel a purpose in doing their jobs and thereby increases their level of job satisfaction. Kim (2012) emphasized the role of P-O fit as the key attitudinal filter through which motivational orientations are transformed into work attitudes, thus emphasizing the idea that satisfaction is what fit brings about before commitment comes along.

The second path, connecting job satisfaction and affective commitment, is also highly plausible. According to O'Reilly and Chatman (1986), the two key processes that underpin organizational attachment are identification and internalization, while job satisfaction is precisely what creates an evaluative climate for such processes. Job satisfaction results in employees' feeling emotionally attached to and being members of their organization. Mathieu and Farr (1991) have provided empirical evidence for discriminant validity between job satisfaction and organizational commitment, thereby demonstrating that they are different constructs and follow each other sequentially rather than overlap with each other. Meyer et al. (2002) have meta-analytically demonstrated that among all types of organizational commitments, affective commitment features the strongest association with positive results. Among others, job satisfaction can serve as a highly reliable predictor of affective commitment. In public organizations, Wright and Davis (2003) found out that work environment affects organizational commitment through its impact on job satisfaction.

The final theoretical component is social exchange theory. Satisfied employees see their satisfaction as an indicator of the company's investment in them and reciprocate the investment with increased affective commitment (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Satisfaction turns into support due to P-O fit because it makes organizational reality congruent with the employees' personal values. The sequence of two processes forms the logical pathway between fit and commitment that makes sense from a theoretical standpoint.

H1: Job satisfaction mediates the positive relationship between P-O fit and OAC among Portuguese central public administration employees.

2.6.2. Employer attractiveness and person-organization fit

The theoretical rationale behind the proposed positive association between EmpAt and P-O fit lies in the assumption that employer attractiveness acts as the content and means via which employees make inferences regarding their suitability within an organization. Recruitment and employer branding act as a means of signaling what organizations value and what they have to offer (Spence, 1973). As long as the signal is favorable, employees find it easier to align themselves and feel more congruent and compatible. In research by Cable and Turban (2001), it was found that job candidates developed perceptions concerning employers based on recruitment processes and use them when evaluating their fit within an organization. This process repeats for employees currently working in organizations.

Each EmpAt dimension correlates with the P-O fit construct via its particular mechanism. Developmental value implies that the company cares about developing employees' capacities and career prospects, thereby fostering the need-supplies fit for those people who are interested in personal development and career growth (Cable & Edwards, 2004). Social value implies an interactive organizational culture, which fosters the supplementary fit among people who have needs for affiliation and good relations with colleagues. Interest value conveys the message that the organization provides stimulating and supportive conditions, which are related to both person-job fit and value congruence in terms of innovativeness and intellectuality. Economic value refers to one of the easiest aspects of matching employees' needs with resources offered by the organization, namely when adequate and fair payment removes economic friction that unmet needs would generate (Kristof, 1996). Application-Civic value implies that the organization has civic orientation and provides beneficial services for citizens, thus activating the corresponding dimension of P-O fit (Perry & Wise, 1990; Vandenabeele, 2007). Application-Knowledge value means that the organization provides opportunities for employees to use their knowledge and skills, which fosters demands-abilities fit (Edwards & Cable, 2009).

There is ample empirical evidence supporting this reasoning in studies concerning employer branding. According to Ghielen et al. (2021), the consistency of employer brand signals contributes to the level of consistent interpretation of organizational signals by the employees, and hence the level of fit evaluations. In the case of public administration, effective signals about the attractiveness of organizations based on missions and relationships become strong signals regarding compatibility due to the fact that they show alignment with the values public servants have. As shown by Christensen and Wright (2011), fit evaluation becomes an important process when recruiting public servants since fit becomes a tool for choosing organizations for joining in.

In view of these conceptual links, the following hypothesis should be proposed: Hypothesis 2: Employer attractiveness, as measured by the six-factor adapted EmpAt scale, is positively associated with P-O fit among Portuguese CPA employees.

2.6.3. Employer attractiveness and organizational affective commitment

There are two interlocking lines of reasoning that support the theoretical link between attractiveness and affective commitment. From the perspective of identity, individuals who experience organizational attractiveness on a symbolic level, especially with regards to values

of socialness, development, and application-civic, tend to be more involved in making organizational identification a component of self-identity(Ashforth & Mael, 1989 Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Indeed, the very essence of affective commitment consists in the identification and emotional connection with one's place of employment rather than just a decision to remain there due to its costs.

Each component of employer attractiveness, from a social exchange perspective, acts as a source of organizational value. Developmental value suggests that the organization values development of the employee. Social value suggests that the organizational environment is one where there is room for trust. Application-Civic value suggests that the job has some meaning for the employee in terms of the goals she seeks to fulfill. In terms of the reciprocity principle mentioned by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), this is reciprocated by stronger organizational attachment among employees. For public sector employees where Application-Civic attractiveness is the highest among all six components analyzed in Study 1, this occurs through public service motivation - employees motivated to provide public service are likely to form attachments with organizations whose missions align with theirs (Bright, 2007; Vandenabeele, 2007).

However, Wilden et al. (2010) introduced one key aspect which needs to be taken into account: the source of commitment is not external promises but internal ones. This point should be noted when talking about Portuguese civil servants since their perceptions of organizational attractiveness do not refer to any recruitment communication but rather to the reality they experience within the organization. If these experiences match the symbolic and relational factors which make an employer attractive, then employees gain the necessary level of perceived value fit that in many different studies correlates well with affective commitment.

H3: Employer attractiveness, as measured by the six-factor adapted EmpAt scale, is positively associated with OAC among Portuguese central public administration employees.

2.6.4. EmpAt connection to P-O fit, Job satisfaction, and commitment

In the previous three sections, the relationships between each of the variables have been discussed. The relationship between attractiveness and PO fit is described by hypothesis H2. Hypothesis H1 describes the relationship between PO fit, job satisfaction, and affective commitment. Hypothesis H3 describes the direct link between attractiveness and affective commitment. Hypothesis H4 integrates all the above links in one sequential flow: attractiveness

will achieve full effect on affective commitment by way of developing perceptions of organizational compatibility followed by job evaluation.

Signaling theory provides the theoretical justification for this argument (Spence, 1973). The signals about what the organization stands for, how people are treated within the organization, and what working for the organization implies will be perceived by employees in the form of attractiveness criteria for the employer. If these signals are positive and coherent, employees rely on them to judge compatibility between individual and organization, which is exactly what P-O fit attempts to measure (Cable & Turban, 2001). As regards the central public administration of Portugal, in Study 1 Application-Civic emerged as the most highly rated attractiveness dimension, which makes the signal-to-fit process for civic-oriented employees particularly direct (Kristof, 1996; Perry & Wise, 1990).

Once fit becomes more perceptible, job satisfaction is obtained through Locke's (1976) value-percept approach. Fit indicates that the organization is satisfying the individual's values, and satisfaction is obtained when reality in the workplace corresponds with individual values. The empirical study conducted by Edwards and Cable (2009) supports this process, which was also replicated by Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) through a meta-analysis. In the field of public administration, Steijn (2008) and Bright (2007, 2008) proved that value compatibility due to PSM contributes to increasing fit-to-satisfaction, as prosocially motivated individuals experience increased motivation in the same environment, making satisfaction reactions exceed what can be achieved through tasks only.

From employee satisfaction to affective commitment, the link is the chain identified by H1. Those employees who continually perceive themselves positively about their job experiences create emotional ties that manifest in their affective commitment towards their organizations (Meyer et al., 2002; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). As per social exchange theories, employee satisfaction serves as an indicator that employers are meeting their employment obligations, and in return, employees attach themselves more strongly to them (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) even integrated the whole process into their employer branding approach where the delivery of consistent value proposition creates commitment through such stages.

The sequential pathway therefore follows a coherent psychological progression: employer attractiveness communicates organizational value signals, those signals shape perceived compatibility, perceived compatibility produces favorable work evaluations, and favorable evaluations build emotional attachment. Each step is theoretically motivated by a distinct

mechanism, and the chain as a whole explains why employer attractiveness produces stronger commitment effects than a direct association alone would predict. Wilden et al. (2010) reinforced this by showing that the internal experience of the employer brand, how employees actually live the organization's value proposition day to day, is a more powerful commitment driver than external brand signals, which is precisely the condition captured when current employees rate EmpAt alongside P-O fit and satisfaction.

H4: Employer attractiveness is positively associated with OAC through a sequential mediation of P-O fit and job satisfaction among Portuguese central public administration employees.

2.6.5. Work-life balance connecting to P-O fit, Job satisfaction, and commitment

WLB based on location ties into the other concepts via a logical process that begins with the theory of needs-supplies fit (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Caplan, 1987). High commuting pressure coupled with low location flexibility creates a misfit for the individual because it shows a mismatch between the organization's needs and those of the individual for living a balanced life. The P-O fit thus suffers. If, on the other hand, the organization offers its workers a commuting arrangement or greater location flexibility, it implies that the organization cares about them and their WLB, thereby creating a perception of fit via the needs-supplies framework. This creates a sense of fit which, as discussed in Locke's study (1976), leads to satisfaction. Finally, job satisfaction forms the base on which affective commitment develops through social exchange and identification processes (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986).

In terms of public administration, Clark et al. (2020) discovered that commuting reduction increases satisfaction from work and leisure activities, whereas longer commuting periods correlate with decreased life domain satisfaction and increased levels of stress. Kossek and Thompson (2015) proved that work-life flexibility decreases work-family conflict and contributes to role coordination. Allen et al. (2013) revealed that the effectiveness of work-life benefits increases when workers perceive such practices as feasible and genuine.

Together, these findings establish location-based WLB as a variable with both direct and indirect effects on the attitudinal constructs central to the model tested in Study 3. Remote and hybrid work arrangements, flexible scheduling, and workplace location strategy are therefore not peripheral design choices but structural determinants of whether the employer attractiveness proposition is credible and sustainable across the civil service workforce.

Based on this reasoning, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: Location-based WLB is positively associated with P-O fit among employees of Portuguese central public administration.

H6: Location-based WLB is positively associated with OAC among employees of Portuguese central public administration.

H7: Location-based WLB is positively associated with OAC through the sequential mediation of P-O fit and job satisfaction among employees of Portuguese central public administration.

2.7. Summary

The five constructs reviewed here form a theoretically coherent and empirically supported attitudinal system. Employer attractiveness captures the perceived value of the organization as an employer across six symbolic and instrumental dimensions validated for Portuguese central public administration in Study 1 (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Berthon et al., 2005; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). P-O fit is the perceived compatibility between individual and organizational values, predicting positive work attitudes through cognitive appraisal, affective processes, and social identity mechanisms (Edwards & Cable, 2009; Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Job satisfaction captures the cumulative evaluation of work experience and serves as the proximal attitudinal state that translates upstream alignment into downstream commitment (Locke, 1976; Mathieu & Farr, 1991; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). OAC reflects the emotional attachment and internalization of organizational membership that emerges from sustained positive work experiences and identity alignment (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Meyer et al., 1993; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). WLB, and particularly location-based WLB shaped by commuting demands and geographic flexibility, affects all four by determining the practical and psychological resources employees bring to work each day (Chatterjee et al., 2020; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Stutzer & Frey, 2008).

Findings from Study 1 demonstrated that the basic five-factor structure of EmpAt does not apply to the Portuguese public administration setting, giving rise to a new six-factor solution with Application-Civic versus Application-Knowledge dimensions and Economic as a basic organizational characteristic rather than a distinct EmpAt factor. Additionally, commuting was identified as a possible prime, rather than secondary, driver of overall employer attractiveness and attitude profile, with individuals exhibiting exceptionally high levels of commuting having low scores on all six dimensions. Study 3 continues the work started with the prior two studies,

focusing on the hypothesis that a chain effect will take place where EmpAt and place-based WLB serve as initial drivers, P-O fit and job satisfaction will act as intermediate mediators, and affective commitment toward organizations will be the main outcome variable.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

Positivism epistemology is chosen for this research because employer attractiveness, organizational commitment, P-O fit, job satisfaction, and commuting are all considered observable concepts that can be measured using standardized questionnaires. Positivism holds the view that there are patterns in social phenomena that can be discovered, and that data gathering in large enough samples yields results that can be generalized to other settings (Bryman, 2016). This stance fits the study's goal of testing relationships between theoretically motivated variables across the Portuguese public administration.

Considering the existence of well-defined theories on the appeal of the employer, the fit between the individual and organization, public service motivation, and job satisfaction, the research is guided by hypothetico-deductive reasoning. The hypotheses are generated based on theoretical propositions, and the empirical analysis determines whether the results confirm or disconfirm these propositions. This methodology is suitable for testing already developed theoretical propositions rather than creating entirely new ones (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Quantitative approaches enable the application of this research design. The research question focuses on the way in which civil servants perceive their organization and how the perceptions are linked with commitment, fit, satisfaction, and commuter limitations. In order to answer the research question, the researcher needs to use instruments that provide scores for all participants alike, allow for the statistical analysis of associations between variables, and permit the conduct of psychometric assessment, a vital step in instrument validation (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2022). A survey approach using validated Likert-type scales can help meet all three criteria (Berthon et al., 2005; Kim, 2012).

3.2. Procedure

Data collection for this study involved an online questionnaire consisting of measurements for employer attractiveness, P-O fit, job satisfaction, OAC, commuting, location-based WLB, and sociodemographic characteristics. Employer attractiveness was assessed based on the six-factor EmpAt model developed in Study 1 and adapted to reflect Social, Development, Interest, Economic, Application-Civic, and Application-Knowledge value. For P-O fit, a value

congruence scale consisting of three items was used following Cable and DeRue's (2002) framework. The measure of job satisfaction in this research utilized a global satisfaction index adapted from Agho et al. (1993), aligned with Locke's (1976) theory of satisfaction as a positive emotional response to a person's job experience. Affective commitment was assessed using the affective commitment scale proposed by Meyer et al. (1993). Lastly, location-based WLB was measured using three perceived influence items from Stutzer and Frey (2008) in combination with factual variables such as commuting time and commuting mode according to the methodology from the Portuguese 2021 Census (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, Portugal, 2021). All of these instruments were translated and adjusted accordingly in order to fit the Portuguese public administration context and use of organization instead of firm-specific language when necessary. Each attitudinal instrument used a seven-point Likert-type scale.

Contacts were made officially with central government departments, seeking institutional approval before sending out the questionnaire online using each department's internal network, despite not being able to reach respondents through their email addresses. As per ethical guidelines, an informed consent was provided to participants at the outset of the survey. The informed consent clarified the institutional context of the study in a doctoral research project at ISCTE, stated its objective, indicated the voluntary nature of participation and assured anonymity of participants, and informed about the aggregate nature of data analysis. In addition, we also conveyed the estimated time to complete the survey and provided contact details of the researcher for any clarifications.

Voluntary and anonymous participation always carries the risk of self-selection bias (Kaźmierczak et al., 2023), particularly when survey content requires respondents to make evaluative judgments about their employer. Although this questionnaire does not address sensitive personal topics, it does ask participants to assess features of their employing organization, which introduces some potential for systematic response patterns among those who chose to participate. We addressed this by collecting sociodemographic profiles for all respondents, which we then compared against the demographic structure of the invited population to assess representativeness.

At the same time, through the use of secondary data, we were able to contextualize the survey findings in terms of the broader institution and its personnel management framework in the Portuguese context of public administration. The study employed an examination of official statistics and policy documents on the topics of demographic profile of the workforce, age profile and projections of retirement, employee engagement initiatives, as well as recruitment

or employer branding activities carried out by public organizations. We further looked into the regulations governing public employment relations, such as career progressions and benefits schemes, since these institutional arrangements determine which aspects employees find attractive and realistically achievable for themselves (Berthon et al., 2005). Secondary analysis thus provided for cross-checking of our survey results in line with the approach of triangulation advocated by Modell (2005). For instance, if the respondents highly valued career development and promotions opportunities, these perceptions could be evaluated against career mobility and promotion schemes.

The survey was conducted in its Portuguese version (Appendix A) via the software program Qualtrics XM. The period of data gathering occurred between May and June 2025, with a follow-up message being delivered midway during the month of June. In addition, the survey was also distributed to the employees of the National Institute of Administration through the network of that institution. At the same time, the research study was also published by the researcher through his LinkedIn account.

3.3. Sample

The sample population comprised public servants from Portugal's CPA system, comprising employees in ministries, departments, institutes, and agencies in the Portuguese public administration system. The population was considered theoretically interesting since civil servants tend to display motivational patterns that are influenced by the nature of their work environment (Kim, 2012). Such orientations, which are informed by value systems, will likely determine how attractive an organization is viewed by its employees, especially regarding non-economic aspects of work.

There were 431 valid answers in the dataset. Complete data was reported by all the respondents on demographics and commuting. However, there were two cases of missing values (0.5%) for organizational type, bringing down the number of valid responses to 429. Likewise, length of service showed two missing answers (0.5%).

The age profile reflected a predominantly mature workforce. Respondents aged 46 and older accounted for 66.4% of participants, distributed across four categories: 46 to 50 years (19.3%), 51 to 55 years (20.0%), 56 to 60 years (16.0%), and over 60 years (11.1%). The most frequent single age band was 51 to 55 years (20.0%). The median age category was 46 to 50 years, where the cumulative distribution crossed 50%. Respondents under 36 years represented 12.5% of the sample (18 to 25 years: 1.9%, 26 to 30 years: 2.3%, 31 to 35 years: 8.4%). This

late-career concentration is consistent with the broader age structure of the Portuguese public administration and carries implications for how employees weigh stability, progression expectations, and work-life arrangements (Stutzer & Frey, 2008).

Females were 297 (68.9%) in number, while males were 130 (30.2%). One individual (0.2%) responded as “other” while three individuals (0.7%) did not want to reveal their gender identity. This gender composition is important to consider when discussing flexible work arrangements.

Educational qualification was very high because those who possessed a bachelor’s degree constituted 52.2% of the total population; those possessing a master’s degree made up 28.3%; and those with a doctoral degree constituted 4.2%. Those with secondary education constituted 12.5%; those with professional education made up 0.9%; while those with other qualifications were 1.9%. In sum, among university level qualifications, 84.7% had at least a degree. This composition reflects the nature of the work involved in the central administrative positions.

Professional categories were highly concentrated as those who were high technicians/IT specialists/equivalent made up 64.5% of the total sample size. Middle management constituted 14.4%; technical assistants/equivalent made up 14.2%; top management constituted 4.4%; while operational assistants were 2.6%. It should be noted that the findings are mostly a reflection of what is happening among knowledge professionals.

Of the 429 cases with organization type data, 38.5 % worked in general directorates, 29.4 % in public institutes, 24.7 % in general secretariats, 5.1 % in inspectorates, and 2.3 % in regulatory authorities. It should be mentioned that the sample includes all types of the central administration organizations, except for the last category which can be considered rather small.

The variable concerning service length demonstrated a bimodal distribution. The percentage of those respondents with a short period of service was high: 19.3 % of people had spent less than a year in the same position, 10.7 % worked from one to two years and 25.9 % from two to six years. Those respondents who had less than six years of experience formed 55.9 % of the total number of valid cases. In addition, 20.7 % of the respondents indicated more than 20 years of service length. Intermediate periods were presented in lower quantities: 10.7 % from six to ten years, 7.2 % from ten to fifteen years, and 5.4 % from fifteen to twenty years.

Commutes lasting between one and fifteen minutes were reported by 23.2% of the sample, while 16 to 30 minutes was experienced by 29.5%, and 31 to 60 minutes by 29.9% of respondents. More than one hour of commuting, that is, between 61 to 90 minutes was reported by 11.4%, whereas 6.0% of respondents had to commute over 90 minutes. The 31 to 60-minute

range represents the median value since the cumulative distribution reached 50% at that point. To sum up, 52.7% of respondents commute up to thirty minutes, whereas 17.4% commute for more than one hour.

The modal split shows that the use of private automobiles is predominant. Car commuting by the respondents accounts for 44.3%, while car commuting as a passenger amounts to 4.2%. Mass transportation is frequently used since train commuting amounts to 15.3%, followed by bus or coach at 13.5%, and underground at 9.0%. Finally, boat transport accounts for 1.2% of respondents. Commuting using active forms of transportation represents 9.7% of respondents: 8.1% commute by walking, while 1.6% commute by cycling. Other modes of transport amount to 2.8%. Adding up the categories, private motorized transport represents 48.5%, mass transportation represents 39.0%, and active forms of commuting represent 9.7% of the sample. Along with commute duration, the results above make the issue of hybrid working arrangements, flexible scheduling, and alternative workplace locations even more relevant in regard to employer attractiveness in the Portuguese public sector (T. D. Allen et al., 2013).

3.4. Data Analysis Strategy

The analysis follows the two-step logic of Anderson and Gerbing (1988). We first evaluated the measurement model and, only after retaining it as adequate, proceeded to the structural model where the seven hypotheses were tested.

Data screening reproduced the criteria of Study 1. Cases with more than 10% missing values and respondents outside central government organizations were removed, leaving 431 valid responses. Residual missingness stayed below 1% and was handled through full information maximum likelihood estimation available in AMOS.

Descriptive analysis covered means and standard deviations for all items and latent variables, with EmpAt items benchmarked against Berthon et al. (2005). Pearson zero-order correlations and phi coefficients (where applicable) were then computed for the five latent constructs and the controls, namely gender, age, education, professional category, organizational tenure, and commute time.

The measurement model was estimated through confirmatory factor analysis in AMOS, with employer attractiveness as a second order factor reflecting six first order dimensions (Social, Development, Interest, Economic, Application Civic, Application Knowledge) and the remaining four latent constructs specified as distinct factors. Fit judgments follow Hair et al. (2019) recommendations: normed chi square below 3, CFI and TLI at or above .94, RMSEA

below .07 (up to .08 tolerated, Browne and Cudeck (1992)), and SRMR below .08. Reliability relies on Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability above .70, convergent validity on AVE above .50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), and discriminant validity on the HTMT ratio with a .90 ceiling (Henseler et al., 2015).

Discriminant validity at the model level was further tested by comparing the baseline solution with nine alternatives where conceptually adjacent constructs were progressively fused, up to the single factor solution (Bagozzi et al., 1991). Comparisons rely on chi square difference tests, ΔCFI above .01 as a meaningful deterioration (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002), and AIC values.

