



Article

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## The contributions of extracurricular internship activities in terms of learning potential for administration training

As contribuições das atividades do estágio extracurricular em termos de potencial de aprendizagem para a formação em administração

Las contribuciones de las actividades de lo estágio extracurricular em términos de potencial de aprendizaje para la formación em administración

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**Abstract:** This research reveals reflections that contribute to the formulation of self-evaluation policies by each university intern and studies in the field of organizations with an emphasis on the management of people development policies that will benefit the training of graduates, future administrators, who aim to achieve significant and critical learning in their extracurricular internship experiences. The purpose was to analyze the contributions of extracurricular supervised internship activities in terms of significant and critical learning potential for the training of students in the administration course at a Brazilian Federal University. From the critical perspective of the theory of meaningful learning, propositions were identified that served as a basis for analyzing the interns' experiences in their internship activities. From the empirical theoretical confrontation, the analysis revealed that internship activities, for the most part, do not contribute in terms of potentially significant and critical learning to the training of students, but contribute to the reinforcement of potentially more mechanical learning in the organizations who receive them. The diagnosis of this case study contributes to reflections on supervised internship management policies in organizations, in which the importance of the proactive and meaningful learning process of interns to leverage their training is discussed.

**Keywords:** learning; internship activities; extracurricular internship.

**Resumo:** Esta pesquisa apresenta reflexões que contribuem para a formulação de políticas de autoavaliação de cada universitário estagiário e para os estudos no campo das organizações, com ênfase na gestão de políticas de desenvolvimento de pessoas que beneficiem a formação de graduandos, futuros administradores, que almejam conquistar uma aprendizagem significativa e crítica em suas experiências de estágio extracurricular. O propósito foi analisar as contribuições das atividades do estágio supervisionado extracurricular em termos de potencial de aprendizagem significativa e crítica para a formação de estudantes do curso de administração de uma Universidade Federal brasileira. A partir da perspectiva crítica da teoria de aprendizagem significativa, foram identificadas as proposições que serviram como base para a análise das experiências dos estagiários em suas atividades de estágio. A partir do confronto teórico empírico, a análise relevou que as atividades do estágio, em sua maioria, não contribuem para uma aprendizagem potencialmente significativa e crítica na formação dos estudantes, mas colaboram para o reforço de uma aprendizagem potencialmente mais mecânica nas organizações que os recebem. O diagnóstico deste estudo de caso contribui com reflexões acerca das políticas de gestão de estágio supervisionado nas organizações, discutindo a importância do processo proativo e significativo de aprendizagem dos estagiários para a alavancagem de sua formação.

**Palavras-chave:** aprendizagem; atividades de estágio; estágio extracurricular.

**Resumen:** Esta investigación revela reflexiones que contribuyen a la formulación de políticas de autoevaluación por parte de cada pasante universitario y estudios en el campo de las organizaciones con énfasis en la gestión de políticas de desarrollo de personas que beneficiarán la formación de los egresados, futuros administradores que apuntan a lograr un aprendizaje significativo crítico en sus experiencias de prácticas extracurriculares. El objetivo fue analizar las contribuciones de las actividades extracurriculares de prácticas supervisadas en términos de potencial de aprendizaje significativo y crítico para la formación de estudiantes de la carrera de administración de una Universidad Federal brasileña. Desde la perspectiva crítica de la teoría del aprendizaje significativo, se identificaron proposiciones que sirvieron de base para analizar las experiencias de los pasantes en sus actividades de pasantía. A partir de la confrontación teórica empírica, el análisis reveló que las actividades de pasantía, en su mayor parte, no contribuyen en términos de aprendizaje potencialmente significativos y críticos a la formación de los estudiantes, pero sí contribuyen al refuerzo de aprendizaje potencialmente más mecánicos en la organización quienes los reciben. El diagnóstico de este estudio de caso contribuye a reflexiones sobre las políticas de gestión de pasantía supervisadas en las organizaciones, en las que se discute la importancia del proceso de aprendizaje proactivo y significativo de los pasantes para potenciar su formación.

**Palavras chave:** aprendiendo; actividades de prácticas; prácticas extracurriculares.

## 1 Introduction

Internship is "[...] the locus where students' professional identity is constructed [...]" and where they should develop a "[...] reflective and critical action [...]", making it an activity that requires planning and systematization (Buriolla, 2001, p. 13). It functions as a learning-practice environment (Oliveira et al., 2020).

This practice, where knowledge exchange occurs, is a learning space lasting up to two years, as per art. 11 of the Internship Law no. 11.788/2008 (Brasil, 2008). This temporal aspect is crucial in evaluating the knowledge construction process for interns and their development in attitudes, skills, and competencies during their undergraduate education.

In addition, according to Article 1 of Law 11.788/2008, the internship, regardless of whether it is compulsory as a course subject or carried out in an organization, called extracurricular, is "[...] a supervised school educational act [...] aimed at preparing for productive work [...]". Therefore, the two-year period needs to be well planned, because the internship, as well as being aimed at integrating the educational process and fulfilling the social role of the granting institutions, is also aimed at the trainees' learning (IEL, 2011).

The learning process is continuous and never-ending (Ordonez; Cachioni, 2009) and includes, among other important aspects, knowing how to use concepts in order to be able to apply them (Bethlem, 2001). However, especially when seeking meaningful and critical learning, it takes more than knowing how to apply concepts, it is necessary to be concerned with the construction of meanings in a progressive and critical way, in critically acquiring this new knowledge (Moreira, 2011), which implies practicing proactive behavior in the search for new knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2012). Meaningful learning depends on the construction of relevant specific knowledge, arising from a process of capturing, internalizing, differentiating and reconciling meanings, which is not immediate, but progressive, with ruptures and continuities, involving negotiation of meanings (Moreira, 2011). Meaning is the most stable part of sense, and this depends on the progressive mastery of problem situations, learning situations (Moreira, 2011) and an environment that encourages proactivity in the search for new meanings, in which communication is present (Gonzalez et al., 2012).

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In this sense, the internship cannot be an environment for simply carrying out tasks (IEL, 2011). In addition, business students should be engaged in the practical context associated with their area of work, with opportunities to construct meaning and be encouraged to develop sensitivity to human aspects, not only having technical training but being a strategist of the future (Aktouf, 2005).

Given this context, this study assumes that extracurricular internships should focus on meaningful and critical learning, as this allows learners to deal with the quantity and uncertainty of knowledge, as well as the uncertainties and changes of contemporary life (Moreira, 2011). It also allows learners to self-evaluate their commitment to proactively seeking new knowledge in order to improve their learning (Gonzalez et al., 2012). This is the context that drove the effort to answer the following question: - In what way do extracurricular supervised internship activities contribute in terms of the potential for meaningful and critical learning in the training of business administration students?

