INFLUENCE OF INTERNAL MARKETING ON ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT – EVIDENCE FROM CARE INSTITUTIONS FOR THE ELDERLY

UTJECAJ INTERNOG MARKETINGA NA PREDANOST ORGANIZACIJI – NALAZI IZ INSTITUCIJA SKRBI ZA OSOBE STARIJE ŽIVOTNE DOBI

TRŽIŠTE

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ABSTRACT

The provision of institutional care, particularly for the elderly, assumes dedication and commitment of the employees. Hence, identifying the prevailing level of organizational commitment (OC) and precisely which internal marketing (IM) techniques may be deployed to shape this per-

SAŽETAK

Pružanje institucijske brige, posebno za osobe starije životne dobi, pretpostavlja posvećenost i predanost zaposlenika. Stoga je iznimno važno identificiranje prevladavajuće razine organizacijske predanosti i tehnika internog marketinga koje se mogu primijeniti za oblikovanje takvog

formance is of inherent importance. The objective of this research project is, correspondingly, to ascertain the extent to which IM influences the OC of employees at three elderly care support institutions. To study this influence, we selected a sample of 188 individuals, all employees at the three institutions who agreed to participate in the study by answering a questionnaire. As regards IM, quality of work, ascending communication, and valuing and sharing information are the most commonly adopted practices at institutions. In terms of OC related dimensions, we found the affective and the instrumental to be the predominant types of commitment. Our findings support a moderately positive correlation between the IM and OC variables. This study enables an evaluation of respective institutions, informing them of the changes that are both feasible and necessary to the provision of quality care services and, consequently, a higher level of employee commitment and performance.

djelovanja. S tim u skladu, cilj istraživačkog projekta jest utvrditi doseg utjecaja internog marketinga na organizacijsku predanost zaposlenika u tri institucije za skrb o osobama starije životne dobi. Za proučavanje ovog utjecaja odabrali smo uzorak od 188 ispitanika, zaposlenika triju institucija koji su pristali sudjelovati u istraživanju putem anketiranja. Za sam interni marketing, kvaliteta rada, komunikacija prema gore te vrednovanje i dijeljenje informacija najčešće su usvojene prakse u institucijama. U pogledu dimenzija povezanih s predanošću organizaciji, saznali smo da su prevladavajuće vrste predanosti bile afektivna i instrumentalna. Naši rezultati pokazuju umjereno pozitivnu korelaciju između varijabli internog marketinga i organizacijske predanosti. Istraživanje omogućuje procjenu pojedinačnih institucija i njihovo informiranje o izvedivim i potrebnim promjenama za pružanje kvalitetnih usluga skrbi te, posljedično, više razine zaposlenikove predanosti i djelovanja.

1. INTRODUCTION

Organizations currently operate within significantly competitive environments, characterized by the prevalence of uncertainty and constant change. In order to face such difficulties, one of the key aspects to winning competitive advantage is to ensure that employees are committed, that they identify with the employer and accept the company's objectives as reflecting their own interests. An organization's members of staff prove fundamental to its success, especially where their satisfaction impacts on client satisfaction levels; thus, it is necessary for organizations to perceive their employees as their first client. Internal marketing should therefore take corresponding priority over any external marketing processes (Ahmed & Rafiq, 1995; Broady-Preston & Steel, 2002; Flipo, 2007).

According to Ahmed and Rafiq (1995) and Davis and Nance (2001), internal marketing assists in management efforts to communicate with their subordinates and align the business vision throughout all levels of the organization. Internal marketing thereby emerges as a tool for attaining the organization's objectives (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2002, 2003; Peltier, Nill & Schibrowsky, 2003). Within this framework, many organizations and researchers have attributed due importance to internal marketing as an instrument for not only boosting the overall organizational commitment of their employees but also their client satisfaction levels (Flipo, 2007; Lings 2004; Caruana & Calleya, 1998).

An ever increasing number of organizations monitor and value the performance levels attained by their employees, and perceive these to represent a core variable for improving efficiency and productivity. Meyer and Allen (1997) argue that organizational commitment incorporates the psychological relationship individuals build up with the organizations in which they perform various roles. However, as diverse motives drive employees and shape the effectiveness of their respective inputs, so is the case

with the level of education and tenure at work (Baugh & Roberts, 1994).

