

Internal Marketing As A Key To Strategic Human Resources Management In The Education Industry In The Context Of The COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Several studies prove the relevance of internal marketing in promoting job satisfaction and life satisfaction among professionals. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, educational institutions were faced with a set of challenges that forced the redefinition of strategies appropriate to the context experienced, with internal marketing being a key factor in redefining these same strategies. This study aims to evaluate whether internal marketing is a catalyst for professional satisfaction and life satisfaction among professionals in the Education industry active in Portugal during the COVID-19 Pandemic. To this end, a conceptual research model was developed and 4 study hypotheses were postulated to investigate the purpose of this research based on a quantitative methodology applied to a convenience sample (n=167). The findings obtained proved to be statistically significant, showing internal marketing as a direct and positive predictor of commitment, professional satisfaction and also satisfaction with life. Besides, job satisfaction has been confirmed as a direct and positive determinant of employee performance, commitment, loyalty and satisfaction with life. Finally, commitment was too confirmed as a predictor of employee satisfaction and loyalty. Thus, this research presents itself as an added value for both science and the education industry, as it makes important contributions to the country's educational institutions and enables them to perceive various determinants of professional satisfaction, commitment, employee performance and loyalty, so as to improve strategies that support organizational sustainability and the well-being of educational agents and, in turn, of the students themselves.

Keywords: Internal Marketing, Job Satisfaction, Performance, Life Satisfaction and COVID-19 Pandemic.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 Pandemic has imposed immense challenges on organizations, especially educational organizations. Communication practices were adapted by replacing face-to-face communication with digital (online) communication [1], thus forcing educational agents and guardians to communicate in ways they were not familiar with [2]. This form of communication (online) became the only way to maintain connections between families and educational agents throughout the confinement [3].

[4] indicates that, when a crisis is managed effectively and efficiently, in the discovery of organizational obstacles, it leads to the acquisition of skills and knowledge that allow dealing with new adversities and promotes the development of new strategies. Organizations that adapt better to the challenges caused by a crisis can find competitive benefits in this situation and also have the possibility of developing reflections and self-assessments about the way in which leaders and other professionals react to this scenario, to analyses of innovative actions.

Nowadays, employees expect their workplaces to be pleasant environments capable of satisfying their needs and enhancing the development of others [5]. It is, therefore, extremely important that organizations foster opportunities and promote the well-being of professionals as well as the quality of working life and, consequently, satisfaction with life [6].

It is essential that organizations understand the repercussions of the work circumstances that are required of professionals and that they identify the professional and psychosocial risks that may arise, with the aim of developing protection policies, to minimize the occurrence of these effects [7].

In this sense, professional satisfaction must be assessed to assess its level and the factors that influence it, as well as its relationship with the worker's performance, commitment, and loyalty to the organization. The literature confirms that job satisfaction is directly related to productivity, performance, loyalty to the organization and personal fulfilment of professionals. According to [8], greater employee satisfaction contributes to finding meaning in work, translated into the adoption of positive attitudes of loyalty and involvement with the employer, thus stimulating development and organizational performance. Therefore, the objective of this study is to evaluate internal marketing as a predictor of the satisfaction of professionals in the education sector in Portugal and understand how job satisfaction predicts commitment, performance, loyalty and satisfaction with life, allowing us to recognize the features which are most appreciated by these professionals in their work background, and which contribute to their satisfaction with life. Thus, the present study proposes a conceptual model to assess the effect of internal marketing on the level of satisfaction of these professionals, and, in sequence, how their professional satisfaction adds to performance, commitment and the loyalty of employees to their educational organization.

The study consists of 5 sections, after this introduction comes the theoretical framework, which presents the dimensions under study and the conceptual model of the investigation, shadowed by the quantitative methodology supporting the entire research. The section follows, where the results achieved as predictors of job satisfaction, commitment, performance, loyalty, and life

satisfaction of education professionals are presented and discussed. Lastly, the key conclusions and contributions of this work are mentioned.

2. BACKGROUND

Education in the COVID-19 Pandemic

At the beginning of 2020, the COVID-19 Pandemic spread in Portugal and the confinement of the population was decreed with the aim of reducing the spread of the disease. Only essential professionals (“related to health, policing, food, transport and communications”) remained active, as such, schools closed for a long period of time and teaching began to be carried out remotely using digital platforms, which it negatively interfered with the socialization of students and educational agents [9].