The purpose of this study was to analyze how extracurricular supervised internship activities contribute in terms of significant and critical learning potential to the education of management students at a Brazilian Federal University. In order to achieve this objective, it was necessary to diagnose what the extracurricular internship experience was like for the students in terms of learning, describing the meanings they constructed about their internship activities, whether they were mechanical or whether they were, including how and why they were meaningful. In addition, a diagnosis was made of the trainees' understanding of the activities they experienced during a minimum period of six months within the same organization, verifying whether or not these activities contributed to their training as undergraduate business students. Finally, it was necessary to identify the contributions in terms of meaningful and critical learning to the training of these trainees, which implied a comparative study between the students' points of view and the theoretical framework of reference, as shown below.

This research presents a topical issue that requires the production of knowledge for a better understanding and consequent contribution to higher education training. On the other hand, it is worth noting that its proposition goes beyond a theoretical understanding, since from the critical perspective of the theory of meaningful learning,



this study seeks to identify propositions for analyzing the experiences of interns in their internship activities. This study is relevant insofar as it deals with an important aspect for business students: the achievement of meaningful and critical learning in their extracurricular internship experiences until they graduate. According to Castro (2006, p. 61) "[...] we say that a topic is important when it is somehow linked to a crucial issue that polarizes or affects a substantial segment of society". In the case of this research, this applies to the morning and evening administration students at a Brazilian federal university, through their learning experiences from extracurricular internship activities. Conducting this case study provides a way of self-evaluating the students who do extracurricular internships in relation to their own learning in the academic sphere and in the extracurricular sphere, within organizations, and contributes useful information about the influence of the learning policies of internship-granting organizations on the learning of their management trainees.

According to the literature review carried out by searching for articles in the Scopus database, it was found that there are no studies exploring this context, which is in need of discussion with a view to improving management trainees in training. The Scopus database was used because it is a reference for indexing current studies (Bufren et al., 2016). Therefore, it is assumed that the study of the topic of learning in the extracurricular internship environment, i.e. in the granting organizations, is relevant to the training of management students, based on the construction of meaning, exchange and sharing of knowledge, with opportunities to learn to question what they say they know and, consequently, learn in a meaningful and critical way at this stage of their professional and academic training. This research assumes that the organization that offers internships can benefit from the results of this study in drawing up a management policy that seeks to develop its interns based on content, strategies and routines that provide an opportunity for the exchange of knowledge and a space for them to (re)signify their knowledge in administration, which can end up having a positive impact on the improvement of different processes and management policies of the organization that receives them.

The topic of meaningful learning has been explored in the context of the teaching-learning process in undergraduate courses, as in the research by Romero, Cazorla and Buzón (2017), but with a special focus on the health area, exemplified by the research by Bressington et al. (2018), it has also been addressed in the understanding of the teacher training process in higher education institutions (Kostiainen et al., 2018), in the partnership between higher education teachers and their students to transform the learning process (Sailen; Mahmoud, 2018), 2018), in the partnership between higher education teachers and their students to transform the learning process (Nel, 2017) and in improving the digital pedagogy of teachers and their students (Sailin; Mahmor, 2018), however, despite the importance of these debates in dialogue with meaningful learning, the analysis of the contributions of

extracurricular internship activities in terms of the potential for meaningful and critical learning for the training of students, especially in the area of administration, has not been investigated before.

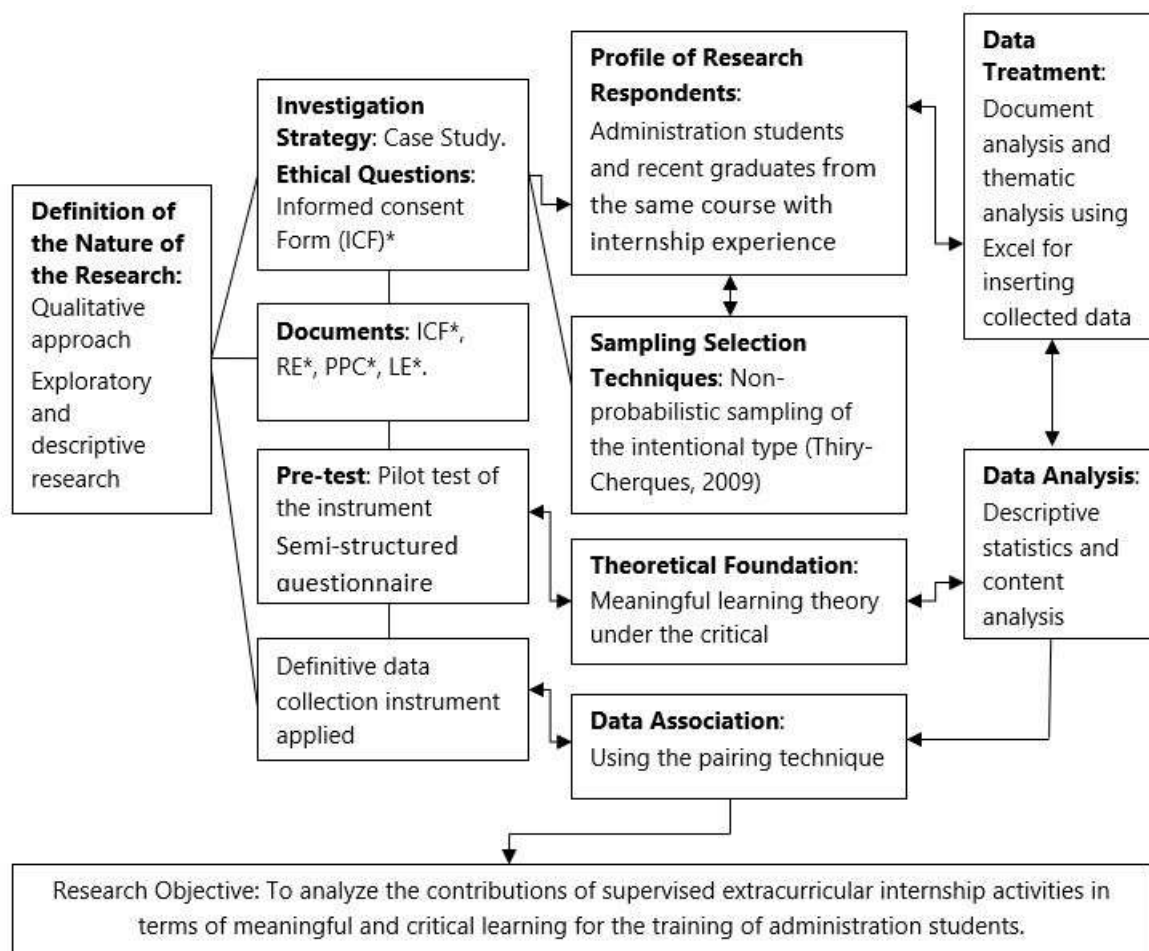
Some authors have dedicated their efforts to monitoring graduates in their postgraduate training (Trevisol; Balsanello, 2022), while others (Verhine; Freitas, 2012) advocate integration and complementarity between aspects of higher education evaluation. This research looks at the monitoring of those who are in the process of training during their undergraduate studies in administration, while taking part in extracurricular internship experiences in the area of administration. Based on the experiences of these students, analyzed on the basis of the theoretical assumptions arising from the adaptation of Moreira (2011) schematic view, in dialogue with the schematic view of Gonzalez et al. (2012), which addresses the influence of learning policy on the behavior of the individual who learns, this study contributes with reflections on the student intern's self-assessment process regarding their learning potential during the extracurricular internship period, while developing in the area of activity.