Pool and Pool (2007) refer to the extent to which committed performance and motivation levels are attained at companies undertaking programs that encourage, promote and bring benefits to employees. Therefore, to ensure employees turn in high performance levels, their needs have to be taken into consideration and satisfied through marketing campaigns targeting the internal company environment (Flipo, 2007).

Both Helman and Payne (1992) and Davis and Nance (2001) propose that internal marketing necessarily involves recognizing the importance of developing a marketing-based orientation throughout the organization. With the fundamental objective of bringing about employee assimilation of the company mission, as well as client-oriented activities, internal marketing thus motivates employees and focuses their efforts on the goals defined. To this end, organizations need to make increasing recourse to human resource management tools and deal with their own employees as if they were clients (Berry & Parasuraman, 1992).

While studies analyzing the impact of internal marketing on organizational commitment do exist (for example, Boshoff & Tait (1996) in the financial service sector; Caruana and Calleya (1998) in the retail banking sector; Davis and Nance (2001) in terms of management styles, and Chang and Chang (2007, 2009) in healthcare), there are no studies yet on the influence of internal marketing on organizational commitment in non-profit organizations. This is especially true of the organization belonging to the voluntary or so-called "third sector", rendering services of a social type. We therefore consider this approach to be of particular relevance, given that compliance with the high quality standards required by the organizations inherently involves analyzing employee performance levels and grasping the extent to which an organization implements strategies capable of leveraging improvements to these levels. Hence, the key objective of this project is

to analyze whether internal marketing practices do influence organizational commitment. To this end, we apply a conceptual model that takes into account the set of relationships existing between different indicators for internal marketing and organizational commitment.

2. INTERNAL MARKETING

The concept of internal marketing first emerged in the marketing and service management literature in the 1970s (Varey & Lewis, 1999). This term has taken on a steadily broader dimension with Ahmed and Rafiq (2002) and Papasolomou (2006), who defined the core premise of internal marketing as follows: "to have satisfied clients, organizations also need to have satisfied employees." This may best be attained by perceiving members of staff as clients and striving to satisfy their needs and requirements. In other words, putting internal marketing into practice involves recognizing the importance of developing a marketing-based orientation throughout the organization. The main objective of this approach is to ensure that members of staff duly assimilate the respective company objectives, alongside client-focused activities able to contribute towards their own motivation levels (Helman & Payne, 1992).

Ahmed and Rafiq (2000, 2002) point to three phases the internal marketing concept went through which are closely interlinked: motivation and employee satisfaction, client-based orientations and a broadening concept of marketing – managing change and implementation strategies.

From the internal marketing perspective, approaching members of staff as organizational clients, Berry and Parasuraman (1992) consider that employees should be dealt with as if internal clients and, consequently, have their needs met. Thus, by doing so, companies also prove capable of raising their ability to meet the needs of external clients. These authors define the key objective of internal marketing as attracting, developing, motivating, and retaining qualified members of staff. Rafiq and Ahmed (1993), meanwhile, warn of the problems potentially stemming from adopting such orientation in which an employee is viewed as an internal client.

The internal marketing orientation perceives all sectors of an organization as simultaneously being suppliers and clients (Lings & Brooks, 1998; Lings, 1999). The factors defining this vision are: fostering internal awareness about the quality of internal services, identifying "internal clients" and "internal suppliers", identifying internal client expectations, communicating these expectations and discussing the difficulties and capacities for fulfilling them, the identification and implementation of changes in behavior on behalf of the "internal suppliers" in order to guarantee service provision requirements are fully met, and finally, the "internal clients" should measure service quality in order to ascertain the "internal supplier" performance levels (Lings, 2004). The advantages of this approach result from a more holistic vision of the organization, the opportunity to measure service quality, acting in a proactive approach to the design of new processes, developing an external client-based focus, enhancing motivation and raising employee satisfaction levels (Lings, 1999).