Common method bias was assessed through Harman's single-factor test with principal axis factoring and through a single factor CFA, following Podsakoff et al. (2012).

The hypotheses were tested through structural equation modeling in AMOS. Employer attractiveness and location-based WLB entered the model as upstream predictors. P-O fit and job satisfaction were specified as sequential mediators, and OAC was specified as the distal outcome. Gender, age, education, professional category, organizational tenure, and commute time were included as control variables for the endogenous constructs. Direct, indirect, and total effects were estimated with standardized coefficients. The mediation tests behind H1, H4, and H7 used bias-corrected bootstrap resampling with 5,000 replications and 90% confidence intervals, preferred over the Baron and Kenny (1986) steps because it tests the indirect effect directly without assuming a normal sampling distribution (Hayes, 2022; Preacher & Hayes, 2014). An effect is considered significant when its confidence interval excludes zero. Explanatory power is reported through R squared for P-O fit, job satisfaction, and OAC. Partial mediation is inferred when direct and indirect effects are both significant, and full mediation when only the indirect effect holds.

4. Measures

The survey instrument contained six blocks for measurement: employer attractiveness, organizational commitment, person-organizational fit, job satisfaction, commute, and socio-demographic factors. All questions in the Likert scale were asked on a seven-point scale, which is considered sensitive to changes in attitude by previous literature in organizational behavior (Berthon et al., 2005). Each block will be presented below along with its theory and relevant questions.

4.1. Employer attractiveness

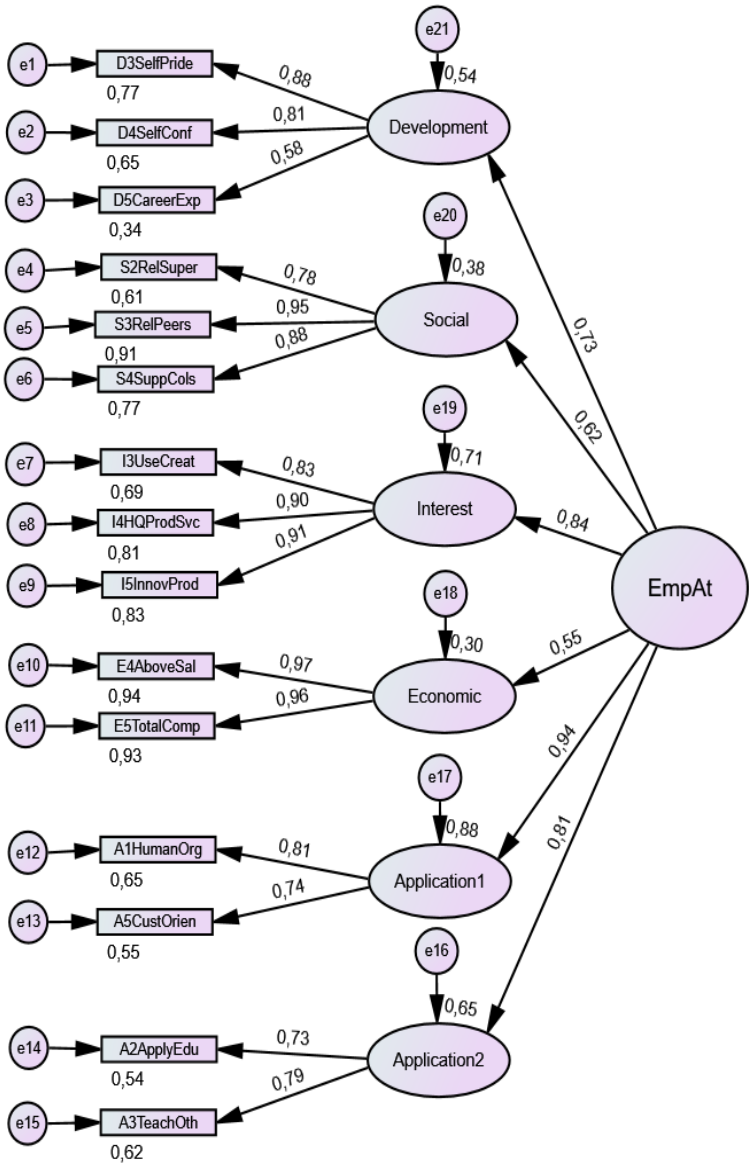
Employer attractiveness was measured using the Employer Attractiveness scale, known as EmpAt, originally developed by Berthon et al. (2005). The original instrument contains 25 items distributed across five dimensions: Development, Social, Interest, Application, and Economic value. Because Study 1 showed that this original structure did not fit the Portuguese central public administration context adequately, Study 3 uses the adapted 15-item six-factor structure retained in Study 1. This adapted structure distinguishes Social, Development, Interest, Economic, Application-Civic, and Application-Knowledge value. The distinction between Application-Civic and Application-Knowledge is central to the present model because it separates civic and public service contribution from the use and transfer of professional knowledge.

The Social factor captures the quality of relationships with colleagues and supervisors and the supportive character of the work environment. The Development factor captures self-confidence, self-pride, and career-enhancing experience derived from work. The Interest factor captures creativity, innovation, and the quality of organizational outputs. The Economic factor captures salary and compensation-related attractiveness. Application-Civic captures the organization's humanitarian orientation and citizen-focused contribution. Application-Knowledge captures opportunities to apply acquired knowledge and to teach or transfer knowledge to others.

The CFA for the 2nd order solution comprising all the original items showed poor fit ($\chi^2(270)=1763.729$, normed $\chi^2=6.532$, CFI = .810, TLI = .789, RMSEA = .113, 90% CI [.108; .118], PClose = .000; and SRMR = .127).

Guided by the findings from the 1st study, we tested a CFA of the extracted six-factor solution. The CFA for the revised 15-item solution showed liminal acceptable fit ($\chi^2(87)=404.443$, normed $\chi^2=4.649$, CFI = .932, TLI = .919, RMSEA = .092, 90% CI [.083; .101], PClose = .000; and SRMR = .069). The fit indices for the alternative five-factor solution that fuses both applications is also liminal acceptable ($\chi2(86)=422.991$ normed $\chi^2=4.919$, CFI = .928, TLI = .912, RMSEA = .095, 90% CI [.086; .105], PClose = .000; and SRMR = .067) but the model fit comparison indicates it has worse fit ($\Delta\chi2(1)=18.584$, p <.001). Therefore, we opted to preserve the 15-item six-factor solution (Figure 5)

Figure 5 - CFA for EmpAt 2nd order



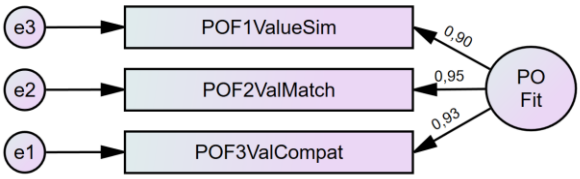
4.2. Person-organization fit

Person-organization fit (P-O fit) describes the degree of compatibility between a person's values and the values of the organization where they work (Kristof, 1996). The study measured it with the three-item scale from Cable and DeRue (2002), which focuses specifically on value congruence, the most widely accepted operationalization of P-O fit across the literature (Verquer et al., 2003). Participants rated three statements on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree): "The things I value in life are very similar to the things my organization values," "My personal values match the values and culture of my organization," and "The values and culture of my organization are very compatible with the things I value in life."

P-O fit matters in this study because prior research shows it plays both a direct role in shaping work attitudes and a mediating role between individual motivation and outcomes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Bright, 2008; Kim, 2012; Wright & Pandey, 2008). In the context of Portuguese public administration, where organizational mission and individual values around public service intersect, measuring fit between what employees value and what the organization represents adds an important layer to understanding employer attractiveness.

As a 3-item measure, the CFA expectably showed just identification. All items loaded significantly in the latent construct and by adding an additional identification, the solution showed acceptable fit ($\chi^2(1)=4.310$, p =.038; Normed χ^2=4.310; CFI = .997; TLI = .992; RMSEA = .088, 90% CI [.017, .179] PClose = .150; SRMR = .0044). The factor has convergent validity (AVE=.859) and is also reliable (Cronbach's alpha=.947). Figure 6**Error! Reference source not found.** shows the CFA diagram.

Figure 6 - CFA for P-O fit



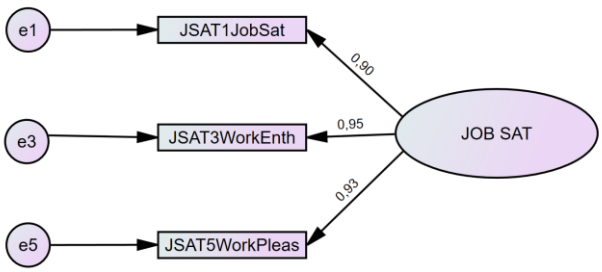
4.3. Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction was measured with five items adapted from the global satisfaction index of Agho et al. (1993). This instrument captures the positive emotional state a person derives from their work experience (Locke, 1976). Participants rated agreement with five statements on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree): "I feel quite satisfied with my current job", "I'm satisfied with my job at the moment," "Most days, I feel enthusiastic about my work," "I enjoy my job more than the average worker", and "I take real pleasure in my work".

Job satisfaction appears frequently as a key outcome variable in both employer attractiveness and public service motivation research (Kim, 2012; Pandey & Stazyk, 2008). Including it here allows the study to examine whether employer attractiveness perceptions link to how employees actually feel about their work, and whether that relationship operates through other constructs such as P-O fit.

The CFA of the single factor solution showed poor fit ($\chi^2(5)=137.689$, p <.001; Normed $\chi^2=27.538$; CFI = .948; TLI = .896; RMSEA = .248, 90% CI [.214, .285] PClose = .000; SRMR = .0264). Residual diagnostics and modification indices indicated localized discrepancies centered on two items (JSAT2, JSAT4). After their removal, the 3-item solution presented just identification. All items load significantly upon the latent construct and by adding one additional identification, the solution showed good fit ($\chi^2(1)=4.011$, p =.045; Normed $\chi^2=4.011$; CFI = .998; TLI = .993; RMSEA = .084, 90% CI [.010, .176] PClose = .168; SRMR = .0042). The factor has convergent validity (AVE=.852) and is also reliable (Cronbach's alpha=.944). Figure 7 shows the CFA diagram.

Figure 7 - CFA for Job Satisfaction



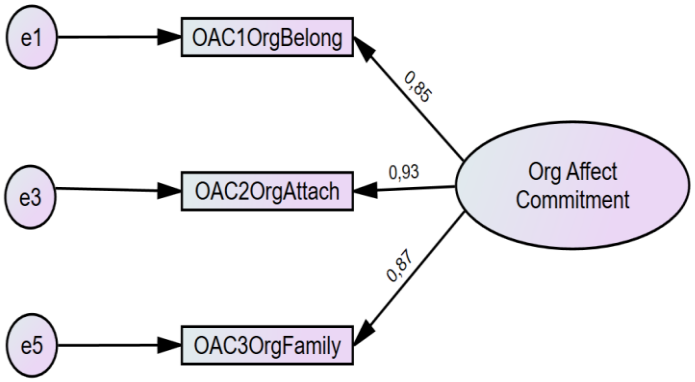
4.4. Organizational affective commitment

Organizational commitment was operationalized as affective commitment, using the three-item subscale from Meyer et al. (1993). Affective commitment reflects the emotional attachment a person feels toward the organization where they work. Research consistently finds affective commitment to produce the strongest associations with organizationally relevant outcomes such as attendance, performance, and citizenship behavior (Meyer et al., 2002). In the public sector specifically, affective commitment shows stronger links to organizational characteristics than normative or continuance forms of commitment (Steijn & Leisink, 2006).

Participants rated agreement with three statements on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree): "I have a strong sense of belonging to my organization," "I feel emotionally attached to this organization," and "I feel part of the family in my organization." These items appear consistently in public sector research and show strong factor loadings in samples from Korea, the Netherlands, and the United States (Kim, 2012; Meyer et al., 2002).

The 3-item solution presented a just identified model with all items loading significantly upon the latent construct. By adding one additional identification, the solution showed good fit ($\chi^2(1)=1.939$, p =.164; Normed χ^2=1.939; CFI = .999; TLI = .997; RMSEA = .047, 90% CI [.000, .146] PClose = .369; SRMR = .0059). The factor has convergent validity (AVE=.776) and is also reliable (Cronbach's alpha=.909). Figure 8 shows the CFA diagram.

Figure 8 - CFA of organizational affective commitment



4.5. Commuting and Work-Life Balance

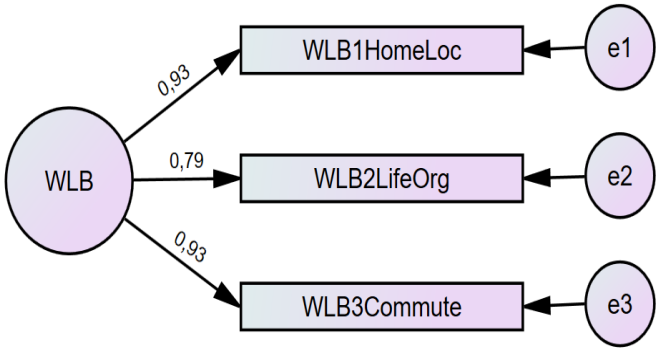
The study measured commuting with three items from Stutzer and Frey (2008), presented with the stem "The choice of your current job was influenced by," followed by "The location of your home," "Organizing your private life," and "Time spent travelling to work." Participants rated each on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). These items reflect the extent to which location-related constraints shape job choice, which connects directly to WLB concerns in the Portuguese public administration context.

To complement these perceived indicators, the questionnaire included two factual items drawn from the Portuguese 2021 Census methodology (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, Portugal, 2021). The first asked participants to report their average one-way commute time, with five response categories ranging from up to 15 minutes to over 90 minutes. The second asked for the primary mode of transport used to travel between home and work, with options including walking, car as driver, car as passenger, bus or coach, employer-provided transportation, underground, train, bicycle, boat, and an open "other" category.

Integration of perceived and factual aspects of commuting into the measurement framework enhances its validity. Perceived dimensions reflect the impact of commuting on people's lives, whereas factual components link the study to concrete facts about time and means of transportation (Stutzer & Frey, 2008; Wheatley, 2021). Together they allow a more complete account of how geographic and logistical constraints relate to employer attractiveness in the public sector.

The CFA of the single factor solution showed poor fit ($\chi^2(5)=179.170$, p <.001; Normed χ^2=35.834; CFI = .888; TLI = .777; RMSEA = .285, 90% CI [.250, .321] PClose = .000; SRMR = .0775). Residual diagnostics and modification indices indicated items WLB4 and WLB5 were harming the model fit. Their removal left a 3-item solution and further analysis showed just identification where all items loaded significantly onto the latent factor. The CFA of this solution showed good fit ($\chi^2(1)=0.870$, p =.351; Normed χ^2=0.870; CFI = 1.000; TLI = 1.000; RMSEA = .000, 90% CI [.000, .124] PClose = .566; SRMR = .003). The factor has convergent validity (AVE=.785) and is also reliable (Cronbach's alpha=.914). Figure 9 shows the CFA diagram.

Figure 9- CFA of commuting based work-life balance



4.6. Sociodemographic variables

Demographic information served two purposes: describing the aggregate sample and functioning as control variables in subsequent analyses. Prior research shows that demographic characteristics influence attitudinal variables such as employer attractiveness perceptions and should therefore be accounted for in models examining these outcomes (Meyer et al., 2002; Ng & Feldman, 2010).

The questionnaire collected gender (female, male, other, prefer not to answer), age in eight grouped categories from 18-25 through over 60, and highest academic qualification across six levels from secondary education through doctorate, with an open option for other qualifications. Respondents also reported their academic area in a short open-ended field, the type of organization where they work (General Secretariat, General Directorate, Inspectorate, Public Institute, Authority, Local Administration, or other), professional category (top management, middle management, senior technical specialist or equivalent, technical assistant or equivalent, and operational assistant), and length of service in the current organization across seven intervals from under one year to over 20 years.

The professional category options follow the general career structure defined in Portuguese public employment law, supplemented with management tiers consistent with the classifications established by the Directorate General for Administration and Public Employment (Fernandes, 2021). Including organization type alongside professional category allows the analysis to account for the structural diversity within Portuguese public administration, where central ministries, local governments, and independent bodies operate under different conditions and organizational cultures.

5. Measurement Model and Common Method Bias

The measurement model tests the fit for all the latent constructs comprised in the conceptual model. Findings show an acceptable fit ($\chi^2(311) = 821.757$; $\chi^2/df = 2.642$; CFI = .949; TLI = .942; RMSEA = .062, 90% CI [.057;.067], PClose = .000; SRMR = .0572; AIC = 1009.757). Due to the cross-sectional nature of data collection, it is plausible that common method variance may bias the results and, likewise, that latent constructs are fused. By testing multiple variations of the conceptual model where adjacent constructs are progressively fused, the respective measurement models showed worse fit in all cases to the exception of one (Model F, $\Delta\chi2(\Delta df) = 2.54(3)$ p =.46, ΔCFI = 0.000). Harman test, conducted with principal axis factoring, showed a first factor accounting for 35.4% total variance thus falling below the 50% threshold. Likewise, the single factor model generated in CFA also has unacceptable fit indices. We, therefore, consider that the model is not biased due to common method variance.

To assess the adequacy of the proposed measurement structure, the baseline model was compared with a set of alternative models in which conceptually related constructs were progressively fused. This procedure aimed to test whether the latent variables retained in the baseline solution were empirically distinct, or whether some of them reflected overlapping dimensions that could be represented more parsimoniously by fewer factors. Table 26 reports the fit statistics for the baseline model and for each competing model.

The baseline model corresponds to the original theoretically grounded conceptual model that is used as the reference point for the model comparison procedure. This model treats the main study variables as distinct latent constructs, namely Employer Attractiveness, P-O fit, Job Satisfaction, OAC, and Work Life Balance. Employer Attractiveness was modeled as a second order construct reflected in six first order dimensions, Interest, Social, Economic, Development, Application-Civic, and Application-Knowledge, while the remaining variables were specified as separate latent constructs.

5.1. Comparison of Competing Measurement Models

Table 26 - Comparison models

Model	χ2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	CI90	PClose	SRMR	AIC	Δχ2(Δdf) Baseline	ΔCFI
Baseline χ^2 821.757 (311)	2.642	.949	.942	.062	[.057;.067]	.000	.0572	1009.757	-	-
Model A χ^2 1238.325 (315) (JS+OCfused)	3.931	.907	.897	.083	[.078;.087]	.000	.0631	1418.325	416.568(4)***	0.041
Model B χ^2 1614.530 (315) (PoF+JSffused)	5.125	.869	.855	.098	[.093;.103]	.000	.0655	1794.530	782.573(4)***	0.080
Model C χ^2 1317.365 (315) (PoF+OCfused)	4.182	.899	.888	.086	[.081;.091]	.000	.0657	1497.365	495.608 (4)***	0.049
Model D χ^2 1019.797 (314) (Emp+PoFfused)	3.248	.929	.921	.072	[.067;.077]	.000	.0940	1201.797	198.04(3)***	0.019
Model E χ^2 1779.241 (315) (WLB+PoF)	5.648	.853	.836	.104	[.099; .109]	.000	.0917	1959.241	957.484(4)***	0.096
Model F χ^2 824.297 (314) (WLB+Emp)	2.625	.949	.943	.061	[.056; .067]	.000	.0578	1006.297	2.54(3) p =.46	0.000
Model G χ^2 1875.448 (318) (PoF+JS+OCfused)	5.898	.844	.827	.107	[.102; .111]	.000	.0649	2049.448	1053.691(7)***	0.105
Model H χ^2 2832.395 (320) (PoF+JS+OC+WLBfused)	8.851	.748	.723	.135	[.131; .140]	.000	.0965	3002.395	2010.638(9)***	0.201
Model I single factor χ^2 3422.412 (321)	10.662	.689	.659	.150	[.145; .154]	.000	.1573	3590.412	2600.655(10)***	0.260

The results in Table 26 reveal that the baseline model exhibited a satisfactory fit with a CFI of .949 and a TLI of .942. The RMSEA was .062, and the SRMR was .0572, both being considerably lower than the thresholds suggested by Hair et al. (2019). While the PClose for the 90% confidence interval is reported as .000, such a finding is relatively common in models of intermediate complexity using samples of this size because the indices derived from the chi-square distribution are notoriously sensitive to both sample size and model specifications (Hair et al., 2019). In other words, it would be unwise to interpret the outcome in isolation and base conclusions solely on the reported index. Another sign that the baseline model is appropriate can be found in its ability to produce one of the smallest AIC scores among all the model variations, indicating that it achieves an optimal trade-off between the fit and simplicity.

The alternative models were designed to exhaustively cover possible conceptual overlaps where in model A, Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment were fused into a single factor, model B fused P-O fit and Job Satisfaction, model C fused P-O fit and Organizational Commitment. Model D fused Employer Attractiveness and P-O fit, model E fused Work Life Balance and P-O fit, and model F fused Work Life Balance and Employer Attractiveness. Model G started fusion of three sequenced constructs, namely P-O fit, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Commitment into a single factor, while model H fused four constructs, namely P-O fit, Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Work Life Balance. Finally, Model I, tested the single factor solution, combining all constructs into a single factor. As shown in Table 26 none of the alternative models showed better fit than the baseline model as indicated by the Chi-square and CFI differences.

However, two alternative models deserve attention. Model F, in which Work Life Balance and Employer Attractiveness were fused, produced fit indices that were equivalent to those of the baseline model. This result deserves careful interpretation. Statistically, it indicates that Work Life Balance and Employer Attractiveness are highly overlapping in this sample of public servants. Employees appear to perceive WLB closely tied to the organization's attractiveness as an employer. In other words, balance between professional and personal life may not be experienced as an external or separate employment condition, but rather as part of the employer value proposition itself. This is a potential meaningful finding in the public sector context, where predictability, flexibility, and the ability to reconcile work and personal responsibilities often hold substantial value for employees. However, subsequent analysis where WLB was incorporated into EmpAt as a 2nd order factor, showed a low loading (λ=.18). Still, Model F opens an important avenue for interpretation and future scale development as this measure of

WLB was based on commuting effects, not general WLB. In the context of CPA, being able to balance work with life responsibilities, may function as a salient component of employer attractiveness if WLB is taken generally, not specifically focused on how commuting time modulates it.