After the introductory part, we move on to present the methodological procedures, the theoretical basis, the analysis of the results and the final considerations, including conclusions and suggestions for future research.

## 2 Methodology

The methodological path of this research is shown in Figure 1. To achieve the proposed objective, a case study research strategy was used, which seeks to answer "how" and "why" questions (YIN, 2005).

Figure 1 - The path taken to carry out the research



Legend: \* = Documents presented throughout the methodology section.

Source: Own elaboration.

Considering the nature of the phenomenon investigated, this study has a qualitative approach, as it represents a means of exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals and groups attribute to some social or human problem (Creswell, 2010), but also of understanding the meaning that people give to their lives and to things (Moresi, 2003). In the case of this research, we sought to analyze the meanings attributed by students to extracurricular internship activities in terms of learning, verifying whether they are potentially significant and critical or potentially mechanical for their management training. Then, using the pairing technique, which involves theoretical and empirical comparison, we sought to analyze the contributions of these activities in terms of meaningful and critical learning for the education of business students.

In order to achieve the aim of this research, it was necessary to contact students who had at least six months' internship experience in the same organization. The people interviewed should be those who are directly linked to the focus of analysis or who are able to provide information about it (Bardin, 2016). To select the students, the intentional or judgmental selection method was used, in which the "subjects are selected because they represent the relevant characteristics of the population under study" (Thiry-Cherques, 2009, p. 21). In all, 53 students received the link with the collection instrument because they met the necessary requirement. Once a total of 30 responses had been received, no more were allowed. We then began to analyze the data collected from these 30 returns, 12 of which presented the problem of repeated answers to the objective questions. Therefore, the number of returns with valid answers was only 18.

The aim of the collection phase was to identify each student's understanding of the activities they experienced during their extracurricular internship, and to see if these activities contributed or are contributing to their management education. In addition, we sought to understand what these contributions are in terms of learning, analyzing whether and in what way they move more towards potentially significant and critical learning for management training, or whether they move more towards potentially mechanical and operative (repetitive) learning.

To this end, the questions in the survey instrument were drawn up on the basis of the theoretical foundation of the theory of meaningful and critical learning and the bibliography on extracurricular internship practice, in order to check whether the internship activities contribute in a potentially meaningful and critical way in terms of learning, and/or whether they contribute to potentially operative (repetitive and/or reactive), mechanical-type learning. All the questions in the collection instrument are explored in the chapter on the presentation and discussion of the results and were drawn up on the basis of the theoretical assumptions made in this research, which were also addressed in the discussion of the results.

In all, there were 18 objective questions, 10 open questions and 08 semi-open questions. We arrived at a total of 36 questions after pilot-testing the instrument with a group of ten students who met the research requirements. The average time taken to answer the 36 questions in the questionnaire was approximately seven minutes.

In order to get in touch with the internship universe and deepen our understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, we also carried out a documentary analysis of the following data sources (Figure 1): (1) the Internship Commitment Term (TCE), to analyze the internship's rules, regulations and objectives; (2) Internship Reports (RE) submitted by student interns to the university's internship coordinators, in which the intern's direct supervisor evaluates their performance in relation to the evaluation criteria set out in this document and, in some REs, it was also



possible to analyze the students' evaluation of the internship environment; (3) the Pedagogical Project for Administration Courses (PPC), for both the morning and evening shifts; and, finally, (4) the Internship Law, the latter two being used to verify the objectives associated with internship activities.

The data triangulation technique (Figure 1) was used with the aim of comparing the information in these documents with the information collected from the student interns, as well as helping in the process of defining the themes of analysis, according to Bardin (1977). For ethical and confidentiality reasons, it was decided not to disclose the name of the educational institution where the interns' study, presented here as "Universidade Federal Brasileira (UFB)", nor the name of any organization where the internship was carried out, mentioning only whether they are public, private or of another type, and the type of business of each organization.

Before each student answered the closed, open and semi-open questions in the semi-structured questionnaire, they were shown a message containing the necessary requirement to take part in the survey: the student must meet the criterion of having at least six months' experience in the same organization, whether public, private or otherwise, in terms of an internship. Throughout the questionnaire itself, this criterion was present as a way of encouraging participation only from students who had had enough time to get to know all the activities at the site of their extracurricular internship.

At the start of this survey, which was carried out by sending a Google Forms link via email, the students read and agreed to the ICF. The survey instrument was divided into three parts: in the first, each respondent had to read the ICF and agree to it in order to start the survey. In the second, the student's profile characteristics were explored, such as age, shift and period in the undergraduate course, whether or not they are de-periodized, whether or not they are currently doing an internship and their experiences in public, private or other organizations in terms of internships. Finally, focusing on just one organization where the respondent had had at least six months of internship experience, questions were asked linked to the theoretical framework, with semi-open questions about the characteristics of the internship site and about the respondent in this environment. A 7-point scale was also used, developed in the light of the theoretical framework, in which the respondent had to choose whether they totally agreed (point 7 on the scale) or totally disagreed with the statements (point 1 on the scale).

The information contained both in the documents linked to the internship activities and in the answers obtained from the semi-structured questionnaire was analyzed using the content analysis technique, which aims to understand the game environment at a given time and which "[...] seeks to know what lies behind the words it focuses on" (Bardin, 2016, p. 38). Based on Bardin (2016) guidelines, first the material

was selected (data and information collected), then the themes for analysis were identified, in this case seven general themes, and finally the data was processed and interpreted, the phase in which inferences and results are generated, in which assumptions may or may not be confirmed. The seven themes were: meaningful learning, subsumers or anchor ideas or specific knowledge, meaningful learning and machine learning, conditions for meaningful learning, prior organizers, machine learning and a critical view of meaningful learning.

After the statistical analysis of the data collected, the pairing technique was used, which associates the data collected with the theoretical model (Gil, 2002), in this case with the concepts of learning and the learning continuum of Moreira (2011). Next, we considered the critical view of the Meaningful Learning Theory (MLT) and the assumptions of the schematic view adapted from Gonzalez et al. (2012) and Moreira (2011), which address the influence of the learning development policy present in the internship environment on the behavior of the individual who learns.

### 3 Theoretical foundation

As already mentioned in the introductory part of this study, this research made use of the schematic view of the continuum of meaningful learning and machine learning by Moreira (2011), an author who explores David Ausubel's MLT. The schematic view of Gonzalez et al. (2012) was also used, which relates the type of learning achieved by the individual to the type of learning policy encouraged in the environment in which they are inserted. For this reason, the focus of this chapter is initially to explore the premises of these two schemes and then the critical perspective of meaningful learning, since it is hoped to relate the interns' experiences in the extracurricular internship environment to the premises of this perspective.