[10] declares that the closure of educational institutions can in no way stop learning and the school journey, which will entail the implementation of strategies to adapt to the new reality, and this reality contains work carried out remotely and participation in classes outside the school background.

This new reality implied changes in the work context, with most organizations choosing to introduce the practice of teleworking with employees [11]. According to the National Statistics Institute (INE), in March 2020 there were one million professionals in Portugal working remotely, in September of the same year 682,000 workers remained in these conditions [12].

The basis of education is socialization and relationships between peers and between students and educational agents, with learning guided by “reflection and discovery” through various instruments and techniques such as: exchange of ideas, group and individual work, debates, books, computers, among others, as such, teleworking in this area must be reflected [13]. Teachers, students, and their families had to adapt to the challenges that arose due to the Pandemic, challenges that require material resources and technologies that promote curricular autonomy, but which also highlight socioeconomic inequality among students, such as virtual forms of learning [14].

Several authors state that the introduction of new content to enhance students' cognitive activation and the assessment of learning, the integration of Information and Communication Technologies in their teaching and the implementation of creative strategies for teaching online were some of the challenges with that teachers had to deal with remote teaching, with the least positive evidence identified by teachers being the lack of interaction with students [15]; [16] and [17].

Internal Marketing and the COVID-19 Pandemic

According to [18], research into internal marketing is still very limited as it is a current subject but extremely relevant for organizations. Marketing is based on the needs of the external customer, while internal marketing is aimed at meeting the needs of the internal customer in order to promote the well-being of professionals. It can therefore be said that internal marketing is related to the following concepts: “communication, motivation and satisfaction”. [19] also add

that internal marketing operates in the following organizational areas: employees, motivation, training, rewards, service quality and organizational culture.

According to [20], internal marketing was integrated into holistic marketing. In the past, actions were designed and implemented with a focus on external customers, with holistic marketing considering professionals and the organizational environment itself as all parties involved in the organization are directly linked to organizational productivity.

[11], indicate that currently there is evidence of proximity between organizational productivity and the motivation of the professionals who work there, as such, workers should be seen as “internal customers” and the tasks they perform as “internal products”. [21] also adds that it is necessary to understand and satisfy the needs of professionals so that they can perform their functions with quality and prioritize organizational productivity, which in turn provides the satisfaction of external customers.

In view of the adversities presented by the COVID-19 Pandemic, organizations adopted relevant strategies to promote their performance, such as: valuing professionals (recognizing and highlighting the commitment of workers and valuing and considering their dedication in the face of adversities), provide support and guidance (in teleworking situations it is necessary to monitor professionals, ensuring not only that they have the means and conditions to carry out the tasks assigned to them and that they have the technological knowledge to do so, but also monitor their performance and negative effects that social isolation can cause), “consistency in communication” (there must be distanced communication with professionals to ensure that they are aware of all changes made in the organization) and “establishment of a specific communication plan for topics adjacent to the COVID-19 pandemic” (the Pandemic caused the need to reflect on several topics that could affect the organization and/or its workers, such as: organizational stability, monetary concerns and isolation and social and emotional instability [22]).

Professional satisfaction and life satisfaction during the COVID-19 Pandemic

To minimize the spread of the virus, measures were imposed during the Pandemic such as work carried out remotely (teleworking) [23]. Working from home has positive consequences, which increases employee satisfaction, and negative consequences, which causes satisfaction to be reduced, the first being flexible working hours and increasing the professional's autonomy and the second being increased stress as employees now must reconcile their professional and personal lives in the same space [24] and [25].

Some authors argue that professional satisfaction has decreased with teleworking due to several factors such as: professionals feel more isolated and communication with their superiors is reduced, which reduces the chances of progressing in their career; high involvement in work due to the long periods of time it occupies [26].

According to [27], [28] and [29] teleworking increases employees' professional satisfaction and their commitment to the organization. The authors [25] and [30] state that remote work increases organizational productivity as professionals do not waste time communicating with each other, thus proving to be faster and more capable in carrying out their duties.

Satisfaction with life depends on the period of life the subject is in and from person to person, however, it can also change due to positive or negative events that may occur [31]. [32] states that the higher the satisfaction with life, the greater the resilience and mental health of the subject, while feelings of low control and external events are related to lower levels of satisfaction with life.