Therefore, from a more generalized perspective, internal marketing consists of working the internal and external marketing programs in conjunction within the framework of constantly striving to satisfy external clients. This is a management philosophy structured around effectively acting in environments external to the organization, based on an adapted and appropriate working environment, always respecting the needs and desires of employees, and with an external client orientation in effect among all members of staff (Lings, 2004; Ahmed & Rafiq, 2002; Ahmed, Rafiq & Saad, 2003; Varey & Lewis, 1999; Foreman & Money, 1995; Varey, 1995).

Internal marketing is implemented through empowerment-related practices, through participative management and adopting the informal communication norms as detailed by Gounaris (2008). In turn, Ahmed, Rafiq and Saad (2003)

propose an internal marketing mix involving reward systems, internal communication, training and development and, finally, leadership.

The most generally accepted conclusion has come from Jou, Chou and Fu (2008), who propose six factors as determinant to internal marketing: Empathy and Consideration (high levels of this factor displayed by direct supervisors enable entities to accompany the needs and motivations of internal clients), Benchmarking (researching and analyzing what competitors provide to their employees to provide a better understanding of internal client expectations), Quality of Work (financial and emotional value attributed to employee working outputs), Ascending Communication (scope for employees to communicate incidences of dissatisfaction and their suggestions to their hierarchical superiors), Valuing and Sharing Information (internal programs enabling managers to convey organizational messages, missions and values to their subordinates), and Promotional Activities (activities involving internal clients and enabling them to achieve the organization's objectives). These are the factors applied in this research project.

3. ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

In the organizational behavior literature, organizational commitment has been applied to conceptualize the relationship binding an individual to the organization employing him/her. The bibliographic review returned two major approaches. In the first, commitment is perceived as an attitude (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986) while the second approach, proposed by Salancik, (1979) and subsequent authors, perceives commitment as behaviorally based.

In the behavioral approach, Salancik (1979) defines commitment as the individual's way of being and that which maintains their activities and organizational participation. This perspec-

tive does identify some factors susceptible to raising commitment levels, such as individuals undertaking similar actions or adopting compatible behaviors, the freedom of individual choice as regards these behaviors, and the revocability and explicit definition of employee actions.

According to this approach, organizational commitment represents a construct designed to explain behaviors, whether based on individual or third-party accounts, by focusing on the individual sense of organizational belonging. Within this perspective, efforts are targeted at identifying the factors that explain specific forms of committed behaviors. Under this approach, employees are committed to remaining with the organization and are able to develop a more positive vision of their surroundings, consistent with their behavior, thereby avoiding cognitive dissonance and maintaining positive self-perceptions (Salancik, 1979).

In the attitudinal approach, employee commitment is advanced either through individual identification with the organization or when individuals and their organization hold congruent objectives. This analytical perspective was first put forward by O'Reilly and Chatman (1986).

Thus, O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) propose that commitment be defined as the psychological bond establishing a connection between the worker and the organization that may come in three distinct and different forms: (1) complacency or instrumental involvement in relation to the extrinsic rewards, (2) identification or involvement based on a desire for affiliation, (3) the internalization of, or the sustained involvement in, an alignment between individual and organizational values.

Attitudinal commitment is therefore conceptualized as the psychological bond or affective link between the individual and the organization, reflecting the extent to which the organization's values and objectives correspond to the individual's values and objectives (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Attitudinal commitment has received greater attention across the literature, both in theoret-

ical and empirical terms. Taking that emphasis into account, this study thus accepts and adopts commitment as an attitude according to the Meyer and Allen multidimensional model.

The Meyer and Allen (1997) conceptual organizational commitment model is consensually understood in the literature as a three-dimensional construct incorporating affective, normative, and instrumental components.