#### 3.1 Meaningful learning

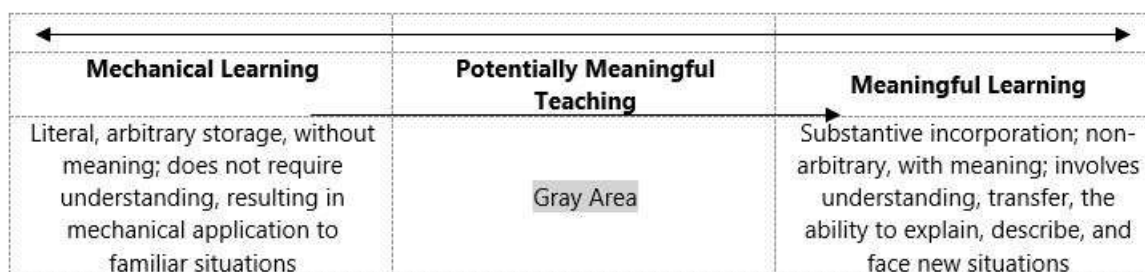
MLT, proposed by David Ausubel in the 1960s, states that learning is significant when new information acquires meaning from the individual's pre-existing cognitive structure (Ausubel, 1968). It is a type of learning in which symbolically expressed ideas interact in a non-literal way and not with any idea, but with some specifically relevant existing knowledge (Moreira, 2011).

Ausubel calls this knowledge, which is specifically relevant to the new learning, a subsumer or anchor idea, meaning the same as specific knowledge (Moreira, 2011). "In simple terms, a subsumer is the name given to a specific piece of knowledge, existing in the individual's knowledge structure, which allows them to give meaning to a new piece of knowledge presented to them or discovered by them" (Moreira, 2011, p. 14).

Meaningful learning is not learning that the individual never forgets, but rather learning in which the individual can easily retrieve the content in their memory when they return to study the same subject, which was, in fact, previously learnt in a meaningful way (Moreira, 2011). Mechanical learning, on the other hand, "is learning that is practically meaningless, purely memorised, that is used for tests and is forgotten, erased soon after"; "[...] it is the well-known rote learning, so used by students and so encouraged at school" (Moreira, 2011, p. 31-32). "It should be noted, however, that meaningful learning and mechanical learning are not a dichotomy [...], but [...] lie along the same continuum" (Figure 2) and "[...] there is a grey area between them" (Moreira, 2011, p. 32).

The existence of this continuum (Figure 2) between meaningful and mechanical learning is important because the transition from one form of learning to the other is not automatic, but progressive, involving ruptures and reconciliations of meanings. "[...] meaning is the most stable part of sense, and this depends on the progressive mastery of problem situations, learning situations" (Moreira, 2011, p. 33).

Figure 2 - A schematic view of the continuum between meaningful learning and machine learning, suggesting that, in practice, much of the learning takes place in the intermediate zone of this continuum and that potentially meaningful teaching can facilitate the student's 'walk' in this grey zone



Source: Moreira (2011, p. 32).

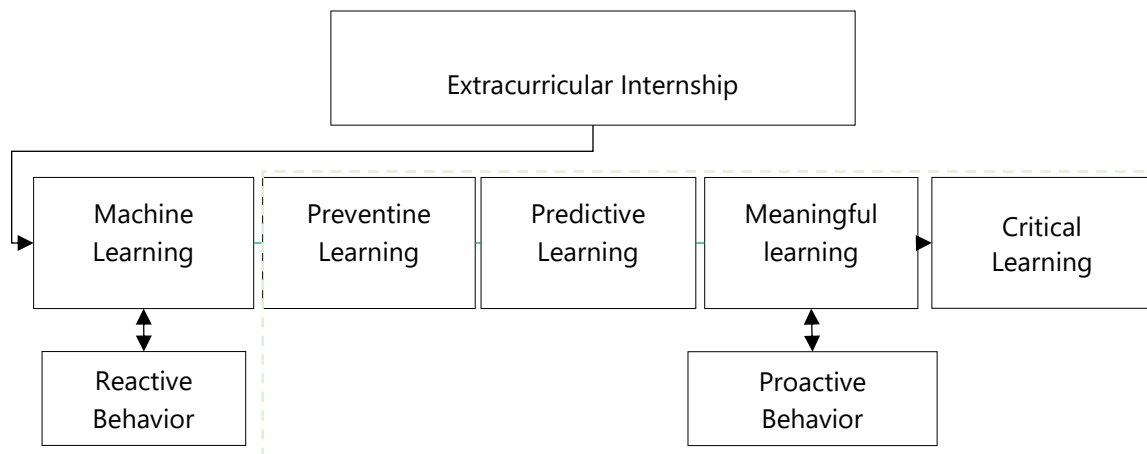
Furthermore, there are two conditions for meaningful learning: "potentially meaningful material, which implies the intrinsic logic of the material and the availability of specifically relevant knowledge, and a predisposition to learn" (Moreira, 2011, p. 25).

According to Gonzalez et al. (2012), the type of learning policy encouraged in a given context influences how the individual will behave and carry out their activities in that same context.

Based on the adaptation of Gonzalez et al. (2012) and the schematic view of Moreira (2011), the following schematization of the learning continuum in the extracurricular internship environment is presented (Figure 3):

Figure 3 - A schematic view of the continuum between mechanical learning and meaningful and critical learning, suggesting that, in practice, the type of learning resulting from experiences with

extracurricular internship activities is influenced by the type of learning policy practiced in the granting company and by the individual's own behavior in seeking their development



Source: Adapted from Gonzalez et al. (2012) and Moreira (2011).

The type of learning policy encouraged or practiced in a given environment influences the development of the individual's behavior which, on a continuum, can either tend to be potentially reactive, reacting only to the stimuli of the environment in relation to their process of seeking new knowledge and learning, or it can progress to a proactive type of behavior in this same process (Gonzalez et al., 2012).

### 3.2 Meaningful learning from a critical point of view

Learning is a change in behavior resulting from study, experience, warning, observation and interaction with the environment (Moraes, 1999). However, while it is necessary to live in society and integrate into it, it is also necessary "to be critical of it, to distance oneself from it and its knowledge when it is losing its way" (Moreira, 2011, p. 173). Thus, this research adopts the critical view of meaningful learning, where "[...] in contemporary society it is not enough to acquire new knowledge in a meaningful way, it is necessary to acquire it critically" (Moreira, 2011, p. 173). Which implies understanding that meaning lies in people, not in words; that "meaningful learning requires the sharing of meanings, but also implies personal meanings"; that the uncertainty of knowledge means that "it makes no sense to teach dogmatically"; that, just as prior knowledge is the variable that most influences learning, it can also inhibit new knowledge by not allowing the individual to perceive new meanings; that it is necessary to abandon teaching in which the student merely reproduces what the teacher says; and that the learner must be faced with active participation strategies and be responsible for their own learning (Moreira, 2011, p. 175). Here, we also analyze what Gonzalez et al. (2012) point out about the attitude of the individual who learns, highlighting proactivity in order to gain new information and knowledge, as well as the



importance of analyzing the influence of the type of learning management policy that exists in the environment where the individual is inserted.