In the context under analysis, the variables evaluated in this literature review allow us to meet the objective defined for this work. Therefore, we intend to integrate them into a conceptual model that evaluates the potential effect of IM on professional satisfaction, performance, and organizational commitment, also analysing whether these variables are determinants of employee loyalty and life satisfaction. Therefore, we propose to test 4 research hypotheses: the internal marketing has a direct and positive effect on life satisfaction, commitment and job satisfaction (H1); job satisfaction has a direct and positive impact on performance, employee loyalty, life satisfaction and commitment (H2); commitment has a direct and positive effect on performance (H3) and commitment has a direct and positive effect on job satisfaction and employee loyalty (H4). Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model proposed for this research.



Figure 1-Research Conceptual Model

Source: Own elaboration

3. METHODOLOGY

Type of study and sample

A quantitative approach was used, based on a questionnaire survey administered digitally, after a pre-test was carried out on the data collection instrument. The justification for using a quantitative approach lies in the objectives inherent to the research: the proposal and empirical test of a conceptual model that analyses the effect of Internal Marketing on certain attitudes and behaviors of employees, namely: professional satisfaction, performance, commitment, loyalty and satisfaction with life. The study was carried out at a single point in time, therefore having a cross-sectional nature.

The study was applied to workers in the education sector working in Portugal. In this context, the population under study is made up of employees from various Portuguese educational institutions, with different types of employment, seniority and whether they hold leadership positions. Taking into account physical and temporal limitations, we chose to carry out a

convenience sample, through the digital distribution of questionnaires, via email and social networks, having obtained 175 questionnaires, however, 167 of which were fully completed and valid, with the rate corrected response rate of 95%.

Data collection instrument

Table I shows the 6 concepts assessed in the survey constructed from the adaptation of scales proposed in the literature, respecting the psychometric procedures and adjusted to the education sector.

Table I - Scales applied in the study.

Concept	Scale
Internal marketing	Scale proposed by Rodrigues, Queirós and Pires, (2016). It consists of 11 items, but only 9 were used.
Job Satisfaction	Scale proposed by Veloso, Sousa, Au-Yong-Oliveira and Walter (2021). It consists of 5 items.
Organizational Commitment	Scale proposed by Rodrigues, Queirós and Pires (2016), which combines 3 dimensions (organizational commitment, continuity commitment and normative commitment) and a total of 18 items.
Professional performance	Scale applied by Veloso, Sousa, Au-Yong-Oliveira and Walter (2021), proposed by Hsu and Wang, 2008, consisting of 2 dimensions (task and contextual) in a total of 6 items.
Loyalty	Scale proposed by Veloso et al. (2021), totalling 2 items.
Satisfaction with Life	Scale proposed by Caycho-Rodríguez, Neto, Tomás, Valencia, Ventura-León, Neto, Reyes-Bossio and Vilca, 2020, consisting of 5 items.

In the scales measuring the 6 dimensions of the data collection instrument, respondents were asked to use a 5-point Likert scale (1: "I completely disagree"; 2: "I moderately disagree"; 3: "I neither agree nor disagree »; 4: «moderately agree» and 5: «totally agree») to evaluate the different items.

The survey also included two sections, where questions were asked that allowed defining a socio-demographic and professional profile of the respondents, as professional category, working hours, type of relationship with the institution, type of organization (public, private), gender, age and educational qualifications.

Data collection and analysis process

We proceeded with the translation and validation of the measurement scales, also a pre-test was carried out to verify their adaptability to the population to be studied. The survey was distributed through social networks and to the email of Portuguese educational institutions, after acceptance of the authorization request by the institutions' management, data collection took place from January to March 2022.

For sample analysis, statistical techniques were used, applying suitable statistical software, namely SPSS and AMOS. To carry out the examination, a preliminary analysis was carried out, checking the absence of errors, treatment of aberrant values and validation of the assumptions inherent to the application of statistical techniques, then a descriptive analysis was carried out in order to characterize the sample and the constructs of the model, we also use Cronbach's alpha to evaluate the internal consistency of the different variables, we analyze correlations and

structural equation modelling, in order to investigate the relationships between the constructs, linking linear regression models and factor analysis, which allows us to test the validity of the research model, as well as testing the formulated hypotheses.

4. RESULTS

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC AND PROFESSIONAL CHARACTERIZATION

The sample researched is made up of 167 education workers, 53.9% (n=90) of whom are women. The age groups between 40 and 59 years old predominate, 62.9% (n=105) have the marital status of married/in a de facto union, 58.7% (n=98). The majority of respondents had at least a bachelor's degree, 89.2% (n=149). It was observed that 66.5% (n=111) of those questioned had children. Regarding the type of professional relationship, the contract for an indefinite period prevailed, 43.7% (n=73).