According to Mowday and others (1979), affective commitment extends to something beyond simple passive loyalty to an organization. Affective commitment involves an active relationship, in which an individual strives to make a personal input into raising the organization's overall well-being. This type of commitment relates only to the emotional dimension of employees, their identification with and participation in the organization. Employees with high levels of affective commitment remain with the organization because they want to do so. Affective commitment grows out of compensatory rewarding psychological experiences and, hence, out of progress towards meeting employee expectations and objectives (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

Normative commitment reflects a feeling of moral obligation over one's sustained continuity in the organization, reflecting senses of doubt about or belief in one's responsibilities to and for the organization. Normative commitment is shaped by individual experiences in terms of socialization at the family and cultural levels and, subsequently, by organizational socialization (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

In the Meyer and Allen (1997) three-dimensional model, normative commitment is incremented when employees internalize organizational norms through socialization processes, receiving rewards that lead them to act reciprocally and thereby establishing a psychological contract with the organization. Loyalty to the organization is furthermore enhanced by employees feeling satisfied, rewarded and supported in the workplace, and when perceiving that their own values coincide with those of the organization.

In sum, such loyalty is attained whenever employees trust their leaders and recognize that the organization runs human resource policies that value and cherish employees (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1997).

Instrumental commitment reports the level of awareness about the costs resulting from leaving the organization, whether in terms of financial or psychological costs (Allen & Meyer, 1996; Meyer & Allen, 1997). This type of commitment develops when employees, on the one hand, recognize that in leaving the organization they will lose everything they have invested in it, and, on the other hand, when there are no alternatives in terms of vacancies available in other organizations. Indeed, where workers experience discontent, a sense of injustice, without any scope for developing their potential and undertaking tasks that do not provide any challenge, there is every likelihood that they will establish instrumental commitment levels (Allen & Meyer, 1996; Meyer & Allen, 1997).

In summary, employees with strong affective commitment remain in the organization because that is their wish, as members of staff displaying strong instrumental commitment remain out of need whilst those with high normative commitment levels continue at the organization because they feel they should do so (Meyer, Allen & Smith, 1993).

4. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTERNAL MARKETING AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT: RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The relationship between internal marketing and organizational commitment has been demonstrated by different research projects (e.g. Caruana & Calleya, 1998; Boshoff & Tait, 1996; Davis &

Nance, 2001; Chang & Chang, 2007, 2009) in addition to being cited in other studies (e.g. Mowday, 1998; Bohnenberger, 2005), thus verifying how organizational commitment improvements represent one consequence of internal marketing programs.

A study by Caruana and Calleya (1998) analyzes the effect of internal marketing on organizational commitment in the banking sector, and whether it is part of ongoing internal practices. Caruana and Calleya (1998) highlight the unbreakable interlink characterizing services and, hence, the importance of the processes of interaction between members of the organization and external clients. They conclude that internal marketing does impact on the affective commitment of employees and, hence, enhances staff commitment levels towards achieving organizational goals and targets. Chang and Chang (2007, 2009) also conclude that internal marketing practices in healthcare institutions do influence the organizational commitment of nurses.

Boshoff and Tait (1996) examined the potential impact of internal marketing and the perception of financial sector quality and, more specifically, in terms of the services rendered by front-line employees. The same authors refer to front-line staff and their respective client interactions as determinant for the quality of the services provided. Hence, efforts to improve service quality need to consider how this employee group constitutes the first and foremost internal marketing target (Boshoff & Tait, 1996).

A study by Davis and Nance (2001) on integrating internal marketing into management shows how management may make recourse to internal marketing to boost employee involvement in decision-making, raising the level of commitment to the actions thereby decided upon. Davis and Nance (2001) warn that some organizations invest millions of euros in external marketing campaigns while all but ignoring the scope for internal marketing. They even go a step further in stating that the non-existence of internal marketing initiatives may prove fatal to the organization.

We should note that the results of all aforementioned studies approaching the service sector unanimously demonstrate that internal marketing is positively associated with organizational commitment, thus equally reflecting the priority that should be given to internal marketing practices in organizations.

Based on their study, Caruana and Calleya (1998) argue that internal marketing exerts influence on the organizational commitment of employees. Their results point to internal marketing categories being associated to the Meyer and Allen (1997) model's affective component, showing the normative component to be weak and the instrumental practically null (Bohnenberge, 2005). Consequently, more studies able to clarify the relationship between internal marketing and organizational commitment need to be undertaken.