Based on these studies, this research also sought to identify whether interns' activities in organizations enable a more proactive attitude towards more meaningful learning, in the light of the principles linked to the critical vision, or whether they are more geared towards mechanical learning and reactive to events, in the sense that interns always reproduce the same behavioral pattern when interacting with their internship activities in the organizational environment. The way in which this whole investigation was operationalized is detailed in the chapter on methodology.

## 4 Analysis and discussion of results

### 4.1 Analysis of the students' profile

As explained in the methodology, of the total of 53 students who were invited to take part in the survey, only 18 were considered valid returns among those who answered the semi-structured questionnaire. Of these, 50% are female students and 50% are students on the administration course at the Brazilian Federal University (UFB). The average age of the 18 students was 24.94 years old.

Of the 18 respondents, 61.11% (11 students) are studying in the evening, 33.33% (6 students) in the morning and 5.55% (1 student) is a recent graduate (Table 1). With regard to each student's current period in the business administration course, the majority are in their 8th period (Table 1). Of those who responded, 33.3% (6 students) said that they were unperiodized, i.e. they were not enrolled in at least 60% of the course's compulsory subjects; 61.1% (11 students) were not unperiodized and 5.6% (1 student) had graduated.

Table 1 - Profile of the student interns who took part in the survey

Data Collection Date in 2021				Fictional Name	Internship Duration in Selected Organization		
Year 2021	Administration Course Shift	Administration Course Semester	Responses		Public	Private	Other
18/07	Evening	7º	1 [female]	Alphalene	-	2 years	-
20/07	Evening	6º	2 [male]	Bravo	-	2 years	-
29/07	Evening	8º	3 [female]	Charlene	2 years	-	-
29/07	Morning	7º	4 [female]	Deltalene	-	19 m	-
18/08	Evening	9º	5 [female]	Ecolene	2 years	-	-
23/08	Evening	8º	6 [male]	Fox	-	2 years	-
24/08	Evening	9º	7 [male]	Golfy	18 m	-	-
25/08	Evening	8º	8 [female]	Hotelene	-	6 a 12 m	-
26/08	Graduate		9 [male]	Índio	-	2 years	-

28/08	Morning	8°	10 [female]	Juliete	6 m	-	-
31/08	Morning	8°	11 [female]	Kilomena	13 m	-	-
01/09	Morning	5°	12 [male]	Lima	2 years	-	-
02/09	Morning	5°	13 [female]	Maykely	6 m	-	-
17/09	Morning	7°	14 [female]	November a	2 years	-	-
18/09	Evening	9°	15 [male]	Oscar	-	2 years	-
21/09	Evening	8°	16 [male]	Papa	6 a 12 m	-	-
17/11	Evening	7°	17 [male]	Quebec	2 years	-	-
17/11	Evening	7°	18 [male]	Romeu	-	6 a 12 m	-

Source: Survey data.

From the survey of suggestions for improvement (Table 2) in the internship environment, it was possible to identify the needs of the interns and assess what they consider important in this environment.

Table 2 - Suggestions for improving the extracurricular internship experience

Interviewed Student	Internship Duration/Location	Suggestions for Improvement
Alphalene	2 years/Private	"More autonomy to carry out certain processes"
Bravo	2 years/Private	"Greater openness for dialogue with supervisors"
Deltalene	19 months/Private	"Provide more autonomy to interns through access to systems"
Fox	2 years/Private	"Be more flexible and accept feedback from interns who are part of the organization"
Hotelene	6 to 12 months/Private	"Check if all those involved are aligned with the organization's culture and projects. Also, work on training and development processes within the organization"
Índio	2 years/Private	"Develop problem-solving skills"
Oscar	2 years/Private	"Company and University connection"
Romeu	6 to 12 months/Private	"Include interns in more areas within the organization, so they can better understand the organization as a whole and understand its mechanisms and processes"
Charlene	2 years/Public	"All sectors should offer interns the opportunity to get to know each other's activities and understand the organization as a whole, from the environment to the processes"

Ecolene	2 years/Public	"More interaction and communication in the routines and activities of different sectors, in addition to a greater reception of feedback on the work carried out by interns"
Golfy	18 months/Public	"Listen more to the intern and provide activities that involve students more in the processes instead of assigning tasks that 'nobody wants to do,' i.e., repetitive and tedious tasks"
Juliete	6 months/Public	"Be more dynamic, but I know that in a public environment the processes are very similar"
Kilomena	13 months/Public	"Provide the intern with greater participation in technical and strategic functions, as the intern's work is very operational, which hinders knowledge acquisition"
Lima	2 years/Public	"Greater variety in activities assigned to interns to expand the knowledge gained during the internship period"
Maykely	6 months/Public	"Provide more challenging tasks for interns, something that truly takes them out of their comfort zone and brings learning"
Novembera	2 years/Public	"That activities be performed as challenging tasks, seeking to develop creativity and provide stability"
Papa	6 to 12 months/Public	"Focus more on communication efficiency. Give voice to interns in decision-making. Open more space for dialogue"
Quebec	2 years/Public	"That there be job rotation, so the intern can work with different sectors, expanding their knowledge base"

Source: Survey data.

This table of suggestions revealed, for example, that Golfy is demotivated by the activities, Papa doesn't appreciate the lack of dialog and communication, and Romeo complains about the lack of integration of the intern with the company's other processes. All these statements in Table 2 are explored in the analysis of the theme of learning in the internship environment.

## 4.2 Analysis of the potential for meaningful learning in extracurricular internship activities

An assumption of MLT is that when teaching is potentially meaningful, the learning process also becomes potentially even more meaningful, especially when facing new situations. In this sense, what we were able to analyse in the context of extracurricular supervised internship activities is that, among the students with 6 to 12 months' internship experience in a private organization, as in the case of Hotelene and Romeo, both perceived a lack of knowledge of the organizational whole on the part of the interns. For Papa, who interned in a public organization for the same period, it is necessary for everyone in the organization to be heard and for channels for dialogue to be opened. Juliete and Maykely, both of whom had spent exactly six months as interns in a public organization, stressed the need for interns to take part in activities that lead them to new knowledge and learning. It can be concluded that, for these students, the internship activities did not bring them closer to meaningful learning and that they are closer to mechanical learning when carrying out their internship activities.

In the analysis of the point of view of the group of students with 13 to 19 months in the same organization, this need to obtain new knowledge and new learning at the extracurricular internship site was also felt by the only respondent with 13 months' experience in a public organization, Kilomena, and highlighted by Golfy, who has 18 months' internship also in a public organization, who criticized the fact that the activities were "repetitive and boring". For interviewee Deltalene, who had 19 months' experience in a private organization, the trainee lacks the possibility of accessing the systems within the traineeship environment. It can be seen that this group of trainees is also in an internship environment where there is clear potential for mechanical learning.