The majority of individuals surveyed, 86.2% (n=144) did not perform any management or leadership role at the time of responding to the questionnaire. In terms of working hours, 35.9% (n=60) had strict timetables. Regarding of length of service at the institution, it is observed that 53.3% (n=89) of interviewees have been with the institution for at least 20 years. Furthermore, the majority of respondents, 60.5% (n=101) travel up to 20 km to get to work. This justifies the fact that 65.3% (n=109) of those interviewed took up to 30 minutes to travel. It is noteworthy that the majority, 88.6% (n=148) use a private car to go to work.

Structural Model

The maximum likelihood method was used applied to the original items to evaluate the measurement model. A two-step strategy was used to adjust the model, that is, first the measurement model was adjusted and then the structural model was adjusted. The quality of the model was evaluated using the CFI and PCFI indices and also the RMSEA. The Z test (Critical Ratio and p value) was applied to assess the significance of the structural coefficients, considering parameters with $p \leq 0.05$ to be statistically significant.

Thus, it appears that the model under analysis presents a good fit, CFI=0.813; GFI=0.708; RMSEA=0.126. So, the model explains 84% of the variability in employee loyalty and explains 30% of the variability in life satisfaction.

The Figure 2 shows that direct causal path: "Job satisfaction → Performance" does not present statistical significance. Contrariwise, the causal trajectories of direct impacts that present statistical significance are: "Internal Marketing → Commitment" – $\beta=0.687$ and $p < 0.01$; "Job Satisfaction → Commitment" – $\beta=0.333$ and $p < 0.01$; "Job satisfaction → Employee loyalty" – $\beta=0.591$ and $p < 0.01$; "Job satisfaction → Life satisfaction" – $\beta=0.530$ and $p < 0.001$; "Commitment → Employee loyalty" – $\beta=0.517$ and $p < 0.001$; "Internal Marketing → Satisfaction with life" – $\beta=-0.282$ and $p < 0.001$; "Commitment → Performance" – $\beta=0.279$ and $p < 0.01$;

Also, the statistically significant total impact on Performance through Commitment is "Internal Marketing → Performance" – $\beta=0.192$ and $p = 0.037$. The statistically significant total influence

on employee Loyalty via Commitment is “Internal Marketing → Loyalty” – $\beta=0.355$ and $p=0.01$. The statistically significant total influence on Employee Loyalty via Commitment is “Job Satisfaction → Employee Loyalty” – $\beta=0.763$ and $p=0.01$.

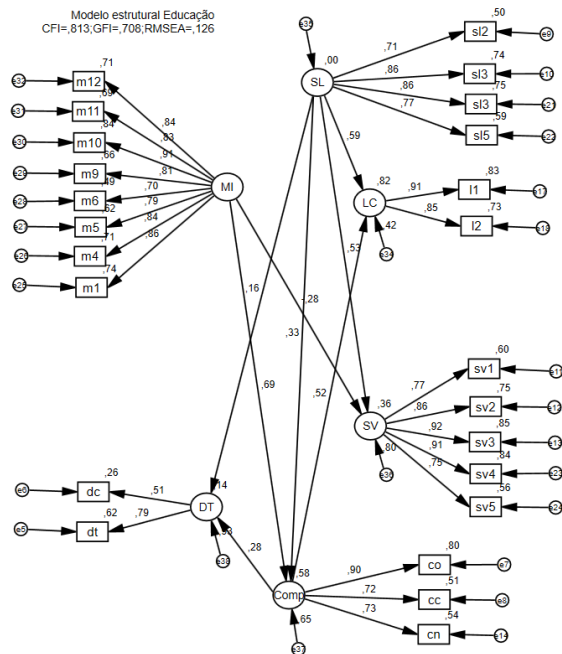


Figure 2-Structural Model
Source: Own preparation

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Considering the Structural Model (Figure 2) and Table 2, we can state that all hypotheses formulated were corroborated in this work, highlighting the significance of the research model developed, supporting internal marketing as a determinant of job satisfaction, commitment and satisfaction with life, performance, job satisfaction and commitment as determinants of the loyalty of professionals in the education sector and their satisfaction with life. So, in relation to H1: Internal marketing has a direct and positive effect on life satisfaction, commitment and job satisfaction, it has also been shown that internal marketing has an impact direct and positive on commitment and job satisfaction, in a statistically significant way. Though, in terms of life satisfaction, the impact is significant, but in a negative sense. The study by [33] partially corroborates the present study by indicating that internal marketing has an effect on salaries, the

organizational environment, the definition and implementation of organizational objectives, communication, the organizational structure, the motivation of professionals, their capacity physical and psychological well-being, that is, in the connection between the organization and the worker, with the aim of promoting organizational development and success. Furthermore, the investigation by [34] corroborates the results of the present study by indicating that internal marketing positively influences job satisfaction, also verifying a positive relationship with performance.