5.2. Results

This section starts by showing the descriptives, namely the means and standard deviations of the variables under study, followed by the bivariate statistics.

5.3. Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlation

Table 27 presents the descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for all variables in the study. The analysis below moves through the constructs in the conceptual model, first describing their central tendency and dispersion, then examining how each relates to the demographic controls and to the other constructs comprised in the conceptual model.

Among the five constructs in the conceptual model, employer attractiveness scored highest, with a mean of 5.13 on the response scale (SD = 1.14), indicating that civil servants in this sample perceive their organization as a moderately to highly attractive employer overall. OAC followed closely at 4.85 (SD = 1.59), and job satisfaction at 4.74 (SD = 1.60). P-O fit showed a mean of 4.31 (SD = 1.58), and location-based WLB produced the lowest mean at 4.33 (SD = 1.99), with also the highest dispersion among the five constructs, reflecting considerable variation in how employees experience commute and location-related conditions. All means differ among themselves for a 95% confidence interval to the exception of WLB compared to P-O fit ($t(430)=0.171$, p =.865) and job satisfaction compared to OAC ($t(430) = -1.880$, p =.061).

Table 27 - Descriptives and bivariate statistics

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender	0.33	0.52	--									
2. Age	6.13	1.97	-.071	--								
3. Educ	3.16	1.05	.086	-.258**	--							
4. Prof. Category	2.96	0.75	-.105*	-.055	-.455**	--						
5. Org. Tenure	3.75	2.13	-.044	.522**	-.244**	.055	--					
6. Commute time	2.48	1.14	.027	-.107*	.003	-.084	-.163**	--				
7. EmpAt	5.13	1.14	-.110*	-.136**	.027	-.038	-.191**	-.059	--			
8. Location base WLB	4.33	1.99	-.102*	.056	-.020	.172**	.007	-.451**	.174**	--		
9. P-O fit	4.31	1.58	-.076	-.072	-.062	-.023	-.129**	-.072	.441**	.145**	--	
10. JSat	4.74	1.60	-.069	-.055	-.090	-.016	-.146**	-.063	.416**	.118*	.656**	--
11. OAC	4.85	1.59	-.064	.141**	-.073	-.111*	.086	-.084	.399**	.073	.685**	.711**

*p <.05; **p <.01.

5.4. Bivariate Statistics

Overall, the bivariate correlations between sociodemographic variables and those comprised in the conceptual model are not characterized by many significant correlations. An exception lies in commute time crossed with location-based WLB which shows a substantial correlation (r=-.451, p <.01) that naturally results from the shared nature of both constructs. All the remaining significant correlations are of a lower magnitude. Organizational tenure shows three cases of significant correlations with EmpAt (r = -.191, p <.01), with job satisfaction (r = -.146, p <.01) and with P-O fit (r = -.129, p <.01). These are all negative which suggest that more tenured employees experience lower EmpAt, lower job satisfaction, and lower P-O fit. A moderately low correlation of .172 (p <.01) is found between professional category and location-based WLB. Likewise, age is positively correlated with OAC (r = .141, p <.01) but negatively with EmpAt (r = -.136, p <.01) which goes in line with findings concerning organizational tenure. Gender has also two significant negative phi coefficients with EmpAt (phi = -.110, p <.05) and location-based WLB (phi = -.102, p <.05).

Employer attractiveness correlates positively with all four constructs in the conceptual model. The association with P-O fit was the strongest (r = .441, p < .01), followed by job satisfaction (r = .416, p < .01) and OAC (r = .399, p < .01). The correlation with location-based WLB was positive but more modest (r = .174, p < .01). This pattern suggests that how employees evaluate their organization as an employer is closely tied to how compatible they feel with it and how satisfied they are at work, and that this connection is stronger than the link between attractiveness and commute-related conditions.

Location-based WLB showed a significant positive association with employer attractiveness (r = .174, p < .01), P-O fit (r = .145, p < .01), and job satisfaction (r = .118, p < .05). Its correlation with OAC was not significant (r = .073). Taken together, this pattern positions location-based WLB closer to the employment value proposition end of the model, with modest links to fit and satisfaction, and a negligible direct link to emotional attachment.

Person-organization fit produced the two strongest bivariate correlations in the entire matrix. It correlates at r = .685 (p < .01) with OAC and at r = .656 (p < .01) with job satisfaction. Both associations are large by conventional benchmarks and indicate that perceived value congruence with the organization is the single strongest correlate of both job satisfaction and

affective commitment in this sample. As shown above, P-O fit also correlated positively with employer attractiveness (r = .441, $p < .01$) and location-based WLB (r = .145, $p < .01$).

Job satisfaction correlated most strongly with OAC (r = .711, $p < .01$) and P-O fit (r = .656, $p < .01$), both large associations. It also correlated positively with employer attractiveness (r = .416, $p < .01$) and, more modestly, with location-based WLB (r = .118, $p < .05$). Among the demographic controls, only organizational tenure showed a significant negative association (r = -.146, $p < .01$). The strength of the satisfaction-to-commitment correlation is the highest bivariate association in the matrix, anticipating the mediation results that follow.

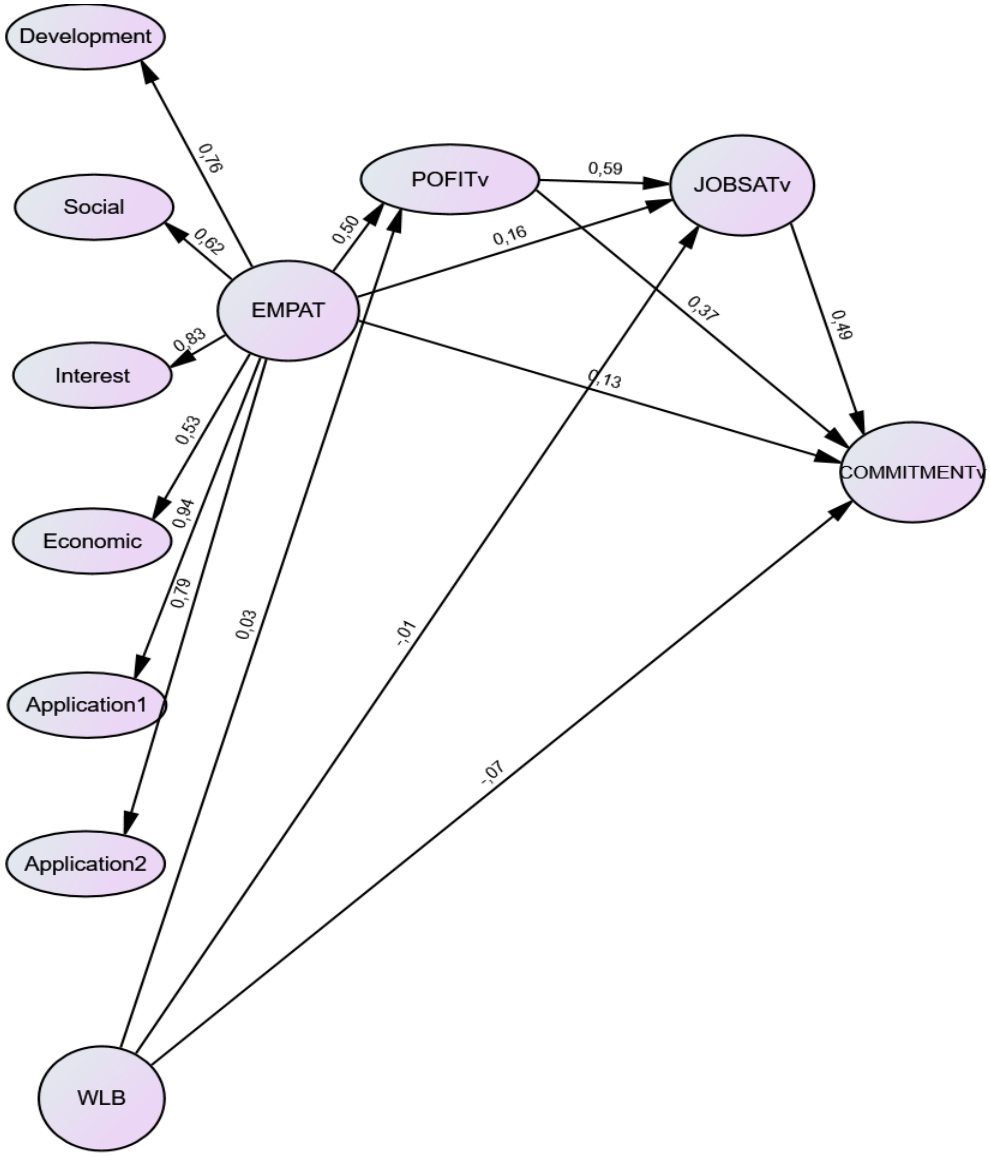
In addition to the correlations previously shown concerning OAC, its strongest correlation is found with job satisfaction (r = .711, $p < .01$). Although stated before, it is worth mentioning correlation with P-O fit, which is also strong (r = .685, $p < .01$). The pattern of correlations confirms that commitment is most strongly tied to attitudinal and value-based mechanisms, particularly satisfaction.

Overall, the bivariate associations are consistent with the proposed conceptual model. The strongest correlations in the matrix cluster around the P-O fit, job satisfaction, and OAC triad, and employer attractiveness shows meaningful positive associations with all three. Location-based WLB occupies a more peripheral position, connected to employer attractiveness and modestly to P-O fit and job satisfaction, but not to OAC. This pattern supports moving forward with the structural model tests.

6. Hypotheses Testing

Table 28 shows the results of the structural model which as simplified graphically Figure 10. Overall, the model has substantial explanatory power, accounting for 29% of the variance in P-O fit, 50% of the variance in job satisfaction, and 74% of the variance in OAC. VIF values indicate no multicollinearity problems (as the values vary between 1.069 and 1.938) clearly below the 5.0 threshold. These values indicate that the proposed framework captures an important share of the attitudinal dynamics underlying employees' relationship with the organization, particularly regarding OAC.

Figure 10 - SEM coefficients



Regarding the control variables, most effects are not statistically significant. Gender is not associated with P-O fit, job satisfaction, or OAC. Age is also neither significantly related to P-O fit nor job satisfaction, but it shows a positive association with OAC ($\gamma = .140$, $p < .001$, 90% CI [.064, .219]). Education showed a negative association with P-O fit ($\gamma = -.129$, $p = .013$, 90% CI [-.227, -.026]), while its relationships with job satisfaction and OAC were not statistically significant. Professional category did not show significant effects on P-O fit or job satisfaction, and its association with OAC is not significant. Organizational tenure was not significantly associated with P-O fit or job satisfaction, but it showed a positive association with OAC ($\gamma = .186$, $p < .001$, 90% CI [.117, .257]). Commute time did not show significant associations with any of the endogenous variables.

Regarding the substantive hypotheses, the results shown in Table 28 support Hypothesis 1, which proposed that job satisfaction mediates the positive relationship between P-O fit and OAC. P-O fit shows a strong positive direct effect on job satisfaction ($\beta = .585$, $p < .001$, 90% CI [.475, .681]), and a positive direct effect on OAC ($\beta = .371$, $p < .001$, 90% CI [.263, .477]). Job satisfaction, in turn, had a strong positive direct effect on OAC ($\beta = .488$, $p < .001$, 90% CI [.378, .597]). In addition, the indirect effect of P-O fit on OAC through job satisfaction was positive (indirect effect = .285, 90% CI [.204, .379]). Since both the indirect effect and the direct effect remained statistically significant, the results indicate partial mediation. Hypothesis 1 was therefore supported.

The findings also support Hypothesis 2, which proposed that employer attractiveness is positively associated with P-O fit. As reported, employer attractiveness showed a strong positive direct effect on P-O fit ($\gamma = .490$, $p < .001$, 90% CI [.383, .580]). This result indicates that employees who perceive the organization as more attractive as an employer are more likely to report stronger perceptions of compatibility and alignment with it.

Hypothesis 3 was likewise supported. Employer attractiveness showed a positive and direct effect on OAC ($\gamma = .126$, $p = .002$, 90% CI [.049, .211]). Although the size of this effect is very modest, the result indicates that employer attractiveness plays a direct role in explaining employees' emotional attachment to the organization, beyond what is explained through P-O fit and job satisfaction.

Table 28 - Direct, indirect, and total effects in the structural model

	P-O fit				Job Sat				OAC			
Control variable	**γ / β**	**p-value**	**90% CI**		**γ / β**	**p-value**	**90% CI**		**γ / β**	**p-value**	**90% CI**	
Gender	-.005	.908	[-.092;.080]		-.007	.863	[-.079;.064]		.025	.407	[-.033;.084]	
Age	-.039	.458	[-.142;.064]		.023	.610	[-.062;.110]		.140	<.001	[.064;.219]	
Education	-.129	.013	[-.227;-.026]		-.085	.056	[-.178;.008]		.030	.403	[-.049;.105]	
Prof. Category	-.074	.149	[-.166;.015]		-.028	.526	[-.119;.072]		-.068	.051	[-.148;.003]	
Org. Tenure	-.074	.159	[-.174;.031]		-.075	.091	[-.165;.018]		.186	<.001	[.117;.257]	
Commute time	-.038	.454	[-.143;.065]		-.018	.683	[-.101;.067]		-.021	.554	[-.093;.050]	
Direct effects												
EmpAt	.490	<.001	[.383;.580]	H2	.162	.001	[.037;.284]		.126	.002	[.049;.211]	H3
Location based-WLB	.042	.433	[-.075;.153]	H5	-.004	.938	[-.095;.093]		-.062	.092	[-.139;.014]	H6
P-O fit					.585	<.001	[.475;.681]		.371	<.001	[.263;.477]	
JSat									.488	<.001	[.378;.597]	
Indirect effects												
P-O fit-JSat-OAC									.285		[.204;.379]	H1
Empat-P-O fit-JSat-OAC									.401		[.320;.481]	H4
WLB-P-O fit-JSat-OAC									.026		[-.063;.112]	H7
Total effects												
EmpAt	.490		[.383;.580]		.449		[.334;.559]		.527		[.419;.627]	
WLB	.042		[-.075;.153]		.021		[-.093;.135]		-.036		[-.154;.085]	
P-O fit					.585		[.475;.681]		.656		[.564;.740]	
JSat									.488		[.378;.597]	
R^2	29%				50%				74%			

Strong support also emerged for Hypothesis 4, which proposed that employer attractiveness is positively associated with OAC through a sequential mediation of P-O fit and job satisfaction (Indirect effect = .401, 90% CI [.320, .481]). This is consistent with previous significant effects found between EmpAt and P-O fit, P-O fit and job satisfaction, and between job satisfaction and OAC. Since the direct effect of employer attractiveness on OAC also remained significant, the results indicate partial sequential mediation. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

By contrast, the hypotheses related to location-based WLB did not receive empirical support. Hypothesis 5 proposed that location-based WLB is positively associated with P-O fit. Although the estimated coefficient was positive, the effect was weak and not statistically significant ($\gamma = .042$, $p = .433$, 90% CI [-.075, .153]). Because the confidence interval included zero, this hypothesis was not supported.

Hypothesis 6 proposed that location-based WLB is positively associated with OAC. As shown in Table 28 the direct effect was negative and not statistically significant ($\gamma = -.062$, $p = .092$, 90% CI [-.139, .014]). Hypothesis 6 was therefore not supported.

Finally, Hypothesis 7 proposed that location-based WLB is positively associated with OAC through the sequential mediation of P-O fit and job satisfaction. The estimated indirect effect was .026 but the 90% confidence interval includes zero ([-.063, .112]). This indicates that the proposed sequential mediation effect is not statistically significant. Taken together with the non-significant direct effect of location-based WLB on P-O fit and the non-significant direct effect on OAC, the result suggests that location-based WLB does not play a meaningful role in the proposed attitudinal pathway. Hypothesis 7 was therefore not supported.

In summary, the pattern of results reported in Table 28, provides strong support for the central attitudinal core of the model. Employer attractiveness, P-O fit, and job satisfaction are the main explanatory variables of OAC. Employer attractiveness showed strong effects on P-O fit and meaningful direct and indirect effects on OAC. P-O fit also played a central role, both directly and indirectly through job satisfaction. In contrast, location-based WLB did not show statistically meaningful effects on P-O fit, OAC, or the sequential pathway linking these constructs. These findings suggest that employees' deeper attitudinal ties to the organization are shaped primarily by perceptions of employer attractiveness, value congruence with the organization, and positive evaluations of the work experience.

6.1. Supplementary Analyses

While EmpAt was tested as a 2nd order factor, it is possible to test the direct effects of the 1st order EmpAt factors upon P-O fit to ascertain the relative weight each one plays in contributing to the effects found. This allows a finer understanding of the effects originating from EmpAt treated as a 2nd order factor. Replicating the conceptual model but removing the direct effect of EmpAt (measured at the 2nd order) on P-O fit and adding direct effects from EmpAt (1st order factors) on P-O fit, produced a model that has acceptable fit ($\chi^2(438)=1053.463$, normed $\chi^2=2.405$, CFI = .942, TLI = .930, RMSEA = .057, 90% CI [.053; .062], PClose = .004; and SRMR = .0503). Findings showed that only EmpAt application civic (γ = .571, $p<.001$; 90% CI [.245;1.105]), development (γ = .256, $p<.001$; 90% CI [.072;.435]) and application knowledge (γ=-.231, p=.022; 90% CI [-.488;-.004]) have significant associations. Both economic (γ=-.068, p=.194; 90% CI [-.185;.059]), social (γ=-.017, p=.768; 90% CI [-.155;.124]), and interest (γ=-.021, p=.821; 90% CI [-.290;.189]) play, apparently, no role here. Additionally, the means as well as the dispersion of these 1st order factors are the following (scale ranges from 1 to 7): EmpAt application civic (M=5.57; SD=1.34), development (M=5.21; SD=1.37), application knowledge (M=5.15; SD=1.45), economic (M=4.17; SD=1.97), interest (M=5.19; SD=1.56), social (M=5.49; SD=1.42).

7. Discussion and Conclusion

7.1. Discussion of Results

The results provide strong support for the central attitudinal logic of the model. Taken together, the findings suggest that OAC among public servants is shaped primarily by employer attractiveness, P-O fit, and job satisfaction, rather than by location-based WLB. This pattern is theoretically coherent and aligns with the broader argument of the thesis, namely that employees' emotional attachment to the organization develops through a process that begins with perceptions of organizational value, moves through judgments of compatibility, and is reinforced by positive evaluations of the work experience.

Support for Hypothesis 1 is also in line with P-O fit (Kristof, 1996) and the existing research on job attitudes. As can be seen, P-O fit not only affected OAC directly but had a partial mediating effect via job satisfaction. This implies that employees who viewed themselves as

being better fitted for the organization evaluated their job in a more positive way but were also more emotionally involved with the organization. This finding is supported by the position taken by Kristof (1996) that fit can refer both to value congruence and to mutual satisfaction of each other's needs. It also fits the approach of Cable and Edwards (2004), which argues that both types of fit (supplementary and complementary) should be considered as important determinants of employee attitudes. Mediation role of job satisfaction supports Locke's (1976) claim that evaluations of one's job form the foundation of attitudes towards organizations. However, presence of the direct effect of P-O fit on affective commitment allows us to conclude that affective commitment should also be perceived as the consequence of fit, alignment, and affiliation with the organization. Here the present findings are consistent with the perspective of social identity, which states that people tend to feel closer to those organizations whose values are congruent with those they identify with (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

The findings supporting Hypothesis 2 underscore the significance of the attractiveness of the employer as a critical antecedent of perceptions of P-O fit. Employer attractiveness was found to be significantly positively related to P-O fit, implying that the attractiveness of the organization as an employer plays a significant part in employee perceptions regarding whether the organization satisfies their expectations and preferences. Consistent with both employer branding theory which defines employer attractiveness as employees' perception of the organization's value as an employer (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) and signaling theory (Spence, 1973) that emphasizes the importance of cues and attributes available to employees for forming their judgments about the organization's hidden characteristics, the results suggest that employees make judgments based on the employer's attractiveness to determine whether the organizations meet their needs. Practically speaking, when public sector employees find an organization to be attractive because it provides them with satisfying work, career growth, social interaction, and other valuable organizational attributes, they tend to view the organization as fitting them well.

Hypothesis 3 was also supported but the size of the direct association between employer attractiveness and OAC was modest. This is theoretically meaningful as employer attractiveness appears to matter for commitment, but not as the strongest or most immediate predictor. This is understandable because affective commitment reflects a deeper emotional bond with the organization, including attachment, identification, and the desire to remain a member of it (Meyer et al., 1993, 2002). But also, because the model includes competitive pathways via P-O fit and job satisfaction. Employer attractiveness helps shape this bond by making the

organization appear desirable, meaningful, and supportive, yet much of its influence seems to operate through a psychological process that entails both perceived P-O fit and job satisfaction. This finding fits the idea that employer branding does not influence employees only at the level of initial attraction but continues to shape the attitudes of current employees by reinforcing a favorable organizational image (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). At the same time, the relatively modest size of the direct effect suggests that positive perceptions of the employer are not enough on their own to generate strong affective commitment. Those perceptions become more influential when they are translated into a sense of compatibility and a positive work experience.

For the model, the most compelling empirical evidence appeared regarding Hypothesis 4. The significant and positive sequential indirect effect of employer attractiveness on OAC via perceived P-O fit and job satisfaction provides strong empirical support for the proposed theoretical logic and for the usefulness of the tested model. Employer attractiveness appears to function as an organizational signal first, then as an element facilitating perceived P-O fit next, followed by its role as a precursor to job satisfaction, and lastly, as an antecedent of affective commitment. This flow of relationships between variables fits well with the theoretical foundation of this work, which includes employer branding theory, signaling theory, value congruence theory, and job satisfaction theory (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Kristof, 1996; Locke, 1976; Spence, 1973). It is also consistent with the affective commitment literature, where emotional attachment results from positive organizational experiences (Meyer et al., 2002; Meyer & Allen, 19931). The fact that employer attractiveness also has a direct effect on commitment (albeit modest in magnitude) indicates partial sequential mediation, which means that the influence of employer attractiveness is both immediate and indirect. In substantive terms, this suggests that public servants become more affectively committed not only because they see the organization as attractive, but because that attractiveness strengthens their sense of fit and improves their evaluation of their work experience.