Of the 10 respondents with two years' internship experience, four are women and six are men. In the group of women, only Althalene is an intern in a private organization, while Charlene, Ecolene and Novembera are interns in public organizations. From these four students, it was possible to analyze that the suggestions for improvement focused on themes such as autonomy, learning about the organization as a whole, communication, feedback, challenging activities and creativity (Table 2). In the group of male interns, Bravo, Fox, Índio and Oscar have internship experience in private organizations, while Lima and Québec have experience in public organizations. The themes that emerged from the suggestions for improving their internship experiences included: dialog, feedback, problem-solving skills, the company-university connection, challenging activities, diversifying activities and broadening knowledge. It can be concluded that, for these 10 students with two years' experience in the same internship location, whether in a public or private organization, the common themes are the lack of more challenging activities, the lack of



opportunities that offer more knowledge and learning, and the lack of feedback. In the same way as the previous groups, these trainees do not perceive opportunities in the internship environment to obtain new knowledge that challenges them, which reinforces the presence of potentially mechanical learning.

This analysis of the suggestions for improvement (Table 2) leads us to identify certain causes which, according to these students, would lead to greater satisfaction with the internship. Causes that they did not find in their respective organizations include: "Giving interns autonomy" (report from two interns from a private organization); 'Providing opportunities for dialogue with supervisors' and 'Providing space for supervisors to receive feedback from interns' (report from three interns, one of them from a private organization); 'Providing opportunities for interns to have contact with other sectors' (three interns from a public organization); 'Offering (elaborate) training to develop interns' (two interns, one from a public organization and one from a private organization); "Offer more efficient communication with trainees" (two trainees from public organizations); 'Offer engaging activities that are less repetitive and boring' (one trainee from a public organization); 'Offer a more dynamic routine' (one trainee from a public organization); 'Diversify trainees' activities', "Offer challenging activities" and "Make it possible to learn more" (two trainees from public organizations).

The questionnaire also sought to identify which internship activities were considered most significant, in the sense that they were most relevant to the students in terms of learning new knowledge and achieving new challenges by solving new problems.

#### **4.2.1 General analysis of internship activities in terms of their potential for meaningful and critical learning**

An analysis of the content of the internship activities carried out by each of the 18 interns revealed that the majority were predominantly repetitive in nature, rather than reflective. This conclusion was reached by analyzing the scope of these activities pointed out by the students, also revealed in the Internship Reports (RI), and comparing them with the meanings on the continuum between mechanical learning and meaningful learning. Considering the grey area (Moreira, 2010) regarding the type of teaching in the environment under discussion - which, in this case study, corresponds to the type of people management in the organizations that receive the students for internships - we arrived at the MLT statements and the critical perspective of this theory. In applying these statements, a seven-point scale was used, in which the respondents had to choose the degree of the scale that best aligned with their internship activities. When analyzing all the types of internship activities collected,

including comparing them with those in the internship reports, a concentration of repetitive activities was found.

The repertoire of these repetitive activities ranges, for example, from the trainee doing "plan cancellation" and "reimbursement request" (Deltalene account of the private non-profit institution that manages the health care of its beneficiaries where she did her internship), "feeding spreadsheets" (Golfy account of a state public bank), to "handling spreadsheets to update the indicators reported to clients" (Hotelene account of the private organization that offers specialized educational medical services), the "processing of files" (Maykely account of a public institution), "customer service", "internal customer service" (Indio account of a private cooperative financial institution), "filing" and "organizing documents and budget requests" (Juliete account of a public institution that provides legal advice and advocacy for the needy), "file organization" (Romeo account of a private financial organization with office and administrative support services), among others.

With regard to the activities considered repetitive and reflexive, the following were found: "carrying out activities related to sales and processes" (Bravo about the private organization that deals with the trade and retail of parts and accessories for motor vehicles), "managing ICT contracts" (Charlene account of the public company that deals with ordinary appeals and writs of review), "writing letters, dispatching cases [...], minutes of meetings", "recording and classifying documents received for filing" and "keeping and preserving files" (Ecolene account of the public institution that supports and encourages culture).

Among the activities considered most significant are: "giving support to the employees and also giving support to the cooperative members" (Alphalene account of the private organization, a cooperative financial institution).

This concentration on repetitive activities contributes to the stimulation of machine learning, which is also reinforced by the types of feedback provided by the professionals who supervise and evaluate the interns in the organizations, according to an analysis of the internship reports containing the interns' evaluations. It was observed that in the eight private organizations linked to eight respondents, 60% of the interns' activities are repetitive, while in the ten public organizations of the other ten interns, the percentage of repetitive activities reaches 80%.

Considering the theoretical framework of reference, when someone claims to have learned a piece of content, but forgets it completely, as if they had never learned it, "it is likely that the learning was mechanical, not significant" (Moreira, 2011, p. 17-18). The trainees were then asked about the relevant activities of the internship, checking whether these activities came easily to mind. Bravo (with 2 years in a private organization), Charlene (with 2 years in a public organization), Deltalene (with 19 months in a private organization), Ecolene (with 2 years in a public organization),

Hotelene (from 6 to 12 months in a private organization), Índio (with 2 years in a private organization) and Novembera (with 2 years in a public organization) answered that they totally remember these relevant activities, scoring 7. However, 5 trainees did not remember: Juliete, Lima, Papa, Golfy and Oscar. Of these, Juliete (with 6 months in a public organization) scored 4 (Graph 2), indicating a vague recollection. Lima (with 2 years in a public organization) and Papa (6 to 12 months in a public organization) scored 3, indicating even more difficulty in remembering. Golfy (18 months in a public organization) and Oscar (2 years in a private organization) scored 1, indicating that they don't remember. Therefore, learning was probably mechanical for these last 5 trainees, who scored between 1 and 4, while for the other 13 trainees there was a greater potential for significant learning, in the sense that they confirmed that they remember knowledge obtained in the internship that contributed to their training in administration.

### 4.3 Analysis of internship activities in the light of the theoretical framework

In order to achieve the proposed objective, it was necessary to explore the seven general themes of the content analysis of the sources of evidence. Based on the theoretical assumptions related to both the potential for machine learning and the potential for meaningful and critical learning, it was possible to identify the link between what MLT advocates and what was expected to be found in the content of management students' responses in terms of learning experiences in extracurricular internship activities. Theme 1, referring to significant learning and its theoretical meaning, made it possible to reflect that, in relation to what was expected to be found in the answers, there was some connection between the internship activities and the undergraduate subjects, and there was also an opportunity for the intern to make interactions between the knowledge of these environments, which was relevant to them, and also that the student had a proactive stance in relating the academic context to the context of their internship. These conditions were revealed through a statement presented on a 7-point scale in the questionnaire, which the interns had to evaluate in relation to their internship activities. The answers were as follows: 5.56% (1 student) ticked 1 - I totally disagree with the statement; 11.11% (2 students) ticked 2 - Either there was no opportunity for such interaction or there was, but it wasn't relevant; 5.56% (1 student) ticked 3 - Neither disagree nor agree; 5.56% (1 student) ticked 4 - Don't totally agree, but agree to some extent with the statement; and 27.78% (5 students) totally agreed with the statement.