Hence, we constructed our analytical model that strives to verify whether the internal marketing variables (Empathy and Consideration, Benchmarking, Quality of Work, Ascending Communication, Valuing and Sharing Information and Promotional Activities) influence the organizational commitment of employees at institutions providing care to the elderly across the affective, instrumental and normative dimensions. The hypotheses underlying this premise are the following:

H_1: Internal marketing positively influences organizational commitment.

$H_{1.1}$: Internal marketing positively influences affective commitment.

$H_{1.2}$: Internal marketing positively influences instrumental commitment.

$H_{1.3}$: Internal marketing positively influences normative commitment.

Given that the overwhelming majority of studies focus on other organizational types, we consider it of relevance to study internal marketing and the organizational commitment of professionals providing care to the elderly. Although there is a shared regulatory and supervisory framework for institutions providing this type of care, there

are also varying characteristics dependent on prevailing cultural, social and organizational environments, which may result in different applications of internal marketing practices, thereby producing a different impact on levels of employee commitment and performance.

5. METHODOLOGY

The universe of this research study was constituted of employees at three elderly care institutions in the city of Covilhã, Portugal, belonging to the private non-profit sector: LSJ (86 respondents), ASM (45 respondents) and LSCMC (57 respondents), making up a total of 188 respondents with a 96.4% response rate. On site residential care services are provided by all three entities, thus enabling their collective study. The objective of analyzing the aforementioned institutions was to determine whether they are aware of the application of internal marketing practices, and whether or not such practices influence the commitment and performance of their employees, in addition to whether this is approached in an intuitive fashion or else programmed and implemented by their superiors.

The questionnaire applied in the research study consisted of three different sections. The first gathered socio-demographic information: gender, age, civil status, professional category, professional status, length of service, and department. Closed (dichotomous) and multiple-choice answers were offered to respondents.

In the second section, we collected information on the application of internal marketing practices by the institutions in accordance with the Jou, Chou and Fu (2008) scale. It included six components – Empathy and Consideration, Benchmarking, Quality of Work, Ascending Communication, Valuing and Sharing Information, and Promotional Activities. The approach employed by Jou and others contains 26 statements, covering the component items listed above. The instrument was ruled valid and reliable for the analysis of in-ternal marketing practices, and returned a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.9 (Jou et al., 2008).

In the third section, we sought information on the organizational commitment of employees within their institutions. Organizational commitment was evaluated by an adapted version of the Meyer and Allen (1997) model through an organizational commitment questionnaire (OCQ). The questionnaire enables the measurement of three dimensions to organizational commitment: affective commitment, normative commitment, and instrumental commitment. The scale features 19 items, of which four are inverted. The Meyer and Allen scale presents considerable internal consistency, given that its reliability rating exceeds 0.70.

In the second and third questionnaire sections, we employed a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from "1–total disagreement" and "7–total agreement". A pre-test was carried out on ten social institution employees. The full questionnaire was applied over the course of the month of August 2012 across the three institutions, and then subsequently statistically processed with the help of IBM-SPSS software, version 19.0.

6. RESULTS

As regards the sample characteristics in terms of gender, females overwhelmingly predominate (93.1%). The most representative age group is between 41 and 50 years of age (38.8%), with the 20-30 age group being the least representative one (6.4%). In terms of professional category, the direct-action auxiliary nurse category had the largest share (26.1%), followed by the care-home auxiliary category (17.6%). There is some contractual instability given that only 25.6% of respondents hold permanent working contracts. As regards the length of service in the profession, the largest percentile group is 10–20 years, while the length of service at the respective institution returned most cases falling into either the less than 10-years category and 10–20 years.

Descriptive analysis of the internal marketing related variables identified the factors that returned the highest average values, in descending order: Empathy and Consideration, Ascending Communication, Valuing and Sharing Information, Quality of Work, Benchmarking and Promotional Activities. A study by Bohnenberger (2005) also obtained the same results. Indeed, the factors reporting the lowest average values in this study – namely, Benchmarking and Promotional Activities, should draw attention to the priority aspects most worthy of further organizational attention and reflection.