Its relevance is particularly evident when we consider the context of public administration. Organizations in the public sector are not only evaluated according to their instrumental benefits, but also according to such criteria as purpose, legitimacy, contribution to society, justice, and significance (Steijn & Leisink, 2006). These symbolic or value-related aspects play a key role in research on public service motivation, where it is claimed that many individuals working in the public sector pay special attention to civic values and their chances to help others

(Bright, 2008; Perry & Wise, 1990; Vandenabeele, 2007). In this case, the results are quite compatible with this rationale. Employer attractiveness in the public sector becomes relevant precisely because of its ability to signal both positive employment opportunities and organizational values. That, in turn, explains the high transmission of its effect on affective commitment through P-O fit and job satisfaction.

In comparison, findings related to Hypotheses 5, 6, and 7 were unable to confirm the predicted importance of location-related WLB. The variable was not found to be significantly related to P-O fit, had no significant association with affective commitment towards the organization, and thus could not demonstrate its expected indirect influence on affective commitment through the mediation of P-O fit. These findings imply that location-based WLB plays a different role in this model compared to the three other predictor variables such as employer attractiveness, P-O fit, and job satisfaction. From a theoretical perspective, this finding does not contradict the existing body of research on WLB. Instead, it demonstrates that location-based WLB, specifically, does not play a role in shaping attitudinal outcomes under study.

This distinction is important. WLB is a broad construct that often relates to strain reduction, role compatibility, well-being, and the management of boundaries between work and non-work domains (Allen et al., 2013; Greenhaus & Allen, 2010). Location-based WLB captures a narrower dimension, linked to commute, accessibility, and the practical articulation of work and personal life. These factors are likely to influence everyday convenience and quality of life, yet they do not necessarily alter employees' deeper judgments about whether the organization fits their values or whether they feel emotionally attached to it. In other words, employees may appreciate shorter commutes and better locational arrangements without interpreting these conditions as signs of value congruence or as reasons for stronger affective commitment. The findings therefore suggest that the practical advantages associated with location-based WLB are not sufficient, on their own, to explain fit or commitment in this sample.

This interpretation is also coherent with the public sector setting. In public administration, employees are likely to form stronger organizational attitudes on the basis of mission, legitimacy, service orientation, and meaningful contribution than based on commute related convenience alone. The stronger effects of employer attractiveness, P-O fit, and job satisfaction support this reading. They indicate that deeper organizational attitudes among public servants are rooted mainly in symbolic and evaluative processes rather than in practical location related conditions. The non-significant effects of location-based WLB therefore suggest not that

commuting or balance are irrelevant, but that they are not central drivers of fit or affective commitment within this explanatory framework.

At the same time, the location-based WLB findings remain theoretically useful. The absence of support for Hypotheses 5 to 7 suggests that this variable may function better as part of the broader employer value proposition than as a direct determinant of P-O fit or affective commitment. This interpretation is also consistent with the earlier measurement model comparison, in which WLB appeared empirically closer to employer attractiveness than to P-O fit or commitment. It is therefore plausible that location-based WLB contributes more strongly to how employees evaluate the organization as an employer than to how they develop emotional attachment to it. It is particularly pertinent in the context of public organizations, where actual work environment issues may be of importance for recruitment and retention purposes, even though they do not play a direct role in developing attitudinal links. Another point to take into account is that location-specific WLB must certainly be analyzed together with other aspects of work environment that have not been accounted for in the model.

7.2. Supplementary Interpretation of First-Order EmpAt Effects

The supplementary analysis of the first-order EmpAt dimensions provides a more detailed interpretation of the employer attractiveness pathway. When the six first-order dimensions were entered as predictors of P-O fit, only Application-Civic, Development, and Application-Knowledge showed significant effects. Application-Civic was the strongest positive predictor, reinforcing the centrality of public mission, citizen orientation, and contribution to the public good in Portuguese central public administration. Development also showed a positive effect, suggesting that employees who associate their organization with self-confidence, self-pride, and career-enhancing experience are more likely to perceive stronger fit with it.

By contrast, Application-Knowledge showed a negative association with P-O fit. This result is unexpected, especially because Application-Knowledge loads strongly on the second-order employer attractiveness construct. One possible interpretation is that opportunities to apply knowledge and teach others may create higher expectations that are not fully met in the daily organizational experience. Another possibility is that employees who place greater emphasis on knowledge application become more sensitive to constraints on autonomy, innovation, and knowledge transfer inside public administration. This finding should therefore be treated as exploratory and deserves further investigation.

7.3. Interpretation of Control Variables

The control variables offer further context into the attitudinal processes among the sample group members. It was noted that age and organizational tenure correlated positively with OAC, meaning that older employees as well as employees who have worked at the organization for a longer period of time would report a greater sense of emotional connection towards the organization. There could be multiple explanations for this phenomenon, including the role of increased familiarity and socialization. However, it might also be the result of self-selection, whereby employees who are less emotionally committed to the organization may choose to leave or avoid filling out an optional survey. Education was correlated negatively with P-O fit, meaning that highly-educated people may have higher standards concerning various organizational factors. Other control variables did not exhibit any significant associations, which suggests that the attitudinal process can be better explained by other factors than demographics.

7.4. Limitations

The cross-sectional design is the most consequential limitation in this study. All constructs were measured at a single point in time from the same respondents, so the study establishes associations but cannot confirm causal direction. Employees who feel more committed may retrospectively rate their organization as more attractive, or greater satisfaction may foster better fit perceptions. Longitudinal data tracking how attractiveness, P-O fit, and job satisfaction evolve over time would better help make stronger causal claims. The cross-sectional design also raises common method variance concerns, which the study addressed through Harman's single factor test and competing model comparisons, finding no evidence of serious contamination. Future research may benefit from designing time-lagged data collection for the outcome variable, so to provide stronger assurance, and especially, from conducting longitudinal repeated-measures data collection.

The sample is restricted to Portuguese central public administration civil servants who responded to an online survey distributed through institutional networks and social media. Although anonymity was ensured, the voluntary nature of the participation favors self-selection bias, where the sample may most likely overrepresent digitally engaged and motivated employees. This may inflate the observed associations.

The location-based WLB construct presents a measurement limitation. The original five-item scale was reduced to three items after two harmed model fit. The retained items capture

how commuting and home location influenced job choice, which is a retrospective and narrower frame than how commuting conditions currently deplete daily energy and psychological availability. A measure of ongoing commuting burden would likely connect more strongly to the proposed P-O fit and satisfaction pathways. The null results for hypotheses 5, 6, and 7 should be read with this in mind: they indicate that this specific operationalization did not produce significant paths in this sample. Data collection during May and June 2025, when hybrid work was well normalized in Portuguese public administration, likely compressed variance on the WLB measure by reducing how salient daily commuting was for many respondents, but this is now a current situation that is established as the norm.

Finally, the study design treated all organizations as equivalent units and did not model between-organization variation due to participants' anonymity protection. We reasoned that asking too much nominal data would create the risk of identification and worse, it would create doubt in the mind of the participants about the full anonymity protection we pledged in the informed consent. Therefore, between gaining this information but risking socially desirable answers or a high rate of no-participation, we deemed it preferable to do as we did. The descriptive results show meaningful differences across organizational types on employer attractiveness, P-O fit, and affective commitment, yet a single-level structural model cannot capture how institutional context shapes those relationships. A multilevel approach would better account for the organizational heterogeneity present in the sample.

8. Conclusion

This study was designed to answer a relevant research question: Is there a connection between employer attractiveness and location-based WLB with OAC via a sequential attitude chain that involves P-O fit and job satisfaction? The answer was partially affirmative.

In other words, the sequential attitude chain applied to employer attractiveness but not location-based WLB. Moreover, this asymmetry turned out to be one of the most interesting findings of Study 3.

The employer attractiveness pathway received strong empirical support. As expected, employer attractiveness positively predicted P-O fit (H2). The finding is consistent with signaling theory (Spence, 1973), which suggests that employers send signals to employees regarding their characteristics as organizations to which they can be committed. Employer attractiveness also had a direct, although modest, effect on OAC (H3), which aligns social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Employer attractiveness led to a significant increase

in P-O fit, which in turn contributed to OAC. Thus, the full sequence of attitudinal change from employer attractiveness via P-O fit and job satisfaction to OAC (H4) was empirically supported. Finally, P-O fit showed a direct effect on job satisfaction, which in turn positively predicted OAC. Partial mediating effects were found for all links in this chain that were not hypothesized but also do not weaken the hypotheses. The four empirical results fully correspond to the theoretical rationale that employer attractiveness acts sequentially as an organizational signal that individuals will have P-O fit, will be making positive evaluations of employment conditions, and finally will feel more affectively committed to the organization.

Outside the scope of the hypotheses, the supplementary analysis of six first-order dimensions of EmpAt reveals a more nuanced picture. Out of all six dimensions, Application-Civic proved to be the most influential predictor of P-O fit, followed by Development. The third-ranked Application-Knowledge showed a surprisingly negative correlation with P-O fit. This could indicate that chances to apply and transfer professional knowledge create unmet expectations related to the functioning of the organization in question. It is also very informative to observe that Social, Interest, and Economic dimensions did not significantly correlate with P-O fit. The path through employer attractiveness to employee commitment, thus, passes mainly via civic mission and career development signals. Relational aspects, stimulating creativity, or compensation did not show a significant effect in this study, and this deserves future attention.

Location-based WLB, however, had no significance as a predictor of P-O fit (H5), OAC (H6), and their relationship (H7). This does not imply that commuting and location aspects are unimportant to employees, but rather that they function on another attitudinal plane from those implied by value congruence and affective commitment. As it was shown in the comparison of competing models, WLB and attractiveness overlap highly in this sample, which suggests that location conditions affect employees' evaluation of the organization as an employer but do not influence their affective relationship with it. Therefore, trying to base decision on commuting conditions as a way to foster organizational commitment may not work.

Future research has many indications in this study to further deep the knowledge about this topic. Firstly, focusing on interinstitutional employer attractiveness within CPA implies that the sample should be representative of public servants that do have enough working time so to have acquired the institutional logic of public mission. This will most likely determine the split of the original Berthon et al. (2005)’s application factor, in the same way both empirical studies showed in this research. Still, it is required that such test is conducted on other CPA than the Portuguese. Secondly, future research can conduct longitudinal studies also targeting long-run

changes in key constructs comprised in the conceptual model. How does the employer attractiveness evolve as one goes from a new entrant into a tenured employee? Likely, how does this relate to track record of interinstitutional change (as public servants may have one-institution work experience even after a long career or they may have a history of rotating across many public institutions). Thirdly, other variables may be also added to the predictors, not so much as control variables, but as dispositional factors e.g., personality traits. Lastly, it is appealing to devise a conceptual model that does not stop with the psychological construct of OAC but extends this into performance outcomes or any other behavior, e.g., organizational citizenship behavior that is contributive to the fulfillment of the public service mission that legitimates the notion itself of public administration.

General Conclusions

What employer attractiveness means for civil servants embedded in the Portuguese institutional context, how leaders understand it, and whether it truly connects to the commitment outcomes that retention and engagement depend on? This is a research problem that has never been studied formally within the Portuguese public administration.

This is important because the public sector of Portugal is facing significant structural problems in terms of its human resources. It is aging, as more than 40% of CPA workers in Portugal has at least 55 years-old (OECD, 2025) which is mirrored in the study 1 sample where three-quarters of respondents were at least 46 years old. Promotions are rare. Salaries are centrally fixed and do not allow much, if any, differentiation among institutions. Mobility is high among young, well-educated workers, and job security is no longer important in their career decision-making processes. Moreover, competition is tough within institutions when it comes to recruitment, and no official valid tools have been devised for measuring institutional attractiveness to their workers.

A well-established measure of employer attractiveness already existed, the EmpAt scale developed by Berthon et al. (2005), and it served as the point of departure. Even so, applying a measure built on final-year Australian university students' perceptions of fictitious private-sector organizations to the Portuguese CPA would neither be a methodologically robust approach nor a politically neutral decision. It would overlook CPA organizational context which is defined by idiosyncratic legal status, mission orientation, and regulated pay, which would advise an adjusted measurement of employer attractiveness.

Summary of findings across the three studies

These three consecutive studies aimed at achieving the research objectives described above. Driven both by theoretical indication concerning the centrality of PSM (Perry, 1996) and the specific nature of the Napoleonic Administrative System, together with indication in empirical literature of inconsistencies in the employer attractiveness construct's measurement with civil servants' sample, the first study examined the validity of the EmpAt scale in measuring the employer attractiveness of organizations in Portuguese CPA. As expected, the factorial structure originally proposed by Berthon et al. (2005) was not supported empirically. Instead, one of the dimensions, Applications, is clearly divided into a civic contribution (closely aligned with PSM) and professional knowledge.

The Application-Civic factor reflects the facet of prosocial orientation and civic-oriented goal setting. Items referring to organizational humanitarianism and the impact of work on citizens belong to it. The Application-Knowledge factor reflects the use of professional skills and transfer of knowledge to other employees. The division of these two types of activities into different dimensions makes sense when talking about the CPA of Portugal. In both the private sector and student samples where EmpAt was originally devised, these two orientations easily belong to the same dimension. An important finding from this study concerns the relative weight of each of the employer attractiveness dimensions when loaded into a single 2nd order factor. CFA showed that interest value had the highest weight followed, in decrescent order by Application-Civic, Application-Knowledge, Development, Social value, and Economic respectively. Economic value stands out due to the relatively lower weight is in line with theoretical expectations, since salary is standardized within Portuguese government organizations and no longer serves its purpose of distinguishing an attractive employer. This is also supported by the mean values attributed to economic value by employees which fall clearly below the mean values reported by Berthon et al. (2005).

This finding exclusively reflects the perceptions of employees, thus leaving aside the important view from institutional leadership. Study 2, conducted with senior leaders in Portuguese CPA, representing each one institution and, collectively representing a varied nature of CPA institutions, provided three important findings. First, leaders' accounts provided strong qualitative corroboration of the six-factor structure, particularly the weak position of Economic value and the prominence of civic, knowledge, interest, and development dimensions. In the explicit ranking exercise, Economic value was placed last in seven of ten organizations. Interest value, Application-Civic, and Application-Knowledge occupied the upper tiers of leader rankings across most institutional types. This strongly suggests that the split between Civic and Knowledge Application is not a theoretical artifact of the measurement model: leaders in mission-intensive bodies emphasized civic contribution as a pre-entry attraction signal, while leaders in technically specialized bodies emphasized professional knowledge challenge and the accumulation of career capital. Furthermore, findings point out the discrepancy between leaders' reasoning about motivations on one hand, and their practical management style on the other hand. While leaders allocated substantial energy toward participative management, climate building, psychological safety, and people-centered HR policies, they placed Social value as being of less importance in comparison to mission, knowledge, and task-based factors, which are seen as more explicit motivational factors. The difference found here is in accordance with

the functional contrast between the implicit and explicit approaches to understanding of motivation, not in relational orientation deficiency. Third, location-based WLB became a relevant element of the employer value proposition among seven of the ten organizations. Leaders highlighted geographic proximity, commute duration, transport network, and hybrid working models as key factors in the employment relationship. Location emerged as a meaningful consideration in the attraction and retention of talent among seven organizations, with retention effects being more consistently reported than attraction effects. The results justified a possible new relevant factor, location-based WLB, as a stand-alone concept in akin research.

There are two more structural issues discovered in Study 2 that should be considered regarding the overall argument of this thesis. The first is that of the springboard effect, which explains how organizations make an investment in training and qualify their employees at the same time increasing their value and potential exit. In other words, organizations spend money and effort on developing their workers and thereby make them attractive to other organizations offering a higher salary. Another issue concerns institutional instability, which undermines the notion of public sector jobs providing stability.

These two studies provided pieces of a puzzle that gained shape to favor a third empirical study, the one that more closely answers the research question, so to gauge the true value of employer attractiveness in the CPA inter-institutional environment. Based on theory and previous findings concerning employer attractiveness, study 3 tested a conceptual model previewing sequential mediating role for person-organization fit and job satisfaction variables in the influence of employer attractiveness and location-based WLB on organizational affective commitment. The findings partially supported the hypotheses.

Hypotheses 1 to 4, concerning the effect of employer attractiveness on organizational affective commitment, were all corroborated. As expected, employer attractiveness is associated with P-O fit, and there is a partial mediation of job satisfaction between P-O fit and OAC. Additionally, employer attractiveness was positively associated with OAC. Lastly the sequential indirect effect of employer attractiveness on OAC via P-O fit and job satisfaction was observed. This is strongly aligned with theory, as organizations use their attractiveness factors to convey their value propositions to potential employees who use the information to match their own personal values to those of the organization. Repeated positive evaluations will foster emotional connection with the organization, and because the sample comprises mostly tenured civil servants (averaging organizational tenure over 9 years), this is especially noted.

Regarding hypotheses 5 to 7 referring to the WLB pathways, none of them were statistically confirmed. Location-based WLB showed no identifiable association at all which should be cautiously interpreted. This lack of evidence cannot be considered as a lack of relevance of WLB because this study targeted a very nuanced aspect of WLB based on commuting. Commuting and geographical reachability will hardly impact on some employees' attitudes, less closely related to value congruence. People may feel dissatisfied about commuting but cannot interpret these conditions as a signal of organizational value mismatching. However, the general belief held by leaders that location plays a key role in attracting civil servants moving in the inter-institutional environment is neither echoed by employees nor by data analyses conducted.

Finally, it should be noted that a complementary analysis of dimensions of the first-order EmpAt concept brought up an important discovery. Among all six dimensions used as independent variables in predicting P-O fit, there were only three which had a significant effect on this fit. Application-Civic was the strongest positive predictor, which once again proves that civic mission and citizen orientation constitute an important pillar in the attitudes of CPA employees in Portugal. Another positive association was found by Dimension Development which suggests links between self-esteem, self-confidence, and career experience of workers and perceptions about P-O fit. Lastly, the Application-knowledge was surprisingly negatively related to P-O fit, which is hard to explain except if this expresses a closer relation to person-job fit instead of person-organization fit (Kristof, 1996). When professional knowledge becomes very salient, it is very likely that the job itself gains a more central dimension than the organization where that job is performed. Alternatively, those that value this application-knowledge dimension may generally feel lower value congruence if they reject the bureaucratic nature of CPA organizations.

Theoretical contributions

A validated six-factor EmpAt specification for the Portuguese civil service

This thesis constitutes a comprehensive psychometric evaluation of the EmpAt scale in Portuguese CPA service with a sample large enough to allow for confirmatory factor analysis, evaluation of convergence, and the application of the second-order approach. The specification of six factors, with Application divided into Application-Civic and Application-Knowledge and Economic Value redefined as an institutional benchmark condition, forms a measurement model applicable to employer attractiveness studies in Napoleonic-administration civil service

organizations, where statutory salary control, strict career progression ladders, and institution's mission determine the context in which market-based instruments have little use.

PSM theory as a measurement rationale

The PSM theory (Perry & Wise, 1990) has been widely employed in elucidating the reasons for selecting careers in the public sector as well as the connection between individual workers and their occupation. In the current study, its scope has been widened from being applied to the behavioral aspects of the phenomenon of PSM and utilized as a basis of developing the psychometric approach. PSM theory helps explain the civic contribution side of Application, while the knowledge application side is better explained by competence use, professional identity, and work design. Together, these perspectives account for the empirical split of Application into Application-Civic and Application-Knowledge in the CPA framework. Different factor loadings of the resulting facets on the second-order latent variable, and dominance of Application-Civic over other variables in predicting the P-O fit highlights the centrality of PSM in line with most findings.

Overvaluing relational climate as an operational asset

The difference between the leaders' real investment in relational climate on a day-to-day basis and the way they explicitly express motivational concepts in terms of mission and competence pointed out knowledge that surveys cannot possibly uncover. On one hand, leaders engage in relational processes, create a sense of security and participation using daily management, while on the other hand, when asked to explain the sources of motivation in their organizations, they use an implicit theory that is driven by mission and competence. This suggests a disconnection between narrative and practice, where PSM is downplayed compared to commitment-HRM practices (such as participation, security, empowerment) although findings give it a much stronger role than these practices.

Location-based WLB

The absence of associations with location-based WLB, when viewed in conjunction with the consistent consideration of geographical accessibility by leaders found in Study 2, serve to place the former construct in its proper place within the hierarchy of the employer attractiveness model. Location factors may eventually impact on the employer attractiveness as stated in literature, but they play no role in the value-based process of affective commitment.

Proposals for application in Portuguese CPA

The conclusions drawn from the studies have led to identifying seven specific fields of action in which the Portuguese CPA institutions and their governance at the level of the system may implement change based on solid evidence. All suggestions are backed by empirical findings of at least one research conducted.

1. Communicate civic mission in concrete terms, differentiated by organizational type

Application-Civic was one of the strongest dimensions in the 2nd EmpAt structure in Study 1, was consistently emphasized in leaders' accounts in Study 2, and emerged in Study 3 as the strongest first-order predictor of P-O fit. Taking together, these three converging results clearly suggest that the civic purpose of public work serves as the primary attitudinal basis for civil servants, and organizations that effectively communicate their civic purpose enjoy a significant advantage in terms of interinstitutional attractiveness and commitment.

However, the second study results also reveal a critical warning. The process of mission communication varies by organizational type. For mission-intensive organizations that directly affect citizens, such as organizations related to the environment, food safety, or procurement, a simple mission story based on protecting society may work well and induces pre-entry self-selection. In one case, an organization in the sample received over 4,000 applications for 50 jobs due to its conservation mission. On the other hand, civic contribution for transversal, support, and technical organizations relies on prestige, expertise, and enablement rather than the actual experience of citizens. Mission communication in the form of a broad public service story, which could apply to all candidate profiles, does not seem to be as effective as creating mission communication stories that specifically match each organizational type and relate the organization's unique contributions to a civic goal relevant to the target candidate profile.

Organizational-level initiatives might include developing factual mission communication about quantified citizen benefits, such as resolved cases, improved services, implemented regulations, and affected public outcomes, and disseminating this information through the recruitment materials used by candidates prior to application. Systemic-level efforts might include DGAEP and INA, who have the capacity to develop sector-wide guidelines for framing mission communication according to organizational type, integrating the knowledge of public administration experts with professional communicators' expertise.