On the basis of this data and considering Ausubel's (2000) assertions that what allows meaning to be given to new knowledge presented to the individual, or what allows meaning to be given to new knowledge discovered by the individual themselves, is the specific knowledge existing in their knowledge structure - in other words, their

subsumers or anchor ideas - we can see the need for the individual to have a knowledge structure in order to attribute meaning to new knowledge. In the case of this research, the contents of the subjects in the undergraduate course are equivalent to Ausubel's subsumers. For 66.67% of the students surveyed, these contents were accessed in some way during their internship activities. It was possible to see that there was an opportunity for interaction between the knowledge from these two environments and that this interaction was relevant for twelve of the eighteen students, especially for five of them who totally agreed with the statement that yes, there was room for some interaction between the knowledge from these two environments and that this interaction was, in some way, relevant.

When exploring theme 2 generated by the content analysis - the subsuming theme or anchor idea or specific knowledge - what was expected to be found from the students' point of view was that the supervised internship activities contributed to new knowledge, while at the same time the content of the subjects in the management course favored the emergence of new knowledge and was useful for the student in solving problems during their internship experiences. It was found that 55.56% (ten students) agreed with the statement that the subject content was (or has been) useful during their internship experiences, corresponding to the sum of points 5, 6 and 7 on the seven-point scale in the semi-structured questionnaire. Students Golfy, Juliete, Maykely and Romeu didn't know whether they agreed or not, as they scored 4 on the scale, while four other students, Fox, Índio, Oscar and Papa didn't agree with the statement (points 2 and 3 on the scale).

With regard to each trainee's assessment of the learning they experienced in the internship environment, 61.11% (eleven students) said that the activities provided learning, almost all of which was very significant; 27.78% (five students) said that the activities provided learning, almost all of which was significant; and 11.11% (two students, Golfy and Papa) said that the activities provided learning, but most of it was not significant. It can be seen that, in general, Golfy had contact with more mechanical activities, while Papa was possibly involved in more mechanical than meaningful activities, reflecting the perception that both did not have a meaningful interaction with the activities they experienced.

With regard to theme 3, meaningful learning and machine learning, Moreira (2011) states that machine learning can be detected when an individual says that they remember absolutely nothing about a particular piece of content. Therefore, we sought to diagnose whether the students could easily remember the knowledge acquired during the internship and whether this knowledge was, in fact, relevant to their management training. In this context, Golfy and Oscar indicated that they totally disagreed with this statement, indicating that they did not remember it. This confirms that Golfy did indeed have contact with predominantly mechanical activities, as highlighted in Table 2. In addition, 11.11% of the trainees do not remember it easily



(they marked point 3 on the scale), 22.22% agree that they remember it easily (they marked point 6), and 38.89%, or seven of the eighteen trainees surveyed, totally agree, indicating that they completely remember the traineeship activities and that these were relevant to their management training.

One of the principles of meaningful learning is that the learner is faced with active participation strategies and takes responsibility for their own learning (Moreira, 2011). When "the substantive, non-arbitrary, meaningful incorporation of new knowledge is achieved, in which there is understanding, transfer, the ability to explain, describe and deal with new situations", it is assumed that the individual is moving towards meaningful learning (Moreira, 2011, p. 32). In this sense, the students were exposed to the following statement: "I had (have) experiences in my internship activities in which I was (able) to face new situations, including having (had) the space to solve problems, even with other people". It was found that 50% of the students totally agreed with the statement. The aim was to identify the presence of more proactive student behavior in the internship environment when faced with new or challenging situations, if such situations exist at the internship site. Of the remaining 50%, 33.33% (six) agreed with the statement, but not completely; 11.11% neither agreed nor disagreed; and 5.56% disagreed with the statement.

Regarding theme 4, the conditions for meaningful learning, namely: "[...] the learning material must be potentially meaningful, and the learner must demonstrate a predisposition to learn" (Moreira, 2011, p. 24), it was found that, concerning the materials at the internship site, they were not meaningful only for one respondent, Fox, who had two years of internship experience in a private organization

When asked about the opportunities they had in the internship environment to learn new knowledge relevant to their training in administration, the students provided scores ranging from 0 to 100. The results reveal that only three students awarded a score of 100, indicating they felt the internship environment offered significant new learning opportunities for their development. Three students gave a score of 90, five students scored 85, two students scored 80, two students scored 75, two students scored 60, and one student gave a score of 10.

It was also found that most students assessed that they experienced meaningful learning and rated themselves as proactive in seeking new knowledge. For 61.11% (eleven students), the internship activities provided learning experiences, all of which were highly meaningful. For 27.78% (five students), the activities provided learning experiences, with nearly all being meaningful. Meanwhile, 11.11% (two students) stated that the activities provided learning, but most of it was not significant. When presented with the statement, "I believe my attitude as an intern, throughout my time at this organization, was undoubtedly: (select the option that best aligns with your experience)", the results showed a positive trend in terms of proactivity in seeking new

knowledge for the majority. For 61.11% (eleven students), their approach was consistently proactive in seeking new information and knowledge. For 33.33% (six students), their approach was almost always proactive, while 5.56% (one student) considered their attitude to be unmotivated over time in seeking new information and knowledge.

In order to deepen the understanding of the reason behind this outcome - that is, the fact that seven students did not rate the internship environment as very good or excellent in terms of providing new knowledge - the focus was placed on the relationships between them and their respective supervisors. On a seven-point scale, students were presented with the following statement:

"As an intern, I can affirm that I had (or have) interactions with my immediate supervisor(s), as well as with other colleagues at the internship site, that were (or are) able to address my shortcomings in performing my internship tasks and activities".

The results revealed that 49.99% (nine students) fully agreed with this statement, marking a score of 7 on the scale. Another 11.11% (two students) marked a score of 6, and 27.78% (five students) marked a score of 5. Thus, 38.89% (seven students) did not fully agree but agreed to some extent with the statement.

The conclusion is that there were interactions with supervisors and internship colleagues that provided, for most interns, an opportunity to address their deficiencies in carrying out their tasks. However, a question remained as to whether the interns were also able to acquire new knowledge that was indeed meaningful and that fostered critical reflections through these interactions. For this reason, theme 7 was explored. In this context, the theme of Critical Perspective on Meaningful Learning reflects that "it is not enough to acquire new knowledge meaningfully; it is essential to acquire it critically" and that, "while it is necessary to live in this society and integrate into it, one must also be critical of it, distancing oneself from it and its knowledge [...]" (Moreira, 2011, p. 173). Thus, it was expected that the interns would indicate having had internship experiences where they were given space or opportunity to express their ideas and viewpoints, including when they disagreed with the current situation, and that they had access to different forms of interaction in the learning process during their internship activities.

Thus, regarding theme 7, the following statement was presented on the scale: "I have experienced (or am experiencing) internship situations where I had the space or opportunity to express my ideas and viewpoints, even when I disagreed with the prevailing situation." Of the eighteen students, a total of five, or 27.77%, did not fully agree but agreed to some extent with this statement. Meanwhile, 44.44% (eight students) fully agreed, marking a score of 7 on the scale. A score of 6 was marked by

16.66% (three students), and a score of 5 by 11.11% (two students), meaning that 27.77% (five students) agreed to some extent without fully agreeing. Additionally, 16.66% (three students) neither disagreed nor agreed, indicating uncertainty in their responses. Although the majority affirmed agreement, it is important to analyze what may have occurred in this process, considering that five students did not fully agree, and three were uncertain. To further explore this point, the improvement suggestions provided by each intern, previously presented, reveal the reasons behind this result. With theme 6 on mechanical learning, the aim was to investigate whether interns would indicate having learned relevant knowledge that helped them connect with other knowledge already present in their cognitive structures.