Concerning H2: Job satisfaction has an impact direct and positive on performance, employee loyalty employee, life satisfaction and commitment, this hypothesis was partially validated in this investigation, despite pointing out a direct and positive relationship between job satisfaction and performance, this is not statistically significant. Thus, and as demonstrated in other studies [35]; [36]; [37], where it was found that professional satisfaction influences organizational commitment, increasing its levels, a since these dimensions give relevance to the employee's sentimental connection with the organization. In this way, it is assumed that increased satisfaction promotes increased commitment from professionals. Likewise, the study by [38] corroborates this study, and its results revealed an average level of satisfaction with life in general, a result influenced by working conditions, that is, indirectly through the job satisfaction perceived by the worker.

Regarding H3: Commitment has a direct and positive influence on performance, the present study validated this hypothesis. Thus, the results obtained are in line with what was demonstrated in the study by [39], since these authors proved the existence of several variables, such as commitment, that influence performance. Contrariwise, [40] reveal that more committed professionals have higher levels of individual performance. Also, in the study by [41], it is explained that the relationships between performance and commitment occur because committed workers have greater adherence to organizational goals, thus increasing individual performance and, in turn, that of the organization. Also, in this work it was possible to corroborate the results of these studies. According to the literature review, it can be stated that committed employees cause better levels of organizational performance and performance [42]; [43]; [38] and [44]. Finally, H4: Commitment has a direct and positive influence on job satisfaction and employee loyalty was validated in this work. Thus, the findings of this research validate the study by [34], which indicates that the emotional part of organizational commitment has an impact on job satisfaction, i.e. the more resilient the employee's emotional relationship with the organization, the higher their job satisfaction will be.

Table 2– Summary of total trajectory coefficients

Trajectory	β	P	Hypothesis supported?
H1 ₁ :Internal Marketing→Satisfaction with Life	-0.282	<0.01	Yes
H1 ₂ :Internal Marketing→Commitment	0.687	<0.01	Yes
H1 ₃ :Internal marketing→Performance	0.192	<0.05	Yes
H1 ₄ :Internal marketing→Employee loyalty	0.355	<0.01	Yes
H2 ₁ :Job Satisfaction→Performance	0.165	0.117	No

Trajectory		β	P	Hypothesis supported?
H2 ₂ : Job with life	Satisfaction→Satisfaction	0.530	<0.01	Yes
H2 ₃ : Job loyalty	Satisfaction→Employee	0.763	<0.01	Yes
H2 ₄ : Job	Satisfaction→Commitment	0.333	<0.01	Yes
H3 ₁ : Commitment	→Performance	0.279	<0.01	Yes
H4 ₁ : Commitment	→Employee loyalty	0.517	<0.01	Yes

6. Conclusion

The present study contributes to deepening knowledge about some skills of professionals in the education sector relevant to the exercise of their professional activity and consequently to enhancing the good functioning of the educational organization in which they are located, raising awareness of the topic, and presenting new knowledge that could be useful to other researchers and organizational leaders. It also makes it possible to understand the satisfaction and expectations of professionals, enhancing the development of innovative strategies that promote their well-being and, in turn, their performance as an educational institution.

Taking the above into account, educational institutions must make a strong investment in internal marketing, promoting extrinsic rewards, as well as providing training to their professionals, in order to promote their well-being and satisfaction with work and, therefore, satisfaction with life, since in organizations with satisfied employees, there are levels of greater motivation and commitment in the development of their functions. Leaders and top managers must also frequently apply satisfaction questionnaires to educational agents in order to assess which factors are less beneficial and try to overcome them, building a healthy organizational environment that will foster the well-being not only of educational agents, but also from the students themselves. This work corroborates the findings of previous studies, however, presenting as a novelty the application to the education sector in the Portuguese context through a conceptual model that simultaneously evaluates internal marketing as a predictor of job satisfaction and satisfaction with life and job satisfaction as a determinant of employee commitment, performance and loyalty.

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