2. Recognize relational climate for retention only

The relational climate cultivated through the process of managerial practice constitutes an important organizational resource which may not have as much bearing in leaders' motivational reasoning as the other components. Social value constituted one of the top three values for only two out of ten leaders in Study 2 but leaders expressed substantial investments to create supportive relationships, a psychologically safe environment, participatory decision-making practices, and socially responsible HRM. In Study 3, social value did not predict P-O fit in the complementary model entering all six dimensions together and treating 1st order employer attractiveness factors as potential predictors of P-O fit. This positions social relations as a retention factor rather than a component of value congruence and affective commitment.

This would mean that organizations should explicitly treat their relational climate as a retention more than an attraction tool. This is not proven by the studies, but findings do advise not giving so much priority to this dimension when communication outwards to attract employees from the interinstitutional environment. Instead, good social relations may be less of an attractor when compared to the repelling potential of toxic social relations at work.

At the system level, the social quality of the work environment is also a performance management issue. By assessing middle managers through SIADAP processes on criteria related to their management behaviors and conditions of employee voice rather than purely output-oriented criteria, organizations can reinforce the message that relationship quality is a critical dimension of their performance management system.

3. Redesign careers to separate development investment from progression stagnation

The "springboard" phenomenon revealed by Study 2 entails investments in training and professional learning, as well as in higher qualifications, resulting in competencies and credentials valuable in the context of better paying competitor organizations and the paradoxical effect of such investments in promoting exit rather than retention. The issue is not organizational mismanagement, but rather the outcome of a career structure that differentiates development and advancement: organizations have control over investing in the former, while the latter is tightly circumscribed by legislation and fiscal limitations. Two types of solutions are advisable at two levels.

At the organizational level, there is a clear need to distinguish the focus on development of transferable competences and personal/professional advancement versus development of

professional skills with strong institutional connection. Competence training seems increases exit rates while not improving employee commitment. On the other hand, training for deeper understanding of the organization's unique technological or methodological domains, building connections both internally and externally, and instilling a feeling of expertise and mastery of the profession, related specifically to the organization, will develop embeddedness as much as competencies. Sample organizations that use training as means of identity building rather than generic professional development report greater retention results. Therefore, programs for mentoring, knowledge exchange within the organization, and involvement in important initiatives and working groups are similarly conducive to identity building, in addition to competence building.

System-wide action must consider the realities of legislative and fiscal constraints and address them directly. Participants in Study 2 pointed out many cases where a newly created special career offered no salary advantages, was less progressive compared to a general career, or failed to fulfill progression expectations set up by the SIADAP appraisal. Such situations cannot be resolved at the organizational level but rather require changes in legislation management. Review of career structures in the special careers to confirm true progression advantages in salary and career prospects, extension of SIADAP managerial option to many more institutions under sustainable financing, and simplification of procedures for public competition are advantageous to reduce the difference between development and career outcomes.

4. Make flexible work and location accessibility formal components of the employer value proposition

"Flexibility", "telework", and "people-centered management" were the most frequently identified attraction themes in Study 2, occurring throughout the entire sample range. For Study 3, location-based WLB failed to show an impact either on P-O fit or on OAC. This could be due in part to the context in which measurements took place as data collection occurred between May and June 2025, by which time hybrid working arrangements were already thoroughly entrenched in Portugal's public sector. Lack of significance may thus be attributed to compressed variance: When flexible work is routine, its mere absence may become more important than its presence.

This point was made quite explicitly by leaders in Study 2, some of whom characterized flexibility and telework as "indirect salary". Specifically, telework and flextime make for more

affordable accommodation options and cut down on commuting costs, providing concrete value to workers even though it does not appear on the paycheck. One leader even spoke of telework arrangements as an attractive offer used because salary differences would not suffice. These are coherent and logical arguments supported by research.

In terms of practical proposals, there are two components. To begin with, CPA institutions may benefit from actively promoting telework and flexibility in their policies and advertise it in job postings and career page content. Next, system-level policy should ensure certain minimum requirements regarding telework possibilities and flexible hours in the CPA of Portugal as this should not be left up to individual organization decision-making, since it open ways to create unfairness among internal employees. Organizations unable to fulfill these minimums due to operational reasons due to their functions (such as inspection services, regional teams) should find compensatory strategies, such as housing or transportation assistance or rotational postings.

5. Use SIADAP strategically as the primary financial differentiation lever

In the case of a pay system that is regulated centrally, SIADAP will be the predominant tool that is employed in creating financial differentiation amongst employees. In study 2, "SIADAP, performance bonuses, and extra progression as differentiating tools" was the most common theme amongst all the interviews conducted regarding differentiating mechanisms. Amongst these six organizations that use SIADAP to create financial differentiation, the combination of performance bonuses, the option of management, and adjustments in salary positions were used to make such distinctions between employees; four organizations did not have any form of financial power other than what had been established legally. The interviews suggest that SIADAP, if well utilized by the leadership, can provide extremely different results. Only one institution, ICNF, was found out of all the organizations in the two ministries where it falls, to have offered performance bonuses and managerial salary progression every year, hence the anticipation of payment cycles and tougher objective setting amongst their employees. DGT made full use of SIADAP in the manner it was intended by making sure that they distributed all the quotas and followed up on those employees nearing the progressional stage within all cycles. For the purposes of retention, SGMTSSS used the option of management, while SGMSAUDE compulsory included innovation as one objective for appraisal. On the opposite end, DGAV reported an increase in mobility requests after every SIADAP cycle.

This relationship is important in the context of the test for the model proposed in Study 3. As revealed by the additional test, the Economic value failed to predict the P-O fit together with the five remaining dimensions, strengthening the assumption about its role as a basic requirement rather than a specific signal from employers. At the same time, as evidenced by the findings of Study 2, perceived inequality in financial incentives compared to similar organizations is a genuine threat to retaining employees, regardless of insignificant differences in actual salaries. SIADAP is the only instrument for overcoming the inequality under consideration in the organizational environment, which differs substantially among the organizations involved in the study.

Two approaches are to be taken, each complementing the other. Firstly, organizational leaders should use SIADAP properly and on time, give out any quotas that the law permits, pay attention to employees close to the progression cut-off point in each cycle and make communication regarding the criteria, the process and its results completely transparent. Where allowed by the institutional regime, and generally for public institutes within CPA, the managerial approach must be employed at each cycle stage to facilitate progression and rewarding performance, as observed in some of the cases. Secondly, SIADAP may become an important tool in retaining employees who have received external offers and have performed well above the requirements for progressing to the next position, but do not satisfy the general criteria. The following systemic interventions may facilitate such processes: providing a stable budget envelope dedicated to salary positioning changes and performance award payments throughout each cycle; extending the application of the managerial option to more central administration bodies within the framework of sustainable financing; modifying some rules regarding quotas.

6. Close the institutional communication gap on the civic mission of support and technical bodies

One problem highlighted by Study 2 was the difficulty in describing the civic function of support bodies, transversal services, and technical directorates. These institutions make a true contribution to society, though indirectly, since their employees do not communicate with citizens. They facilitate ministerial performance, information infrastructure, employment market, or territorial data management. Interviewed leaders of these institutions mentioned the problem of communication. As was said in one of the interviews, the problem was that there is no knowledge of how big the role played by us was.

First, this is a recruitment problem, and second, this is a retention problem. Some leaders of support bodies reported the following dynamic: institutional prestige and technical competence attract people who have no civic motivation, and as soon as an offer with higher remuneration comes, they quit their job. Since there is no civic mission narrative that employees can use, the attitude channel to commitment discussed in Study 3 is close to these people.

It might be in INA's best interest to develop a general communication strategy for the whole institution that will provide narrative templates for support bodies and technical directorates explaining the civic role of each of these functions. Framing archival activity as protection of democratic memory, territorial planning as a geographical basis of environmental and urban policies, and labor market regulation as a guarantee of citizens' rights gives civic meanings to these institutions that cannot be provided through generic public service language. This approach does not imply overstating the importance of an institution's mission.

7. Develop a cross-administration employer branding architecture led by DGAEP

It is evident from the findings of the research that there are significant practical limitations to individual-organization employer branding in the context of institutional constraints. Firstly, most organizations included in the Study 2 sample do not have resources for employer branding, professional communication skills, and budgets necessary for sustained recruitment marketing. Meanwhile, the sector possesses several structural advantages: it is driven by a common public service spirit, characterized by a high degree of knowledge intensity, is marked by institutional stability, can develop its employees through the springboard effect described in Study 2, and represents mission diversity. None of these assets is communicated as effectively as possible individually by the organizations.

It should be noted that DGAEP already serves as a reference body for the formulation of employment policy within public administration institutions. As such, its extension of competence to a sector-wide employer value proposition framework would help organizations gain common ground, upon which each of them can build institution-specific differentiation. This framework would involve a verified employer brand architecture based on the empirical findings concerning the structure of the EmpAt model consisting of six factors described in the thesis. In addition, it would include employer brand recommendations based on organizational categories suggested in Study 2, including mission-intensive organizations, technical directorates, support/transversal services, and inspectorate/oversight authorities. Finally, it should incorporate a strategy for gathering information about the demographic and motivational

characteristics of candidates applying to open competitions to ensure that organizations attract suitable candidates.

This proposal may be cost effective, and the investment volume should be residual compared to general budget. It will require coordination, strategic governance, and implementation of digital communication techniques that are already available to the Portuguese CPA but are underutilized for employer branding purposes.

Addressing the generational challenge

One finding that is common to both Studies 1 and 2 but which was not the focal point of either requires dedicated discussion in the conclusion. The demographic profile of the Study 1 sample is one of maturity, with about ¾ of participants aged 46 or above, while only 1 out of 10 of participants were below 36. The occupational profile of the study sample is also reflective of the demographic composition of the accumulated cohort of civil servants who have been developing their careers in the Portuguese CPA for the last two or three decades.

It was observed in Study 2 that the motivational profile of this cohort does not mirror the motivational profile of the new recruits that organizations are currently trying to attract. These new recruits are not motivated by mission identification, nor are they patient about career progression. They shop around for salaries across different organizations, they are mobile, and job security is not an important criterion for them, as it was for previous cohorts. Some of the interviewees provided practical examples where young and well-qualified recruits refused positions on discovering their salaries or leaving their jobs in two or three years because of slightly higher salaries elsewhere.

There are implications in terms of measurement. First, the structure of the six-factor EmpAt construct, which was identified by Study 1, reflects the experience of attractiveness that civil servants perceive from a mostly mid-to-late career point of view. It is possible that there are other factors that affect candidates' decision making when they evaluate whether to work in a governmental organization for the first or second time in their lives. There might also be another structure of attitudinal hierarchy, with Application-Civic being ranked lower in priority for candidates who have not had enough time to develop their civic motivations in PSM. This has not been tested quantitatively in the current study, but it should be stated based on qualitative findings from interviews with leaders.

As far as practice is concerned, Portuguese CPA should have an employer value proposition that would appeal to two distinct audiences at once. The internal proposition (which focuses on

the interinstitutional environment to attract the current employees), should include the factors of civic engagement, professional competence, quality of relationships, and investment in development that were mentioned in all three studies. However, the external proposition (which addresses young labor market entrants), should tackle the three main barriers that stand in their way: salary transparency when compared to other options, realistic prospects regarding career advancement, and examples of exciting and technically challenging tasks that the public sector can offer but rarely communicates to potential applicants.

Future research directions and final remarks

The following four lines of research arise naturally from the findings and limitations outlined.

Replication over time. A longitudinal study measuring ratings of EmpAt, P-O fit, job satisfaction, and organizational affective commitment starting from entry into the civil service up to the first five years of tenure could determine whether the sequential mediation process found describes the temporal development of commitment or only its structure at the point of cross-sectional measurement.

External candidate validation. An analogous study using the six-factor EmpAt measure in rating Portuguese CPA as a potential employer among final-year university students and recent graduates would verify whether the same six-factor structure holds and how much weight each of the six dimensions carries in a potential employee's eyes before entering the organization. Comparison with the structure of incumbents' perceptions would highlight which expectations of prospective employers need to be fulfilled by the value proposition during the recruitment stage and what is important to sustain in the retention stage.

Multilevel modeling. Both Studies 1 and 3 assumed that all organizations can be seen as equal units at the level of sample selection. As shown in the descriptive analyses, there were differences in terms of organizational attractiveness, fit perceptions, and affective commitment depending on organizational type. A multilevel modeling approach to structural analysis would allow separating individual and organizational levels in the examination of those relations described in this thesis. Namely, employer attractiveness may be a shared perception that gains momentum among CPA employees to the point of being a factor that should be measured at a collective level rather than merely at the individual level.

Application-Knowledge exploration. Among the various associations found in the research, the negative correlation between Application-Knowledge and P-O fit reported in the supplementary analyses of Study 3 is the least anticipated. While application of one's knowledge

to teaching others was rated as highly relevant to the attractiveness of the potential employer in Study 1 and positively highlighted by leaders in Study 2, this factor shows a negative correlation with P-O fit in an individual-level structural model. This may reveal unfulfilled expectations concerning knowledge application, conflicts in aspirations towards autonomy, a missing effect from not having measured person-job fit alongside P-O fit, or measurement problems associated with the two-item scale.

Portuguese CPA is a very large system, with institutional constraints to its operations. This makes it impossible to provide salaries comparable to those offered by private companies. The same holds for the dynamic nature of career prospects. This is a structural problem that may be resistant to any policy making that does not depart from abandoning the Napoleonic Administrative System.

What the results of the three studies described here reveal is the fact that Portuguese civil servants do not assess organizations based on those parameters. What matters to them is civic motivation, knowledge engagement, good relations among employees and personal growth possibilities. The organizations which focus on those elements in relation to their own mission statement and the professional characteristics of the profile they are targeting are evaluated positively by the employees according to all the metrics analyzed here.

This is not a marginal issue regarding HRM because it represents a strong argument regarding the issue of public administration. If it wants to ensure its success as an organization in managing the processes of managing public laws, regulating private activities, protecting natural resources, preserving the memories of the nation, planning its territory and training its future civil servants, Portuguese CPA needs to be able to attract and retain such people.

The findings presented in this research are the basis of a quantitative assessment method which can help achieve those goals. The information acquired from the qualitative interviews with organizational leaders can provide the means to put theory into practice. The structural model validated proves the potential of Portuguese public administration as an employer.

Overall, it is very rewarding to learn from the findings that mission holds a central role in the interinstitutional environment that it is supposed to despite criticism moved against CPA from simplistic viewpoints. If this dimension would not emerge as a key factor in employer attractiveness, then such criticism could have ground to grow. Facing these findings, in all three studies, one cannot but conclude that public service is very much alive.

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Appendix A- Survey Study 1

Q1 Caro(a) participante, O meu nome é David Xavier, e sou doutorando no ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, no âmbito do programa Doctorate in Business Administration. Este inquérito faz parte da investigação para a minha tese de doutoramento, que tem como objetivo analisar a razão pelas quais os Funcionários Públicos escolhem as organizações onde trabalham. A sua participação é fundamental para o desenvolvimento deste estudo e contribuirá para uma melhor compreensão do tema. O preenchimento do questionário demorará aproximadamente 5 minutos e todas as respostas serão tratadas de forma anónima e confidencial. Consentimento Informado Ao prosseguir com este inquérito, confirma que compreendeu as seguintes informações: A sua participação é voluntária e pode interromper ou abandonar o preenchimento a qualquer momento, sem necessidade de justificar a sua decisão. Os dados recolhidos serão utilizados exclusivamente para fins académicos e científicos, sendo analisados de forma agregada, sem possibilidade de identificação individual. As respostas serão armazenadas com elevados padrões de segurança e protegidas contra acessos não autorizados. Este inquérito está em conformidade com o Regulamento Geral sobre a Proteção de Dados (RGPD) e as diretrizes éticas do ISCTE-IUL. Qualquer dúvida ou esclarecimento, pode contactar do e-mail djvx@iscte-iul.pt. Agradeço desde já a sua colaboração. Dê o seu consentimento para iniciar o inquérito.

- Consinto (1)
- Não Consinto (2)

Q2 Porque escolheu trabalhar onde trabalha?, sendo 1- sem importância e 7 muito importante, como avalia os seguintes itens na escolha da sua entidade empregadora. Escolhi trabalhar onde trabalho porque procurei ...

1. Reconhecimento/apreciação por parte da direção (1)
2. Um ambiente de trabalho divertido (2)
3. Um trampolim para um futuro emprego (3)
4. Sentir-me bem comigo próprio por trabalhar para uma determinada entidade (4)
5. Sentir-me mais autoconfiante por trabalhar para uma determinada entidade (5)
6. Ganhar experiência profissional (6)
7. Ter uma boa relação com os meus superiores (7)
8. Ter uma boa relação com os meus colegas (8)
9. Ter colegas que me apoiam e incentivam (9)
10. Trabalhar num ambiente estimulante (10)
11. Empregador inovador - novas práticas de trabalho/pensamento avançado (11)
12. Uma organização que valorize e utilize a minha criatividade (12)
13. Uma organização que produza produtos e serviços de elevada qualidade (13)
14. Uma organização que produza produtos e serviços inovadores (14)
15. Boas oportunidades de promoção dentro da entidade (15)
16. Uma entidade que contribui para a sociedade (16)
17. A oportunidade de aplicar o que aprendi na minha formação académica (17)
18. A oportunidade de ensinar aos outros o que aprendi (18)
19. Aceitação e pertença (19)
20. Uma organização orientada para o cidadão / cliente (20)
21. Segurança no emprego dentro da entidade (21)
22. Experiência prática interdepartamental (22)
23. Ambiente de trabalho feliz (23)
24. Um salário de base acima da média (24)
25. Um pacote de remuneração global atrativo (25)

Q3 A escolha do seu atual emprego foi influenciada por 1- discordo totalmente e 7 - concordo totalmente

1. A localização da sua residencia
2. A organização da sua vida privada
3. Tempo gasto na deslocação casa trabalho

Q4 Quanto tempo demora, em média, na sua deslocação casa-trabalho (somente ida)?

1. Até 15 minutos (1)
2. De 16 a 30 minutos (2)
3. De 31 a 60 minutos (3)
4. De 61 a 90 minutos (4)
5. Mais de 90 Minutos (5)

Q5 Qual o principal meio de transporte que utiliza na sua deslocação casa-trabalho ou casa-local de estudo?

1. A pé (1)
2. Automóvel ligeiro como condutor (2)
3. Automóvel ligeiro como passageiro (3)
4. Autocarro/Camioneta (4)
5. Transporte colectivo da Entidade empregadora (5)
6. Metropolitano (6)
7. Comboio (7)
8. Bicicleta (8)
9. Barco (9)
10. Outro (táxi, elétrico,…) Qual? (10) _____

Q6 Apenas para fins de descrição agregada da amostra, por favor responda às seguintes questões: Categoria Profissional

11. Dirigente de Topo (1)
12. Dirigente intermédio (2)
13. Tecnico Superior/Especialista de Informatica ou equiparado (3)
14. Assistente Tecnico/tecnico Informatica ou equiparado (4)
15. Assistente Operacional (5)

Q7 Género

1. Feminino (1)
2. Masculino (2)
3. Outro (3)
4. NS/NR (4)

Q8 Idade

1. Entre 18 a 25 anos (1)
2. Entre 26 a 30 anos (2)
3. Entre 31 a 35 anos (3)
4. Entre 36 a 40 anos (4)
5. Entre 41 a 45 anos (5)
6. Entre 46 a 50 anos (6)
7. Entre 51 a 55 anos (7)
8. Entre 56 e 60 anos (8)
9. Mais de 60 anos (9)

Q9 Habilitações Literárias

1. Ensino Secundário (1)
2. Ensino Profissional (2)
3. Licenciatura (3)
4. Mestrado (4)
5. Doutoramento (5)
6. Outro. Qual? (6) _____
7. Apresentar esta pergunta:

If Habilitações Literárias != Ensino Secundário

Q10 Tipo de Entidade onde trabalha atualmente

1. Secretaria Geral (1)
2. Direção Geral (2)
3. Inspeção (3)
4. Instituto Público (4)
5. Autoridade (5)
6. Administração Local (6)
7. Outro. Qual ? (7) _____

Q11 Antiguidade na entidade atual

1. Menos de 1 ano (1)
2. Entre 1 a 2 anos (2)
3. Entre 2 a 6 anos (3)
4. Entre 6 a 10 anos (4)
5. Entre 10 a 15 anos (5)
6. Entre 15 a 20 anos (6)

7. Mais de 20 anos (7)

Survey - English

Dear participant, My name is David Xavier, and I am a doctoral candidate at ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, in the Doctorate in Business Administration program. This survey is part of the research for my doctoral thesis, which aims to analyze why public employees choose the organizations where they work. Your participation is crucial to this study and will contribute to a better understanding of the subject. Completing the questionnaire will take approximately 5 minutes, and all responses will be treated anonymously and confidentially. By proceeding with this survey, you confirm your understanding of the following: participation is voluntary, data collected will be used solely for academic and scientific purposes, and responses will be securely stored. The survey complies with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and ISCTE-IUL's ethical guidelines. For questions or clarification, contact djvx@iscte-iul.pt. I appreciate your collaboration.

I Consent

I Do Not Consent

Q2 Why did you choose to work where you do? On a scale of 1 (not important) to 7 (very important), how would you rate the following factors in your choice of employer? I chose to work where I do because I was looking for ...

1. Recognition/appreciation from management
2. A fun working environment
3. A springboard for future employment
4. Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organization
5. Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular organization
6. Gaining career-enhancing experience
7. Having a good relationship with your superiors
8. Having a good relationship with your colleagues
9. Supportive and encouraging colleagues
10. Working in an exciting environment
11. Innovative employer - novel work practices/forward-thinking
12. The organization both values and makes use of your creativity
13. The organization produces high-quality products and services
14. The organization produces innovative products and services
15. Good promotion opportunities within the organization
16. Humanitarian organization - gives back to society
17. Opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution
18. Opportunity to teach others what you have learned
19. Acceptance and belonging
20. The organization is customer-orientated
21. Job security within the organization
22. Hands-on inter-departmental experience
23. Happy work environment
24. An above average basic salary
25. An attractive overall compensation package

Q3 The choice of your current job was influenced by 1 - totally disagree and 7 - totally agree

1. The location of your home
2. Organizing your private life
3. Time spent travelling to work

Q4 How long does your average commute take (one way)?