To obtain this information, the following statement was used in the seven-point scale question: "I can affirm that, through internship activities, I was able to learn relevant knowledge that helped (or helps) me connect with other knowledge already present in my cognitive structures". In total, 50% of respondents did not fully agree with the statement. On the other hand, 44.44% (eight students) fully agreed, while 5.56% (one student) felt that either this opportunity was lacking or, if it existed, it was not relevant. Thus, it is concluded that the internship environment, regardless of the type of organization, requires management capable of fostering routines with closer interactions and greater opportunities for information exchange with interns. This would better align with their goals, knowledge, and skills, promoting the development of more proactive behavior among interns and encouraging them to seek new knowledge and more meaningful experiences.

The analysis of empirical results, in comparison with the schematic perspective adapted from Moreira (2011) and Gonzalez et al. (2012), revealed that meaningful learning occurred in the training of administration students through extracurricular internship activities, though at a moderate to weak level. Moreover, the empirical content obtained did not confirm the presence of extracurricular internship activities capable of offering a potentially more meaningful and simultaneously critical learning process for students. At the same time, this case study found that internship sites (or host companies) lack a learning policy capable of fostering communication between employees and interns, as well as providing more space for interactions, particularly those involving knowledge exchange.

## 5 Final considerations

The purpose of this study was to analyze how extracurricular supervised internship activities contribute, in terms of potential for meaningful and critical learning, to the training of administration students. In this regard, following the theoretical and empirical comparison, which included studying both the conditions for meaningful learning and the principles that facilitate meaningful and critical learning,

it was found that most interns interpreted the materials or explicit content in the internship environment as potentially meaningful and that most interns remained proactive throughout the extracurricular internship in seeking new knowledge. However, the internship activities themselves largely did not provide opportunities for exposure to new and, at the same time, relevant knowledge that would encourage them to participate more actively in their own learning process.

Regarding the principles that facilitate meaningful learning, it was concluded that most interns lack the encouragement and space to engage with new situations that would lead them to reflect rather than simply repeat patterns in a monotonous flow of activities. It was found that there is a shortage of opportunities for interns to be challenged in problem-solving and a lack of closer dialogue with professionals from other areas of the organization. Such interactions would potentially enrich the knowledge repertoire of interns pursuing their undergraduate studies.

Still regarding the facilitators of meaningful learning, it was concluded that there is a lack of more substantial dialogue between interns and their immediate supervisors, as well as more effective communication, particularly concerning feedback during performance evaluation phases.

It was concluded that, according to most respondents, internship activities require greater diversity and dynamism to create a more engaging and challenging learning environment. Beyond recalling relevant knowledge that contributes to education in administration, it is essential to consider the need to foster other relationships within the internship setting that can broaden interns' repertoire of experiences. These relationships should go beyond potentially meaningful learning and also facilitate critical thinking through experiences that encourage divergent, not just convergent, thinking. It is crucial that the internship environment allows interns to ask more questions during interactions with other colleagues, rather than simply being asked to replicate responses or repeat patterns. This practice of questioning and reflection would prevent the consolidation of predominantly mechanical learning and avoid stagnation caused by reinforcing a more reactive intern behavior - where the intern merely reacts when instructed to meet a particular standard or learns to respond only after events occur, rather than considering solutions before issues arise or before being asked for their perspective, opinion, or contribution.

From a theoretical perspective, this research provided guidance on diagnosing the learning experiences of administration interns, shaped by the type of learning management policy within extracurricular internship environments and by each intern's individual behavior in pursuing their own improvement. Its results contributed to the development of a schematic view that spans from mechanical to meaningful and critical learning, tied to the context of extracurricular internship activities experienced by undergraduate administration students a view that will be presented in another



publication, as a new case study covering the period from 2022 to 2023 is nearing completion. Additionally, this research advances the discussion on the training process for interns in the field of administration, considering their interaction with host organizations, and explores the interrelationships of knowledge between the extracurricular supervised internship environment and that which students construct throughout their administration studies.

This case study enabled the identification of a field of investigation that goes beyond the university environment while maintaining a connection with it through the unit of analysis investigated here the extracurricular internship activities within host organizations. These organizations are responsible for fostering the intersection between the knowledge and skills developed by students in their undergraduate program and those actually applied in the extracurricular internship setting. This investigation contributes to the production of knowledge that needs to be further explored to identify potential improvements in the learning processes of interns in training.

Furthermore, this research contributes to society, companies, and higher education institutions by highlighting reflections on the relationship pattern between students and professionals involved in their internship routines. It provides a pathway for internship agencies, internship supervisors within organizational settings, and internship coordinators at educational institutions to better diagnose and organize their interaction processes with student interns, ultimately enhancing the learning experience for these individuals who seek to develop knowledge, skills, and competencies throughout their undergraduate period via extracurricular internships. The development, for instance, of extension projects that foster interconnected relationships between students, professors, and companies would be a strategy directly tied to this context, further benefiting the construction of meaning and critical thinking among administration interns within companies. These initiatives could even extend to joint actions with students affiliated with junior enterprises, aimed at discussing and addressing issues encountered in the internship environment that, for example, are not adequately explored by interns.

Theoretically, the results of this research contribute to the creation of a schematic view of learning within the extracurricular internship environment, derived from the adaptation of Moreira's (2011) schematic view on the continuum from mechanical to meaningful learning, in dialogue with the adapted schematic view of Gonzalez et al. (2012), which addresses the influence of learning policies on individual learner behavior. The resulting schematic view of this study positions the student intern in relation to their behavior through their own self-assessment process while conducting extracurricular internship activities. This self-assessment process is carried out using the data collection instrument developed specifically for this purpose within this research. Thus, this study also contributes to the formulation of self-assessment

policies (Leite et al., 2020), specifically for undergraduate administration students who are interns within organizations, and supports reflections on the role of those responsible for or otherwise involved with intern activities both inside and outside the host companies, concerning the learning process of these interns as they develop within the field of administration.

The reflections brought forth by this research also address the development of the intellectual, human, social, and cultural potential of interns within host organizations, considering not only if but also how this development serves both the business and society.

For future research, it is suggested to conduct further case studies with students from other higher education institutions who have already gained at least six months of supervised extracurricular internship experience with a host organization. Additionally, a survey could be conducted with administration interns who have equivalent experience in organizations that actively implement innovation strategies and possess a non-traditional or innovative organizational structure and/or a learning and relationship management policy that values dialogue and encourages routines fostering self-improvement. The expectation from such studies is, respectively, that the results can be compared and further explored, alongside examining and comparing organizations with more dynamic routines in terms of interaction flows among different professionals. This would enable a reassessment of the routines commonly found in the practice of learning management for interns within organizations seeking extracurricular experience throughout their undergraduate studies.

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