1. Up to 15 minutes
2. From 16 to 30 minutes
3. From 31 to 60 minutes
4. From 61 to 90 minutes
5. Over 90 Minutes

Q5 What is the main mode of transport you use to get from home to work or home to school?

1. By foot
2. Car as driver
3. Car as passenger
4. Bus/coach
5. Employer's public transport
6. Underground
7. Train

8. Bicycle
9. Boat
10. Other (taxi, tram,...) Which? _____

Q6 For aggregate sample description purposes only, please answer the following questions: Professional Category

1. Top management
2. Middle management
3. High technician / IT Specialist or equivalent
4. Technical Assistant/Informatics Technician or equivalent
5. Operational Assistant

Q7 Gender

1. Female
2. Male
3. Other
4. Don't know/Don't answer

Q8 Age

1. Between 18 and 25 years old
2. Between 26 and 30 years old
3. Between 31 and 35 years old
4. Between 36 and 40 years old
5. Between 41 and 45 years old
6. Between 46 to 50 years old
7. Between 51 and 55 years old
8. Between 56 and 60 years old
9. Over 60

Q9 Academic qualifications

1. Secondary education
2. Professional education
3. Degree
4. Master's degree
5. Doctorate
6. Other. Which? _____

Q10 Type of organization where you currently work

1. General Secretariat
2. General Directorate
3. Inspectorate
4. Public Institute
5. Authority
6. Local Administration
7. Other. What is it? _____

Q11 Length of service in current organization

1. Less than 1 year
2. Between 1 and 2 years
3. Between 2 and 6 years
4. Between 6 and 10 years
5. Between 10 and 15 years
6. Between 15 and 20 years old
7. Over 20 years old

Appendix B - Interview Study 2

Pergunta/ question	Português	English
P1	Quais são, na sua perspetiva, os principais fatores que tornam a sua organização pública atrativa como entidade empregadora?	From your perspective, what are the main factors that make your public organization attractive as an employer?
P2	Como descreveria a cultura organizacional e o ambiente de trabalho na sua instituição, e de que forma crê que esses aspetos influenciam a decisão dos profissionais em ingressar e permanecer na organização?	How would you describe the organizational culture and the work environment in your institution, and how do you think these aspects influence professionals' decisions to join and stay with the organization?
P3	Qual o peso da segurança e estabilidade do emprego oferecido pela sua organização na atração de novos funcionários e na retenção dos atuais?	How much weight does the job security and stability offered by your organization have in attracting new employees and retaining current employees?
P4	Até que ponto contribuir para a sociedade e a orientação ao cidadão ajudam a atrair e reter? Por favor, dê exemplos.	To what extent do contributing to society and a citizen oriented focus help attract and retain employees? Please share examples.
P5	De que maneira a direção reconhece e valoriza o contributo dos colaboradores, e quão relevante julga que esse reconhecimento é para motivar os profissionais a trabalhar e continuar a trabalhar na instituição?	In what ways does leadership recognize and value employees' contributions, and how important is this recognition for motivating professionals to work, and to keep working, in the institution?
P6	Que oportunidades de desenvolvimento profissional e progressão na carreira a sua organização proporciona, e até que ponto essas oportunidades influenciam a decisão de candidatos ingressarem na instituição?	What opportunities for professional development and career progression does your organization offer, and to what extent do these opportunities influence candidates' decisions to join the institution?
P7	Como avalia a capacidade da sua organização em promover um ambiente de trabalho inovador e em estimular a criatividade dos colaboradores? E até que ponto isso é relevante para as pessoas?	How do you assess your organization's ability to foster an innovative work environment and encourage employee creativity? How relevant is this for people?
P8	Em que medida a missão pública e os valores centrais da organização pesam na decisão dos profissionais de escolherem trabalhar na sua instituição?	To what extent do the public mission and the organization's core values weigh in professionals' decisions to choose to work in your institution?
P9	Quais considera serem os principais fatores que motivam os colaboradores a desempenhar bem o seu trabalho na sua organização? Fatores EmpAt, definições A. Económico, salário e pacote total de compensação. B. Cívico, contribuir para a sociedade e valor público, foco no cidadão, impacto. C. Social, qualidade da relação com chefias e pares e apoio entre colegas. D. Conhecimento, usar a formação e experiência no dia a dia e ensinar e transferir conhecimento.	What do you see as the main factors that motivate employees to perform well in your organization? EmpAt factors, definitions A. Economic, base salary and total compensation package. B. Civic, contributing to society and public value, citizen focus, impact. C. Social, quality of relationships with supervisors and peers, support among colleagues. D. Knowledge, using education and experience in day to day work, teaching and knowledge transfer.

	E. Interesse, trabalho estimulante, possibilidade de inovação e criatividade. F. Desenvolvimento, ganhar experiência, orgulho e autoconfiança e oportunidades de progressão. Tendo em conta estas definições, por favor ordene os seis fatores pela sua importância para atrair e reter pessoas na sua organização nos próximos 12 meses, 1 mais importante, 6 menos importante.	E. Interest, stimulating work, opportunities for innovation and creativity. F. Development, gaining experience, pride and self confidence, opportunities for progression. Given these definitions, please rank the six factors by importance for attracting and retaining people in your organization over the next 12 months, 1 most important, 6 least important.
P10	Como descreve o nível de satisfação dos colaboradores com a organização e com as suas funções?	How would you describe employees' level of satisfaction with the organization and with their roles?
P11	Que nível de compromisso com a organização e sentimento de pertença observa entre os colaboradores da instituição?	What level of commitment to the organization and sense of belonging do you observe among employees in the institution?
P12	Qual o papel da remuneração e dos benefícios oferecidos pela sua organização na decisão dos profissionais de ingressar e permanecer nela? Para além das práticas de recompensa e reconhecimento do contributo dos colaboradores previstas na lei geral, há práticas em vigor na sua organização pública que a diferenciem das congéneres ou de outras do mesmo tipo na administração pública? Se sim, quais?	What role do pay and benefits offered by your organization play in professionals' decisions to join and stay with the organization? Beyond the reward and recognition practices for employee contributions set out in the general law, are there practices in place in your public organization that differentiate your organization from peer institutions, or from other institutions of the same type in public administration? If yes, which ones?
P13	Em que medida a localização geográfica da sua organização e a facilidade de acesso, por exemplo transportes disponíveis e tempo de deslocação, influenciam a decisão dos funcionários públicos de ingressar nela?	To what extent does your organization's geographic location and ease of access, for example available transportation options and commuting time, influence civil servants' decisions to join your organization?
P14	Pergunta final. Quando considera todos os fatores que podem ajudar a explicar porque motivo esta instituição é atrativa para potenciais colaboradores, que sempre podem optar por se candidatar a outra instituição congénere, que forças tem a sua instituição para atrair bons colaboradores? que fraquezas tem a sua instituição que podem diminuir a atratividade de futuros bons colaboradores?	Final question. When you consider all factors that help explain why this institution is attractive to potential employees, who always have the option to apply to another peer institution, what strengths does your institution have for attracting strong employees? what weaknesses does your institution have that might reduce attractiveness for future high quality employees?

Appendix C- Informed Consent Study 2

CONSENTIMENTO INFORMADO

O presente estudo é desenvolvido no âmbito de um projeto de investigação a decorrer no **Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa**.

O estudo tem por objetivo perceber a atractividade das organizações da administração pública central.

O estudo é realizado por David João Varela Xavier (david.xavier@iscte-iul.pt) e orientado pelo Professor Nelson Ramalho (nelson.ramalho@iscte-iul.pt), que poderá contactar caso pretenda esclarecer uma dúvida ou partilhar algum comentário.

A sua contribuição é extremamente valiosa, pois ajudará a avançar o conhecimento nesta área da ciência principlamente do ponto de vista do empregador público.

Neste estudo, ser-lhe-á solicitado a responder a 15 questões diferentes prespectivas da atravtividade da organização que dirige.

Estima-se que a participação no estudo demore cerca de 30 a 45 minutosminutos.

Não se antecipam riscos significativos decorrentes da sua participação. No entanto, se se sentir desconfortável, pode optar por não responder a essas questões, retirar-se do estudo ou "ou contactar os investigadores responsáveis.

A participação no estudo é estritamente **voluntária**: pode escolher livremente participar ou não participar. Se tiver escolhido participar, pode interromper a participação em qualquer momento sem ter de prestar qualquer justificação. A sua participação não é **anónima**;

Declaro ter compreendido os objetivos, ter-me sido dada oportunidade de fazer perguntas sobre o estudo e para todas elas ter obtido resposta esclarecedora, pelo que **aceito** participar.

Sim ☐

Não ☐

_____, ____ / ____ / _____

[local, dia / mês / ano]

Nome:_____

Assinatura: _____

Appendix D - Illustrative excerpts supporting identified themes

This appendix collects the institution-by-institution illustrative excerpts that support each thematic finding reported in the Results section. Each table corresponds to one interview question or sub-block, in the order presented in the main text. The original table number from the Results section is preserved in parentheses to facilitate cross-reference.

Table 29 - Attraction Themes

Theme	Supporting Sentences
Flexibility, telework, or people-centered management	ICNF (4): HR policy centered on people (adopted 4-5 years ago); significant number in telework; WLB sought; all willing workers placed in telework. SGMTSSS (3): attends to each person's particular situation; mixed telework for families living far from Lisbon; open and closed/open-door management. DGAEP (3): telework-friendly policy; flexible hours; supports work-family conciliation. DGT (4): ~50% in telework post-pandemic; accepts workers in distant locations; conciliation with personal interests; managers encouraged to accommodate unplanned personal needs.
Institutional reputation, reference status, or strategic centrality	IGF (3): brand in public administration; symbolic weight/media visibility; brand weight felt by applicants. SGMSAUDE (2): institutional prestige; recognized competence. INA (2): 46-year institutional history; renewed centrality since 2021. DGAEP (1): seen as a reference service in public administration. DGLAB (3): national regulatory authority for archives; principal authority for libraries/RNBP; leading body in two essential domains. DGT (2): national focal point for EU territorial-cooperation programs (URBACT); exclusive national competence in geographic data.
Mission, public impact, or meaningful contribution	DGAV (5): mission to protect society/consumers; safeguarding the agri-food chain; silent work resulting from countless controls; workers feel they act for everyone; strong impact on public health (zoonotic diseases). IMPIC (3): functions have a direct impact on people's daily lives; regulate 80,000 entities; mission itself is described as attractive. ICNF (2): socially relevant remit; workers want to work with nature and forests.
Positive climate, cohesion, or collaborative environment	SGMSAUDE (3): good environment created internally; people feel happy working there; passed by word of mouth between workers. INA (1): word spreads about a particular internal work climate. IMPIC (2): collaborative environment achieved; three whole-team workshops per year. SGMTSSS (2): solid team; cohesion at the leadership level. DGAEP (1): informal work climate despite hierarchical structure.
Learning, school effect, or career capital	IGF (2): also seen as a school; people come disposed to learn. DGAEP (2): also, is a school; a point of departure for other career destinations. DGLAB (2): workers acquire knowledge enabling moves to other organizations; 'come here to drink the juice'. DGT (2): innovative projects enable curricular development and personal fulfilment; workers are attracted even with salary parity or disadvantage.
Exceptional HR investment or material work conditions	ICNF (7): full SIADAP applied including performance awards and remuneration progression; ~€500k/year in performance awards; lower stagnation rate in salary positions; 100 new pickup trucks for field teams; all staff on laptops with €1M Microsoft license investment; ~€20M investment in rehabilitation of 11 buildings across the country; investment in work conditions described as generating strong attractiveness dynamics.
Economic differentiation described as weak or absent	IGF (2): salary advantage has weakened; previously, a good salary was the draw, today it is not. IMPIC (1): no additional remuneration increments available. DGT (2): organization lacks special careers unlike some peers; workers are attracted despite salary parity or disadvantage.

Note. IGF = Inspeção-Geral de Finanças; INA = Instituto Nacional de Administração; DGLAB = Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas; DGAEP = Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público; DGT = Direção-Geral do Território; IMPIC = Instituto dos Mercados Públicos, do Imobiliário e da Construção; DGAV = Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária; ICNF = Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas; SGMSAUDE = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério da Saúde; SGMTSSS = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social.

Table 30- Stability Themes

Theme	Supporting Sentences
Other conditions override stability (pay, progression, commute, schedules, or mobility)	IGF (2): career progression has diminished; the salary inspection career advantage is now minimal; the salary factor did its work and has partly disappeared as a differentiator. SGMSAUDE (1): many workers are motivated by public service ethos and the common good, not by stability. DGAV (4): what attracts is territorial decentralization/proximity to residence, not stability; shift schedules and permanent availability are attraction factors; atypical working conditions (abattoirs, nights, weekends) drive exits despite job satisfaction; family conciliation pressures force departures even for those who enjoy the role. IMPIC (1): a worker left to earn 25-30% more elsewhere - pay overrides stability. DGLAB (3): technical staff leave for leadership roles in other institutions; workers come to acquire know-how, then take it to better-paying organizations; remuneration and progression elsewhere exceed what DGLAB can offer.
Stability is described as irrelevant or a weak differentiator in practice	SGMSAUDE (1): stability may be relevant, but few external competitions are open - not strongly felt in practice. DGAV (2): attraction in Lisbon is no longer as strong; stability is mentioned but immediately displaced by geographic proximity as the main driver. IMPIC (1): stability is not relevant as a differentiator because it is identical across all organizations. ICNF (2): for current workers' retention, stability is irrelevant - they are already aware of it; for new entrants, it is also not the factor, given full-employment conditions. DGT (2): stability does not appear to be a relevant factor; recruitment by internal mobility means stability already exists before joining.
Stability as a shared public sector condition, not institution-specific	INA (2): security and stability are not specific to INA - it is a feature of public employment in general; workers already inside the public service carry this condition regardless of which organization they are in. IMPIC (2): stability is the same whether one is at IMPIC or at the Tribunal de Contas - the package is exactly equal to all others. ICNF (1): security and permanence are maintained in any public body. DGAEP (2): not very different from other public services; no specialty at DGAEP regarding employment stability.
Lower salience among younger, mobile, or externally attractive profiles	IGF (1): younger cohorts are different - there is no longer the same career trajectory outlook. INA (2): older generation not willing to take on new challenges; for younger workers, stability matters within the AP framework, not specific to this organization. ICNF (2): in a context of full employment, stability is not what drives candidates; generalist profiles (lawyers, finance) are hard to recruit because ICNF pays less, and they do not need a guaranteed public sector salary. DGT (2): a good, specialized worker has no problem leaving; workers are very secure in their own positions and mobility is easy.
Reform, extinction, or institutional uncertainty weakens the stability signal	SGMSAUDE (2): threat of extinction of secretarias-gerais weakens the stability signal; years ago no one would have thought of extinguishing these institutions - they were seen as secure. DGAEP (2): government changes and organic reforms create a climate of uncertainty and instability; three governments in a few years generate perturbation. DGLAB (2): extinction by merger of secretarias-gerais cannibalizes DGLAB's human resources; transversal support entities offer salary supplements that DGLAB cannot match.
Stability weighs more for retention than for initial attraction	IGF (2): stability/career was clearly a stronger attraction factor in the past than it is today; it still motivates applications somewhat - a recent competition attracted over 1,000 candidates. INA (1): stability has more weight in retaining current staff than in attracting new ones.
Stability may shelter low accountability or low performance behavior	SGMTSSS (2): young workers who contest everything and avoid responsibilities - in the private sector, they would already have been dismissed; parental status is used as a shield to avoid accountability, making them unreliable for operational planning.

Note. IGF = Inspeção-Geral de Finanças; SGMSAUDE = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério da Saúde; INA = Instituto Nacional de Administração; DGAV = Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária; IMPIC = Instituto dos Mercados Públicos, do Imobiliário e da Construção; ICNF = Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas; SGMTSSS = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social; DGAEP = Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público; DGLAB = Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas; DGT = Direção-Geral do Território.

Table 31 - Development and Career Progression Themes

Theme	Supporting Sentences
Training and continuous learning are a major development lever	SGMSAUDE (1): rigorous SIADAP and training actively promoted and followed up with all staff. DGAV (3): training cited as one of the main development levers; networking with other organizations and academic institutions described as motivating; proximity to universities nationally as a development factor. IMPIC (2): Annual training plan built from middle-manager consultation and consistently delivered; training is mandatory - one year of training planned per cycle. ICNF (3): training strongly supported - requests rarely refused; many initiatives with universities; €150,000 paid for two specialists to join a scientific expedition on the Santa Maria Manuela. DGAEP (1): professional training always attempted; active search for free or low-cost training.
SIADAP or performance management is used as a progression lever	SGMSAUDE (1): rigorous SIADAP applied; progression through objective achievement. DGAV (2): SIADAP applied and led to progression for a group of workers; mobility requests systematically increase after SIADAP cycles - described as a structural problem. DGAEP (1): budget earmarked for salary position changes and performance awards in this evaluation cycle. DGT (3): SIADAP applied rigorously and on schedule with all quotas distributed; workers near the threshold tracked and compensated in subsequent cycles; performance awards applied with parsimony to preserve internal balance.
Career progression is limited, slow, or weakly differentiated	IGF (3): progression described as very slow and a demotivating factor; IGF excluded from the Finance Ministry restructuring - peers earn over €2,000 more; no strategy found to reverse exits driven by salary gaps. DGAV (2): newly created Veterinary Inspection special career offers the same salary as the general career; progression in the special career will be worse than in the general career. DGLAB (2): no differentiating development opportunities compared to other AP institutions in recent years; archivist/librarian career already requires heavy prior qualification - not a differentiator as staff arrive with post-graduate degrees.
Formal support for study, advanced training, or qualifications exists	SGMSAUDE (1): student-worker status always granted; internal organization adjusted so people are not penalized for returning to study. SGMTSSS (1): “Qualifica” program developed internally - staff progressed to degree level and moved into technical roles. DGT (3): Unpaid leave supported for master’s and doctoral studies; researchers integrated into university research centers and external projects; time and space given for research in areas of interest.
School effect or springboard logic - development also raises poaching risk	IGF (1): staff leave for slightly higher pay elsewhere - 6-7 departures in recent weeks; limited capacity to reverse this. DGAEP (2): DGAEP functions as a school and gateway to other organizations; more than 25 staff members from the headcount are currently working externally in relevant leadership roles. DGLAB (2): described as the 'emerging market' metaphor - training workers who then move to the 'major leagues'; workers leave for directorships and senior roles in other institutions after gaining expertise at DGLAB.
Internal mobility or career-broadening pathways are used	INA (1): internal mobility policy discussed in prior answer - exploring options inside before anyone considers leaving. DGAV (1): post-SIADAP mobility requests are reactive (dissatisfied or relocating workers), not a structured development pathway. IMPIC (1): administrative assistants who completed degrees promoted to technical roles through internal functional mobility.
Development is framed through learning in role, projects, networks, or technical exposure	ICNF (1): training of many natures described as valued by workers - learning through varied practical and scientific initiatives. DGLAB (1): workers come to the authority to acquire knowledge and expertise that they then carry to other contact points.
Development opportunities influence attraction or joining decisions	IMPIC (1): joining is not influenced by professional development - first question from candidates is always about pay. SGMTSSS (2): people came specifically to the organization because word spread about the internal qualification pathway; attraction through the “Qualifica” program confirmed by the respondent.

Note. IGF = Inspeção-Geral de Finanças; SGMSAUDE = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério da Saúde; INA = Instituto Nacional de Administração; DGAV = Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária; IMPIC = Instituto dos Mercados Públicos, do Imobiliário e da Construção; ICNF = Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas; SGMTSSS = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social; DGAEP = Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público; DGLAB = Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas; DGT = Direção-Geral do Território.

Table 32 - Innovation Themes

Theme	Supporting Sentences
Innovation and creativity seen as relevant for employees	IGF (2): staff are happy to engage with new perspectives; initiatives to bring people closer - groups, staff club, events. SGMSAUDE (1): innovation relevant for some staff more than others. INA (1): explicitly described as relevant and important for people. IMPIC (1): innovation clearly relevant; focus on productivity and quality of working life. ICNF (1): creativity and innovation actively stimulated. SGMTSSS (1): innovation is very important; fostering the notion that ideas are accepted and heard. DGAEP (2): innovative work environment relevant for people; stimulating creativity described as very important. DGLAB (1): working at the state of the art in AI described as extremely relevant to workers. DGT (2): innovation relevant; work environment described as consistently stimulating innovation; European territorial cooperation inherently drives search for innovative actions.
Innovation linked to digitalization, AI, or process improvement	IGF (2): a concrete AI project is running, not yet extended to the whole organization; 40-50 staff involved in an AI initiative in partnership with INA. DGAV (2): Microsoft Copilot licenses acquired and distributed to managers and selected staff; new tools and methods being progressively implemented. ICNF (2): dematerialization, information security, and migration to cloud underway; multidisciplinary telework teams facilitate innovation across projects. DGLAB (2): large-scale digital transformation in progress; AI adopted to manage a document volume described as humanly impossible to process manually.
Participation, suggestions, or staff voice drive innovation	SGMSAUDE (3): open-door policy for any suggestion or idea; SIADAP includes a mandatory improvement-proposal objective for every worker; all staff are required to reflect on how their work can be done better - innovation embedded in appraisal. IMPIC (3): organizational units propose process changes through collaborative discussion; workers' committee meets monthly with the full Board of Directors; monthly minutes track what was done and what was not possible - transparent follow-up. SGMTSSS (3): participatory budgeting implemented; staff encouraged to propose ideas in their areas; role/placement changes made when a person does not fit their post - good results achieved. DGAEP (2): staff can participate in decisions, are heard, can criticize and make suggestions without consequences; management asks staff directly before advancing key decisions.
Acceptance is uneven - some roles or workers prefer routine or resist change	INA (2): for some staff, learning to do things differently is an annoyance; acceptance depends on whether individuals are apt to be challenged. DGAV (2): a large group of managers and staff never opened the Copilot tool; cultural resistance - perception that using AI signals laziness or incompetence. DGT (1): ambivalence observed - staff requests creativity but also feels satisfied in platform-based routine work.
Resource limits, workload, or lack of slack constrain innovation	INA (3): innovation capacity depends on available resources and workload; day-to-day urgency consumes the breathing space needed to think differently; doing things differently takes more time than established habits. DGT (1): innovation must be moderated - focus required; only 6-7 truly innovative workstreams are sustainable at one time.
Advanced external innovation signal - partnerships, AI leadership, state of the art	DGLAB (3): partnership with Google for large-scale information processing and digitization; described as one of the most advanced entities in Portugal in AI application; participating in the development of Amália, the Portuguese-language ChatGPT equivalent.

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Table 33 - Compensation and Financial Incentive Themes

Theme	Supporting Sentences
Pay is a binding constraint or weak differentiator for attraction and retention	SGMSAUDE (1): remuneration described as not worth mentioning as a differentiator. INA (2): not a differentiator in strict financial terms compared with other public institutions; agencies and the Assembly of the Republic pay significantly more - even a gardener there earns more. DGAV (1): Pay described as very important for attraction. IMPIC (1): unable to attract more people because no remuneration or financial benefits exist to compete with - pay role described as very large. DGAEP (2): pay plays a large role but is not determinant for joining or staying; people choose DGAEP even at the expense of services offering supplements. DGT (1): weak differentiator for the choice decision - not what distinguishes the organization.
SIADAP, performance bonuses, or extra progression are used as differentiating tools	IMPIC (1): performance awards attributed as a differentiating tool. ICNF (4): the only organization in two ministries awarding performance bonuses and managerial salary progression; managerial option used in all cycles - progression faster than any comparable organization; staff already anticipate the payment cycles and value the system; direct consequence: teams are now more demanding in objective-setting and competency assessment. SGMTSSS (2): SIADAP used strategically - balancing those already promoted against those who have not been; managerial option used to retain staff who signal intent to leave. DGAEP (1): budget earmarked for salary positioning changes and performance awards in this cycle. DGLAB (1): SIADAP and managerial option applied. DGT (1): SIADAP applied on schedule; balanced across all careers; recognized by staff as a fair effort.
Telework, flexibility, or work-life conciliation operate as indirect benefits	SGMSAUDE (3): telework offered; personal, professional and family life conciliation; flexibility for unplanned situations (sick child, personal appointments) - prefers staff work calmly from home; support for staff who want to study or return to education. INA (1): hybrid telework regime valued by people and explicitly cited as a relevant factor. SGMTSSS (2): telework for staff living far from Lisbon described as an indirect salary - avoiding commuting costs; economic component compensated through non-displacement (e.g., living in Nazaré). DGT (1): telework and flexibility operate as compensation relative to organizations that do not offer these benefits.
Human-centered management, practical conditions, or non-pay support substitute for pay	IGF (1): activities, environment, and training create a sense of unified body - substitute for financial differentiation. SGMSAUDE (2): ergonomic monitors and supports provided to all staff; workers seen as people first - that perspective is felt and valued. INA (2): involvement in strategic definition and execution as a non-financial substitute; moments of relaxation and socializing to build affective and emotional attachment to the institution. SGMTSSS (1): basic conditions - dining area, microwave access, heating - cited as relevant given rising staff expectations.
Few differentiated financial tools exist beyond the general legal framework	DGAV (2): only legally mandated compensations exist (shift supplements, night pay, travel allowances); a legal trap in the special veterinary career caused half of the new entrants to rescind their contracts over salary position expectations. DGAEP (3): no capacity to differentiate financially; only avenue is managerial SIADAP option; 25% supplement foreseen in a future restructuring - not yet available; perceived injustice relative to other entities that received supplements without justification. DGLAB (3): nothing beyond what the law provides; the first-ever 'excellent' rating in the organization's history was a recent novelty; ongoing restructuring without response - unable to create new leadership positions; only has work to offer - a great deal of it - with nothing extra in remuneration terms.
Pay gaps, unfairness, or better offers trigger exits, withdrawals, or retention loss	DGAV (1): approximately 50% of newly admitted veterinary inspection staff rescinded their contracts when they discovered they would not enter at the expected third salary position. IMPIC (1): many who leave do so because they are offered more money elsewhere. DGT (1): perceived injustice or absence of minimum progression pushes exits; experienced acutely during the stagnation period - fewer cases now that progression has resumed.

Note. IGF = Inspeção-Geral de Finanças; SGMSAUDE = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério da Saúde; INA = Instituto Nacional de Administração; DGAV = Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária; IMPIC = Instituto dos Mercados Públicos, do Imobiliário e da Construção; ICNF = Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas; SGMTSSS = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social; DGAEP = Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público; DGLAB = Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas; DGT = Direção-Geral do Território.

Table 34 - Contribution Public Impact and Societal Themes

Theme	Supporting Sentences
Societal contribution or public value supports attraction and retention	IGF (1): societal contribution attracts people in some way. SGMSAUDE (1): feeling that one has an impact on people - described as important for workers. INA (1): contribution to society through mission is fully relevant for both attracting and retaining. DGAV (1): a taste for having a role in societal safety is perceived in candidate interviews. IMPIC (1): a great added value; people know what they do has impact - attracts and retains. ICNF (1): helps considerably to attract - people have a specific interest in the activity. DGAEP (1): understanding the AP-citizen relationship helps to attract and retain people. DGT (1): contribution to society and orientation to the citizen explicitly cited.
Explicit public service, citizen focus, or common good language is used	SGMSAUDE (1): citizen orientation explicitly stated as a feature of the organization's work. INA (3): public service orientation very frequently mentioned by new workers on entry; public service ethos expressed even by those coming from the private sector; public service school idea described as motivating. DGAV (1): commitment to the mission of protecting societal safety - explicit *esprit de corps* language. IMPIC (1): citizens benefit from the activity; fight against illegal practice; public construction transparency. ICNF (1): altruistic activity framed around nature conservation, biodiversity, climate change, and species protection - mentioned by the vast majority of recruits. DGT (1): public service identity deeply embedded - 'I provide public service; I know what the public interest is'.
Societal contribution is important in principle, but not a distinctive attraction lever	INA (1): branding deficit in the public administration - people outside do not know the scope of what can be done; the possibility of working on matters unreplicable in the private sector is not communicated as an attraction factor. DGAV (1): younger generations show less mission commitment; WLB now overrides dedication to societal safety. SGMTSSS (1): The theme is less attractive than areas like ISS; the organization must create attraction factors because the mission does not sell itself. DGAEP (1): negative factor - heavy processes, lack of feedback on results, effort disproportionate to visible impact; this does not help attract or retain. DGLAB (2): citizen orientation is important in the area, but not a distinctive factor for attracting or retaining; financial, authority, and leadership questions dominate over mission as a pull factor. DGT (1): connection to the individual citizen is weaker; contribution is more to society broadly than to the direct user.
Impact is framed indirectly through regulation, support, or system effectiveness	IGF (2): relationships with society are short and indirect; passive visibility - in focus sometimes, not always. SGMSAUDE (2): many tasks are inward-facing and administrative support for government members; strategic planning contributes indirectly to policy effectiveness. SGMTSSS (2): support and administrative area with no direct citizen impact; secretaria-geral enables the ministerial cabinets that do the substantive work. DGAEP (2): does not serve citizens directly; functions as a school and reference point for understanding the AP-citizen relationship. DGT (2): fewer areas of direct citizen contact; contribution is indirect through geographic information and institutional partners; information made available is described as fundamental for society.
Concrete examples of societal or citizen impact are provided	SGMSAUDE (2): handles 9,000-10,000 citizen complaints, information requests, and clarifications per year; disseminates best practices, validates records, preserves the Health Ministry's institutional archive. IMPIC (2): licensing of construction and real-estate mediation organizations; role in transparency of public procurement across the country. ICNF (1): the vast majority of recruits explicitly cite nature conservation, biodiversity and climate-related work as their reason for joining.
Visibility in crises, media, or salient cases strengthens perceived public value	IGF (1): IGF appears in newspapers and on TV alongside TAP and INEM - media visibility attracts applicants. IMPIC (1): IMPIC is nationally recognized in public procurement - mentioned spontaneously across the country.

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Table 35 - Mission and Values Themes

Theme	Supporting Sentences
Mission and core values weigh strongly in attraction or choice	IGF (1): mission and values described as weighing considerably. INA (2): weighs considerably - affirmed with conviction; always cited by new workers in their first conversation on entry. DGAV (1): weighs a great deal - stated without reservation. IMPIC (1): described as very important. ICNF (2): mission and values weigh considerably; social value of the work created a dynamic that led to a significant increase in candidates - 50 vacancies drew over 4,000 applicants. SGMTSSS (1): mission described as very important. DGAEP (2): weighs a great deal - working for the common good and collective well-being; sense of building something that influences the lives of citizens and the country. DGT (1): mission is the overarching umbrella - people recognize themselves in it.
Values congruence, identity, or meaning source	INA (1): public service orientation repeatedly cited as a driver of choice - mentioned in every entry conversation. ICNF (1): becoming known for good reasons increased candidate numbers - values visibility as a pull factor. SGMTSSS (1): values of openness and anti-hierarchy actively enforced; not tolerated in middle managers. DGAEP (1): working for the common good, not for commercial ends - explicit meaning source. DGT (2): active interpretation of the mission to create value and affirm the institution; annual strategic reference framework used to justify work priorities and give meaning to collective effort.
Technical or professional identity weighs more than explicit citizen language	SGMSAUDE (1): professional identity tied to the health sector - those who work in health rarely leave it; sector belonging acts as a stronger pull than organizational mission per se. DGAV (1): specialized technical professions chosen by the technical dimension of the mission, not by generic citizen-service language. DGLAB (2): workers come to acquire knowledge from the national archival authority - technical/archival identity weighs more than citizen-facing language; transversal knowledge of public administration built through archival expertise. DGT (1): institutional identity built on specific technical competences (geographic information, territorial planning) - mission interpreted as a set of technical activities.
Values alignment supports longer-term attachment or identity growth over time	IGF (1): recent entrants who seemed uncertain gradually appear fully integrated and feel the mission - identity alignment develops over 2-3 years. SGMSAUDE (1): workers feel they are in an organization with prestige that values their work - attachment reinforced over time. DGLAB (1): whoever passes through DGLAB becomes valuable to any future employer - technical identity grows during tenure; the downside is that this also feeds poaching by other institutions.
Stronger effect for specialized professions, older cohorts, or some groups more than others	IGF (2): uncertain whether the new generation feels the same sense of public service as earlier cohorts; some of the 50 recent entrants appear integrated and feel the mission; others are still searching for direction. DGAV (2): effect stronger in specific careers - pharmacists, nutritionists, and veterinarians, each attracted by their technical sub-mission; veterinarians prefer companion animals or food safety over abattoir work - choice driven by mission sub-dimension.
Mission expressed indirectly in support or transversal bodies	SGMSAUDE (2): secretaria-geral carries institutional weight and history; workers from other Ministry of Health bodies recognize its work and would like to work there - reputation of a support body. SGMTSSS (2): support area - mission always expressed through example, not direct citizen contact; openness and transparency as the operational values that give meaning to an administrative function.

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Table 36 - Organizational Culture Themes

Theme	Supporting Sentences
Positive or healthy work environment	IGF (2): environment described as excellent in early years; still described as a good environment overall today (hedged). SGMSAUDE (3): described as a good place to work; people feel well there; word of mouth about the environment. IMPIC (3): culture described as very healthy; good atmosphere; we get along very well. ICNF (1): good work environment stated. SGMTSSS (1): work environment ends up being good. DGAEP (2): relaxed and good atmosphere; described as having been maintained across leadership changes. DGT (2): Work environment described as good; no exceptional conflicts observed.
Open, participative, or informal culture	IGF (1): old departmental silos have diminished; more cross-department collaboration now. SGMSAUDE (3): open-door culture; teamwork culture; any worker can propose ideas. INA (3): less hierarchical structure; more visible cross-cutting matrix; people are informed and involved in mission, vision and values. IMPIC (3): great sharing of everything being done; three internal whole-team workshops per year; QUAR results, projects, and priorities shared openly. SGMTSSS (1): described as a culture of participation. DGT (2): always building bridges with other organizations; open geographic data shared broadly.
Culture matters more for retention than for first attraction	SGMSAUDE (1): many workers came because current staff called them - word of mouth driven by retention experience. INA (1): cultural factor not only attracts but also contributes to *esprit de corps* and staying. IMPIC (2): culture does not influence initial entry decisions; retaining already can be a value-add; only able to attract people precisely because of this organizational culture. ICNF (2): workers rescinded won competitions at other institutions to return to ICNF; when they arrived elsewhere, they found ICNF had better conditions - so they returned. SGMTSSS (1): when people see there are no financial perks but a good environment - that becomes the pitch. DGAEP (1): retention has mostly to do with the bonds people form here. DGT (2): newcomers do not fully know what they are joining; those who stay do so for the environment; people have left and returned because they wanted to come back to this environment.
Hierarchical, siloed, or conservative constraints	DGAV (5): culture described as very rigid and very hierarchical; resistance to change as an institutional characteristic; units cannot speak horizontally - everything passes through the director-general; work organized in silos by specialty; strong resistance to digital platforms among older, highly operational staff. DGLAB (3): culture described as relatively conservative; staff know each other too long - innovation limited; 40-50 retirements expected 2025-2026, representing over 10% of institutional knowledge at risk.
Leadership proximity, support, or psychological safety	SGMSAUDE (4): leadership always has open doors; any worker can approach and propose; leadership takes responsibility, so workers do not carry the blame; leader sits alongside overloaded workers and asks how to help - workers never feel alone. ICNF (2): leadership recruits chiefs internally (primus inter pares principle); workers see a realistic path to leadership positions.
Cohesion*, esprit de corps*, or strong identity	INA (2*): esprit de corps* described as an outcome of cultural change; almost symbolic communion around shared objectives. IMPIC (1): culture of commitment stated. DGT (2): wearing the institutional jersey described as strong/very strong; strong sense of institutional identity noted.
Telework or flexibility as part of the work model	SGMTSSS (2): total flexibility stated as a feature of the culture; actively supports workers moving to decentralized services. DGAEP (2): telework policy cited as a cultural feature; candidates now ask about telework policy during recruitment interviews.

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Table 37 - Recognition Themes

Theme	Supporting Sentences
Recognition through well-being, flexibility, or personal support	SGMSAUDE (1): telework and work-personal-family life conciliation policy offered as recognition. DGAV (1): persistent failure to resolve the ageing vehicle fleet - inspectors using private cars at personal cost; cited as an unresolved conditions problem spanning decades. ICNF (2): workers' association being set up for leisure, games, social events; this recreational dimension of labor relations is actively supported by management. SGMTSSS (2): “Cuidar AP” well-being program - psychology, nutrition, osteopathy; extended occupational health model with free psychology and subsidized services. DGAEP (1): working conditions, flexible hours, telework, and work-family conciliation offered where possible. DGT (1): seasonal flexibility (e.g., Christmas period); accommodates staff with family health needs.
Recognition through autonomy, involvement, role fit, or exposure	IGF (1): aligning training and development opportunities with the school identity - involvement as recognition. INA (4): talent and competency mapping to find the best role fit for each person; involving staff (not just middle managers) in events and presentations; staff recognized as owners of knowledge in their domains; internal mobility policy - discussing options before anyone considers leaving. ICNF (2): workers' committee supported and active - monthly meetings on labor relations; participation stimulated across the organization. DGLAB (3): opening the institution to new audiences motivates younger staff beyond document-core work; valuing digital channels and educational services as professional development avenues; staff who want community-facing roles given that space. DGT (2): recognition aligned with each worker's motivational drivers; trust given through exposure to preferred tasks and areas of cooperation.
Recognition is mainly nonfinancial because monetary tools are constrained	SGMSAUDE (1): would like to give more money, but it is not possible - must find other ways. INA (1): constrained by general public sector rules; no financial forms of recognition available. DGAV (1): salary progression and pay increases are strongly blocked; the procedural path is too long, and responses never come. DGLAB (1): same career-band salaries across public administration; transversal support entities offer supplements that DGLAB cannot match.
Recognition through praise, communication, or visible appreciation of effort	SGMSAUDE (3): effort recognized clearly - stated in writing, in public and in private; work praised explicitly; errors managed without blame, focusing on solutions. IMPIC (2): workshops used to communicate the importance of everyone's contribution; the idea that results are only achievable with collective commitment - consistently present. DGAEP (3): communication and proximity with workers; workers are heard in decisions; space given for staff to voluntarily critique or suggest new ways of working. DGT (2): verbal recognition used sparingly but genuinely valued by staff; constructive criticism in general meetings balanced with explicit praise for excellent work.
Recognition through training, study support, or professional investment	IGF (2): post-graduate program in partnership with Nova IMS for inspectors; training described as an area where the organization works very well. SGMSAUDE (1): facilitates workers who want to return to study. DGAV (3): training is the main recognition axis given salary constraints; access to the EU Commission Better Training for Safety Food program; international training in various EU locations fully funded - highly valued by staff. SGMTSSS (2): post-graduations in the work area paid for by the organization; extensive procurement/contracting training provided for the whole team.
Recognition is treated as relevant or essential for motivation and retention	IGF (1): relatively dynamic teams where leaders have close proximity to staff - cited as a recognition mechanism. SGMSAUDE (1): recognition essential - other forms of motivation must be found, given financial constraints. INA (1): recognition is clearly relevant and understood as essential for motivating professionals.
Structured performance awards or other tangible reward tools	IMPIC (1): decision taken to award performance prizes - described as relevant and an opportunity seized.

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Table 38 - Employee Satisfaction Themes

Theme	Supporting Sentences
Satisfaction is described as positive, moderate to high, or improving	IGF (2): a very positive sentiment towards the organization; generally good opinion of IGF. SGMSAUDE (2): growing satisfaction in annual surveys; the majority has stayed and shows no sign of leaving. INA (1): level described as medium-high. DGAV (2): Overall, people are satisfied working in the organization; they understand the constraints are not the fault of the director-general or the institution. IMPIC (1): satisfaction with the organization itself described as reasonable to good and has been rising. ICNF (1): satisfaction level described as globally positive. SGMTSSS (1): staff are satisfied - perception confirmed by survey results. DGAEP (1): were reasonably satisfied, at a good or high level, and felt involved in projects. DGLAB (1): 86% satisfied with internal survey, up approximately 1% - described as a meaningful result given the technical profile. DGT (2): approximately 80-85% satisfied overall; satisfaction has grown over time; the first two years under new management were more critical.
Internal surveys or other formal evidence support the assessment	IGF (1): annual opinion surveys conducted alongside activity reports. SGMSAUDE (1): annual satisfaction surveys show a growing trend. DGAV (1): regular satisfaction surveys conducted. ICNF (1): annual surveys conducted. SGMTSSS (1): survey conducted - mean score of 4.23 out of 5. DGLAB (1): satisfaction surveys show 86% satisfied.
Satisfaction varies across roles, units, or functions	IGF (2): inspectors are more satisfied; administrative support area likely less so; support staff may feel that being at IGF or elsewhere makes little difference - some rotation observed. INA (2): varies across teams and service directorates; linked to resources available within each directorate rather than function type alone. DGAV (1): satisfaction varies considerably by organizational unit and the quality of the leadership relationship. SGMTSSS (1): some staff would prefer to be doing different functions. DGT (1): There is always a subset of dissatisfied and critical staff - described as normal and expected.
Pay, incentives, supplements, or monetary comparisons reducing satisfaction	IGF (1): administrative support area has lower comparative compensation - reduces satisfaction. IMPIC (1): dissatisfaction is not with the organization itself but with the absence of incentives and negative salary comparisons. DGAEP (1): transition to a new career without the corresponding supplement reduced satisfaction. DGLAB (1): the only source of dissatisfaction explicitly named is the monetary level.
Uncertainty, extinction, or restructuring reducing satisfaction	SGMSAUDE (1): threat of extinction generates insecurity and weighs on satisfaction levels. DGAEP (3): uncertainty about the future of DGAEP and organic restructuring reduce satisfaction considerably; the director-general's imminent departure with no known successor adds to institutional uncertainty; currently most staff are described as not satisfied due to these external factors.
Meaning, climate, prestige, or professional fulfilment support satisfaction	DGLAB (3): high professional fulfilment - working with the best in their field at the national authority; European and world reference status; staff regularly invited abroad to present best practices; archivists and librarians feel they are doing exactly what they love at the highest level.
Workload, staff shortages, vehicles, or resource constraints reducing satisfaction	DGAV (3): staff shortage is the main dissatisfaction factor - 800 staff against an approved headcount of 1,300; inspectors use their own vehicles for abattoir and field work - ageing fleet and high mileage costs; those who remain are overloaded, particularly visible in shift-based roles.
Role mismatch or task expectation problems reduce satisfaction	SGMTSSS (1): public relations staff wanted to do communications but were assigned protocol work - mismatch between expected and actual tasks created a dissatisfaction problem that had to be resolved.

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Table 39 - Commitment and Belonging Themes

Theme	Supporting Sentences
Commitment and belonging are high or very high	SGMSAUDE (1): the vast majority of staff remain despite the threat of extinction. INA (1): level described as high at the present moment. DGAV (1): a very strong sense of commitment - very visible. IMPIC (2): a group of people with an extremely high level of commitment; with only 110 staff, the organization continues to fulfil its mission and reduce licensing times. ICNF (1): high level of commitment observed. SGMTSSS (1): commitment described as very high. DGAEP (1): quite a high level - sense of belonging also elevated. DGLAB (1): particularly high level of commitment. DGT (1): commitment described as very strong.
Pride, identity, or “vestir a camisola” language is used	IGF (2): a generation that clearly wears the jersey - the IGF is important to them; some newer staff already 'are IGF' in their own sense of identity. SGMSAUDE (2): strong jersey-wearing language; great pride in saying they belong to the Secretaria-Geral; workers themselves express a commitment to the institution and uncertainty about what comes next. INA (1): the concept of SOMOS ('we are') expresses the jersey-wearing sentiment - described as relevant. DGAV (1): love of the jersey among many workers - cited as the reason the institution is recognized by stakeholders. DGT (1): commitment described as very strong with a clear identity undertone.
Crisis response, staying beyond normal hours, or remaining under pressure reveals commitment	SGMSAUDE (1): staff remains despite the institutional extinction threat - commitment visible under pressure. DGAV (3): Staff work on Christmas Day, New Year's Day, and through the night during health crises; in five years, no one has refused to respond - including in emotionally difficult situations such as animal culls; even those who are generally dissatisfied show up when it matters. IMPIC (1): informal test cited - if the building were flooded, staff would come to help. ICNF (2): many staff work beyond their contracted hours; do not leave when they could reasonably do so. SGMTSSS (3): in the extinction phase, staff continue working with full engagement until the end; people decline better-paid job offers from elsewhere in order to stay; regular area meetings held to manage uncertainty - commitment is maintained throughout.
Commitment is uneven across groups or vulnerable to reform, turnover, or mixed engagement	IGF (1): the process of identity formation is gradual - some newer staff are still on the way and not yet fully committed. INA (1): the creation of the new career may have distorted commitment - noted as a caveat. IMPIC (1): there is always a 'patinho feio' - a group that does not pull weight; coexistence of high and lower commitment. DGAEP (1): initial expectation was that commitment was mainly among older staff - this proved incorrect. DGLAB (2): high rotation in support services (finance, legal) weakens commitment in those areas; the era of spending one's entire career in a single institution is largely over.
Commitment is stronger among longer-tenured groups in some cases	IGF (1): the older generation clearly wears the jersey; newer staff are still learning what it means. DGLAB (1): commitment particularly strong among those who have spent their entire working life here; effort is being made to instill the same in newer arrivals.
Newer staff also show belonging, not only older cohorts	IGF (1): some of the newer entrants are already wearing the jersey and feel like IGF - identity is being built. DGAEP (2): newer staff also show a high level of commitment and sense of belonging; described as surprising and notable - the assumption that only long-tenured staff feel this way proved wrong.

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Table 40 - Location and Accessibility Themes

Theme	Supporting Sentences
Location and access clearly influence joining or staying decisions	SGMSAUDE (1): located in the city center with a good public transport network nearby. INA (1): influences decisions, though not in an absolutely determining way. DGAV (1): very strong influence - proximity is enormously important. IMPIC (1): described as very, very, very important. SGMTSSS (2): location influences a lot - people came here specifically because of better access; cited as a choice factor precisely because remuneration is not. DGAEP (1): influences decisions - described as a privileged location. DGT (1): location described as important; building has a degree of centrality.
Central transport access, parking, or urban accessibility described as advantages	SGMSAUDE (2): city center location with good public transport; contrast with other institutions - nobody wants to go to Alfragide. IMPIC (3): Campo Pequeno - metro at the door; train at the door for those from the south bank and Azambuja line; car park available for those who drive. SGMTSSS (1): good central location contrasted with IEFP in Xabregas and other peripheral sites. DGAEP (1): boat, train, and metro at the door - multimodal accessibility. DGLAB (3): second ring road adjacent; metro at Campo Grande (Green and Yellow lines); Cidade Universitária, Campo Grande, Sete Rios, and Lisbon Airport all accessible; parking available - described as a competitive advantage not to be wasted. DGT (2): parking spaces available; outdoor space (garden, bench) valued by staff; no generalized open-plan layout - workspace perceived as comfortable.
Location is described as a disadvantage, barrier, or commuting burden	IGF (3): location does not help - climbing the street in the rain is not pleasant; most staff would prefer to be elsewhere; only those who live nearby are happy with the current location; rumors of a move circulate - the majority would welcome it. INA (1): location in Algés is a recurring issue raised in all recruitment interviews by candidates, from both directions. DGAEP (1): prospect of relocating to João XXI caused some candidates to hesitate - an extra bus or metro journey weighs on decisions. DGT (1): Metro access is not easy due to the uphill walk from the nearest station.
Location matters more through retention or day-to-day feasibility than initial attraction	INA (1): a potential move to central Lisbon is an active internal topic - suggesting location shapes retention more than recruitment. DGAV (2): workers refuse to transfer between Lisbon and Oeiras sites even for a role change - daily feasibility dominates; territorial decentralization is an attraction advantage precisely through residential proximity. DGLAB (1): location influences mainly the decision not to leave rather than the decision to join.
Telework or hybrid work reduces location sensitivity or commuting burden	DGT (1): with telework in place, there are fewer complaints about parking and commuting than before - hybrid arrangements reduce the daily weight of the location.
Territorial dispersion makes headquarters location less relevant	ICNF (2): headquarters location has no relevance - 1,800 staff distributed across 78 sites nationwide; there will be every type of situation: near home, far from home - a single answer is meaningless at this scale.

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Table 41 - Employer Brand Strengths and Weaknesses Themes

Theme	Supporting Sentences
Strengths include climate, flexibility, or supportive management	SGMSAUDE (1): good team climate draws people in. INA (2): strategic alignment and staff involvement in its definition and monitoring; general atmosphere of well-being. IMPIC (2): collaborative environment; possibility of progression cited as a strength. ICNF (2): treating human resources well - HR policy backed by concrete actions; work conditions (vehicles, computers) integrated into HR philosophy. SGMTSSS (2): open and transparent management; proximity to workers in decision-making; participatory processes - involvement in major decisions through quizzes and consultations. DGAEP (2): good work environment recognized; perspectives on offer. DGT (1): facilitating people's lives without compromising work - conciliation culture.
Weaknesses include pay limits, weak competitiveness, or missing supplements	IGF (2): did not follow the Finance Ministry's revaluation process; missing inspection supplement that peers have - described as the current main weakness. INA (2): inability to reward good performers financially; no economic or financial form of differentiation available. IMPIC (2): economic and financial weakness - general regime without supplements; if pay were competitive, significantly more people would choose the organization. ICNF (3): not competitive in remuneration; operational and technical assistants earning €900/month cannot stay - forced exits; lower-grade careers most affected - loss of recently trained staff unavoidable. SGMTSSS (1): salary level below comparable organizations - trained staff leave and feel the difference. DGLAB (3): economic dimension described as the main weakness; cannibalized by Secretaria-Geral do Governo and PAP through salary supplements; very difficult to retain good staff in accounting, HR, and legal because the best follow the supplements. DGT (2): cannot compete for knowledge niches valued by the private sector; no special IT career - impossible to recruit IT professionals under the general framework.
Strengths include mission, public value, or social purpose	SGMSAUDE (2): central service within the ministry with truly central impact; proximity to government members and a long institutional history. DGAV (2): knowledge areas - public health, animal welfare, sustainability - attract interest and internship requests; field and border control work is varied and compelling - no two days are the same. IMPIC (1): mission described as the primary strength - its importance and reach. ICNF (1): work with social significance and social valorization - what ICNF does is for everyone. DGAEP (1): mission related to HR/public administration and the recognized knowledge the organization holds.
Strengths include reputation, authority, or technical prestige	IGF (2): the IGF name still makes people think twice; institutional image and media visibility create a perception of interesting and meaningful work. SGMSAUDE (1): strong recognition from partner institutions; credibility and competence as an employer brand. DGLAB (2): national authority in archival science and library science - attracts the best in those fields; staff leave as transversal leaders with cross-administration competences.
Strengths include learning environment, training, or career capital	IGF (1): a good school; a place to learn and develop before moving on - still an attraction signal. DGLAB (2): capacity to develop a transversal vision is a major added value for attracting good staff; archivists and librarians leave with competences well beyond their original specialization. DGT (1): projects and innovative work are described as the primary attraction strength.
Weaknesses include rigid management tools, bureaucracy, or recruitment structure limits	DGAV (3): external recruitment blocked for many years - structural impact severe over the next five years; Ministry of Finance systematically withholds positive opinions regardless of which government is in power; structural inability to recruit for critical export certification and market access roles. DGAEP (3): being a direção-geral means few management instruments; processes are very bureaucratic and heavy; enormous effort for very small outcomes - described as demotivating. DGT (3): cannot open external competitions - recruitment only by internal mobility; limited flexibility within the legal framework - described as a major bottleneck; remote sensing (the core area of the organization) cannot be staffed from the public sector.
Strengths include location or access as a practical advantage	IMPIC (1): perfect location cited explicitly as one of the organization’s strengths.
Weaknesses include workload, resource shortages, or poor physical conditions	SGMTSSS (1): three years without air conditioning - poor habitability conditions cited as a deterrent comparable to peer organizations.
Weaknesses include uncertainty from reform, extinction, or relocation	SGMSAUDE (1): institutional extinction described as the main weakness - 'a very certain uncertainty' - undermines the employer brand.

Note. IGF = Inspeção-Geral de Finanças; SGMSAUDE = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério da Saúde; INA = Instituto Nacional de Administração; DGAV = Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária; IMPIC = Instituto dos Mercados Públicos, do Imobiliário e da Construção; ICNF = Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas; SGMTSSS = Secretaria-Geral do Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social; DGAEP = Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público; DGLAB = Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas; DGT = Direção-Geral do Território.

Appendix E - Survey Study 3

Q1 Caro(a) participante,

O meu nome é David Xavier, e sou doutorando no ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, no âmbito do programa Doctorate in Business Administration. Este inquérito faz parte da investigação para a minha tese de doutoramento, que tem como objetivo analisar a razão pelas quais os Funcionários Públicos escolhem as organizações onde trabalham. A sua participação é fundamental para o desenvolvimento deste estudo e contribuirá para uma melhor compreensão do tema. O preenchimento do questionário demorará aproximadamente 5 minutos e todas as respostas serão tratadas de forma anónima e confidencial. Consentimento Informado Ao prosseguir com este inquérito, confirma que compreendeu as seguintes informações: A sua participação é voluntária e pode interromper ou abandonar o preenchimento a qualquer momento, sem necessidade de justificar a sua decisão. Os dados recolhidos serão utilizados exclusivamente para fins académicos e científicos, sendo analisados de forma agregada, sem possibilidade de identificação individual. As respostas serão armazenadas com elevados padrões de segurança e protegidas contra acessos não autorizados. Este inquérito está em conformidade com o Regulamento Geral sobre a Proteção de Dados (RGPD) e as diretrizes éticas do ISCTE-IUL. Qualquer dúvida ou esclarecimento, pode contactar do e-mail djvx@iscte-iul.pt. Agradeço desde já a sua colaboração. Dê o seu consentimento para iniciar o inquérito.

- Consinto (1)
- Não Consinto (2)

Avançar para: Fim do inquérito Se Caro(a) participante, O meu nome é David Xavier, e sou doutorando no ISCTE -Instituto Universitá... = Não Consinto

Fim do bloco: Bloco 1

Início do bloco: Bloco de questões por defeito

Q2 Porque escolheu trabalhar onde trabalha?, sendo 1- sem importância e 7 muito importante, como avalia os seguintes itens na escolha da sua entidade empregadora. Escolhi trabalhar onde trabalho porque procurei ...

	Nada Importante 1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	Muito Importante 7 (7)
Reconhecimento/apreciação por parte da direção (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Um ambiente de trabalho divertido (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Um trampolim para um futuro emprego (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sentir-me bem comigo próprio por trabalhar para uma determinada entidade (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sentir-me mais autoconfiante por trabalhar para uma determinada entidade (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Ganhar experiência profissional (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Ter uma boa relação com os meus superiores (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Ter uma boa relação com os meus colegas (8)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Ter colegas que me apoiam e incentivam (9)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Trabalhar num ambiente estimulante (10)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Empregador inovador - novas práticas de trabalho/pensamento avançado (11)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Uma organização que valorize e utilize a minha criatividade (12)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Uma organização que produza produtos e serviços de elevada qualidade (13)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Uma organização que produza produtos e serviços inovadores (14)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Boas oportunidades de promoção dentro da entidade (15)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Uma entidade que contribui para a sociedade (16)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A oportunidade de aplicar o que aprendi na minha formação académica (17)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A oportunidade de ensinar aos outros o que aprendi (18)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Aceitação e pertença (19)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Uma organização orientada para o cidadão / cliente (20)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Segurança no emprego dentro da entidade (21)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Experiência prática interdepartamental (22)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Ambiente de trabalho feliz (23)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Um salário de base acima da média (24)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Um pacote de remuneração global atrativo (25)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q3 Como avalia o seu compromisso com a sua entidade 1- discordo totalmente e 7 concordo totalmente.

	Discordo Totalmente 1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	Concordo Totalmente 7 (8)
Tenho um forte sentimento de pertença à minha entidade (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sinto-me emocionalmente ligado a esta entidade (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sinto-me parte da família na minha entidade (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q4 Adequação pessoa-entidade . 1- discordo totalmente e 7 - concordo totalmente.

	Discordo Totalmente 1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	Concordo Totalmente 7 (7)
As coisas que valorizo na vida são muito semelhantes às coisas que a minha entidade valoriza. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Os meus valores pessoais correspondem aos valores e à cultura da minha entidade (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Os valores e a cultura da minha entidade são muito compatíveis com as coisas que valorizo na vida (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q5 Satisfação no trabalho. 1- discordo totalmente e 7 - concordo totalmente.

	Discordo Totalmente 1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	Concordo Totalmente 7 (7)
Sinto-me bastante satisfeito com o meu emprego atual (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Estou satisfeito/a com o meu trabalho atualmente (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Na maioria dos dias, sinto-me entusiasmado/a com o meu trabalho. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Gosto mais do meu trabalho do que o trabalhador médio. (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sinto verdadeiro prazer no meu trabalho. (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q6 A escolha do seu atual emprego foi influenciada por 1- discordo totalmente e 7 - concordo totalmente

	Discordo Totalmente 1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	Concordo Totalmente 7 (7)
A localização da sua residência (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A organização da sua vida privada (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
O tempo gasto na deslocação casa trabalho (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q7 Quanto tempo demora, em média, na sua deslocação casa-trabalho (somente ida)?

- ○ Até 15 minutos (1)
- ○ De 16 a 30 minutos (2)
- ○ De 31 a 60 minutos (3)
- ○ De 61 a 90 minutos (4)
- ○ Mais de 90 Minutos (5)

Q8 Qual o principal meio de transporte que utiliza na sua deslocação casa-trabalho ou casa-local de estudo?

- ○ A pé (1)
- ○ Automóvel ligeiro como condutor (2)
- ○ Automóvel ligeiro como passageiro (3)
- ○ Autocarro/Camioneta (4)
- ○ Transporte colectivo da Entidade empregadora (5)
- ○ Metropolitano (6)
- ○ Comboio (7)
- ○ Bicicleta (8)
- ○ Barco (9)
- ○ Outro (táxi, elétrico,…) Qual? (10) _____

Q9 Apenas para fins de descrição agregada da amostra, por favor responda às seguintes questões: Categoria Profissional

- ○ Dirigente de Topo (1)
- ○ Dirigente intermédio (2)
- ○ Tecnico Superior/Especialista de Informatica ou equiparado (3)
- ○ Assistente Tecnico/tecnico Informatica ou equiparado (4)
- ○ Assistente Operacional (5)

Q10 Género

- ○ Feminino (1)
- ○ Masculino (2)
- ○ Outro (3)
- ○ NS/NR (4)

Q11 Idade

- Entre 18 a 25 anos (1)
- Entre 26 a 30 anos (2)
- Entre 31 a 35 anos (3)
- Entre 36 a 40 anos (4)
- Entre 41 a 45 anos (5)
- Entre 46 a 50 anos (6)
- Entre 51 a 55 anos (7)
- Entre 56 e 60 anos (8)
- Mais de 60 anos (9)

Quebra de página

Q12 Habilitações Literárias

- Ensino Secundário (1)
- Ensino Profissional (2)
- Licenciatura (3)
- Mestrado (4)
- Doutoramento (5)
- Outro. Qual? (6) _____

Q13 Área de Formação (e.g. Gestão):

_____
_____
_____

Q14 Tipo de Entidade onde trabalha atualmente

- Secretaria Geral (1)
- Direção Geral (2)
- Inspeção (3)
- Instituto Público (4)
- Autoridade (5)
- Administração Local (6)
- Outro. Qual ? (7) _____

Q15 Antiguidade na entidade atual

- Menos de 1 ano (1)
- Entre 1 a 2 anos (2)
- Entre 2 a 6 anos (3)
- Entre 6 a 10 anos (4)
- Entre 10 a 15 anos (5)
- Entre 15 a 20 anos (6)
- Mais de 20 anos (7)

Fim do bloco: Bloco de questões por defeito

EMPAT ENGLISH

Início do bloco: Bloco 1

Dear participant,

My name is David Xavier, and I am a doctoral candidate at ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, in the Doctorate in Business Administration program. This survey is part of the research for my doctoral thesis, which aims to analyze why public employees choose the organizations where they work. Your participation is crucial to this study and will contribute to a better understanding of the subject. Completing the questionnaire will take approximately 5 minutes, and all responses will be treated anonymously and confidentially. By proceeding with this survey, you confirm your understanding of the following: participation is voluntary, data collected will be used solely for academic and scientific purposes, and responses will be securely stored. The survey complies with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and ISCTE-IUL's ethical guidelines. For questions or clarification, contact djvx@iscte-iul.pt. I appreciate your collaboration.

- I Consent
- I Do Not Consent

Fim do bloco: Bloco 1

Início do bloco: Bloco de questões por defeito

Why did you choose to work where you do? On a scale of 1 (not important) Please rate from 1 (Not Important) to 7 (Very Important).

	Not Important 1	2	3	4	5	6	Very Important 7
Recognition/appreciation from management	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A fun working environment	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A springboard for future employment	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feeling good about yourself as a result of working fora particular organization	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feeling more self-confident as a result of working fora particular organization	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Gaining career-enhancing experience	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Having a good relationship with your superiors	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Having a good relationship with your colleagues	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Supportive and encouraging colleagues	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Working in an exciting environment	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Innovative employer - novel work practices/forward-thinking	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The organization both values and makes use of your creativity	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The organization produces high-quality products and services	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The organization produces innovative products and services	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Good promotion opportunities within the organization	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Humanitarian organization - gives back to society	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Opportunity to teach others what you have learned	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Acceptance and belonging	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The organization is customer-orientated	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Job security within the organization	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Hands-on inter-departmental experience	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Happy work environment	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
An above average basic salary	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
An attractive overall compensation package	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Quebra de página

How do you rate your commitment to your organisation? 1 - I totally disagree and 7 - I totally agree.

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
I have a strong sense of belonging to my organization	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel emotionally attached to this organization	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel part of the family in my organization	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Person-organization fit . 1 - totally disagree and 7 - totally agree.

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
The things I value in life are very similar to the things my organization values.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My personal values match the values and culture of my organization	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The values and culture of my organization are very compatible with the things I value in life	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Job satisfaction. 1 - totally disagree and 7 - totally agree.

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
I feel quite satisfied with my current job	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I'm satisfied with my job at the moment	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Most days, I feel enthusiastic about my work.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I enjoy my job more than the average worker.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I take real pleasure in my work.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

The choice of your current job was influenced by 1 - totally disagree and 7 - totally agree

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
The location of your home							
Organizing your private life							
Time spent travelling to work							

How long does your average commute take (one way)?

- Up to 15 minutes
- From 16 to 30 minutes
- From 31 to 60 minutes
- From 61 to 90 minutes
- Over 90 Minutes

What is the main mode of transport you use to get from home to work or home to school?

- By foot
- Car as driver
- car as passenger
- Bus/coach
- Employer's public transport
- Underground
- Train
- Bicycle
- Boat
- Other (taxi, tram,...) Which? _____

For aggregate sample description purposes only, please answer the following questions: Professional Category

- Top management
- Middle management
- High technician / IT Specialist or equivalent
- Technical Assistant/Informatics Technician or equivalent
- Operational Assistant

Gender

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Don't know/Don't answer

Age

- Between 18 and 25 years old
- Between 26 and 30 years old
- Between 31 and 35 years old
- Between 36 and 40 years old
- Between 41 and 45 years old
- Between 46 to 50 years old
- Between 51 and 55 years old
- Between 56 and 60 years old
- Over 60

Academic qualifications

- Secondary education
- Professional education
- Degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate
- Other. Which? _____

Area (e.g. Management):

_____

_____

Type of organization where you currently work

General Secretariat

General Directorate

Inspectorate

Public Institute

Authority

Local Administration

Other. What is it? _____

Length of service in current organization

- Less than 1 year
- Between 1 and 2 years
- Between 2 and 6 years
- Between 6 and 10 years
- Between 10 and 15 years
- Between 15 and 20 years old
- Over 20 years old

Annex - Statement on the Use of Artificial Intelligence in the Elaboration of the Thesis

In the development of this doctoral thesis on employer attractiveness in Portuguese public administration, artificial intelligence (AI) tools specifically language models such as OpenAI's ChatGPT, Research Rabbit, Scopus AI, Mendeley AI, MAXQDA AI and Claude AI were used as complementary academic support. The integration of these technologies was conducted ethically, transparently, and under the critical judgment of the researcher, without replacing authorship, scientific analysis, or intellectual responsibility for the research outcomes.

AI was used in accordance with emerging international guidelines on responsible academic practice (Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024; Nature, 2023), and for the following purposes:

1. Support in structuring of academic text: AI contributed to the preliminary structuring of the topics per chapter such as in the literature review, theoretical framework, acknowledgements, dedication, and annexes. These were always critically reviewed, written, submitted to analyses for feedback, rewritten, and validated by the researcher to ensure academic rigor and alignment with doctoral-level standards (Stokel-Walker, 2023).

2. Summarizing and assisting in the interpretation of academic literature: AI tools assisted in synthesizing complex theoretical contributions during the exploratory phase of the literature review. The tool facilitated a broader mapping of core constructs relevant to the study (e.g., employer attractiveness, public service motivation, employer branding), which were later deepened using peer-reviewed sources.

3. Conceptual articulation and visual structuring: During model development, AI served as a reflective assistant, helping to map and articulate relationships between constructs such as symbolic benefits, value congruence, and employer image which was especially helpful for exploratory thinking stages (Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024).

4. Translation and bilingual drafting: AI was used to produce English versions of auxiliary texts such as the acknowledgements, dedication, and survey invitations. These were linguistically and culturally adapted by the researcher to meet institutional standards. AI was also used to refine the English writing so to identify and correct grammar or any other issues that could make reading less intelligible.

AI was not used for data generation, data manipulation, statistical analysis, or drawing empirical conclusions. All empirical stages including data collection, cleaning, coding,

statistical testing, and interpretation were conducted entirely by the researcher, in line with scientific and ethical standards applicable to doctoral research.

The use of AI in this study aligns with the latest recommendations from the American Psychological Association (American Psychological Association, 2024) and scientific publishers (Nature, 2023) regarding the responsible integration of language models into scholarly writing. Its role was strictly limited to linguistic and structural assistance, with full accountability retained by the author.