Regarding the organizational commitment dimension, we found that the most significant levels of commitment were those affective and instrumental, with averages of 4.8 and 5.2 respectively. Such results testify to respondents working at the institution because they wish to do so and enjoy doing it (affective commitment), as well as that they remain there because the costs of departure (psychological and/or financial) may prove high.

After establishing the average values of the different variables incorporated into the study, we opted to analyze the relationship between the global internal marketing constructs and organizational commitment by Pearson's correlation. We observed a positive, moderate correlation of 0.498 (p= 0.000), which is again in accordance with the results of earlier studies (e.g. Caruana & Calleya, 1998; Bohnenberger, 2005).

Subsequently, we attempted to understand the extent to which internal marketing influences organizational commitment, which would prove or disprove the hypotheses set out above.

In order to test *H1: Internal marketing positively influences organizational commitment*, we opted to undertake multiple linear regression with the objective of verifying the functional relationship between the dependent variable (organizational commitment) and the independent variables (in this case, the internal marketing variables). Thus, we effectively strove to ascertain the extent to which internal marketing shapes and impacts on the organizational commitment of employees at the institutions studied. Having verified the statistical multicollinearity of the variables (through VIF Analysis), residual normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test) and the homoscedasticity level (graphic methodology), we carried out the specific analytical procedures whose results are detailed in Table 1.

As may be seen from the table above, the R value shows the correlation coefficient between internal marketing and organizational commitment standing at 0.604. Hence, the percentage of total variation in the commitment explained by internal marketing (R^2) is 36.5%. An ANOVA test returns an F level of significance of 0.000, which is a value below 0.05, therefore indicating that internal marketing does influence organizational commitment. Thus, we are correspondingly in a position to confirm the hypothesis formulated

Table 1: Regression analysis

Model	R	R^2	R^2_{adj}	$\hat{\sigma}$		
1	0.604[a]	0.365	0.344	0.75918		
	Analysis of Variance					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Regression	59.936	6	9.989	17.332	0.000[a]	
Error	104.321	181	.576	–	–	
Total	164.257	187	–	–	–	

[a] Predictors: (Constant), Empathy and Consideration, Benchmarking, Quality of Work, Ascending Communication, Valuing and Sharing Information, Promotional Activities α =0.05

as "Internal marketing does positively influence organizational commitment", a fact hitherto confirmed by the findings of studies by Caruana and Calleya (1998), Davis and Nance (2001), Bohnenberger (2005), and Chang and Chang (2007, 2009).

We then worked on evaluating whether the variables making up the internal marketing construct made an equal contribution towards explaining this model of analysis. Table 2 details these results.

With the goal of testing the model's three hypotheses – $H_{1.1}$: *Internal marketing positively influences affective commitment*, $H_{1.2}$: *Internal marketing positively influences instrumental commitment* and $H_{1.3}$ *Internal marketing positively influences normative commitment*, and thereby measuring the intensity of the correlation between the internal marketing variables and the dimensions to commitment, we adopted Pearson's R correlation (Table 3).

Table 2: Regression coefficients (Organizational commitment)

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coef.		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.981	.187	-	21.277	.000
Empathy and Consideration	.090	.043	.166	2.076	.039
Benchmarking	-.018	.038	-.034	-.486	.627
Quality of Work	.302	.059	.576	5.149	.000
Ascending Communication	-.145	.051	-.257	-2.828	.005
Valuing and Sharing Information	.132	.059	.229	2.259	.025
Promotional Activities	-.131	.061	-.178	-2.132	.034

Analyzing the regression coefficients, we verified that the factors of Quality of Work, Ascending Communication, Valuing and Sharing Information and Promotional Activities provide the greatest relative contribution (in descending order) to explaining the internal marketing influence on organizational commitment. We also make note of the fact that the Benchmarking item has no significant impact on organizational commitment.

We may therefore infer that Quality of Work, Ascending Communication and Valuing and Sharing Information do have an influence on organizational commitment at the institutions studied. These factors report the greatest relative contribution to explaining the influence exerted on commitment, while rejecting any influence by the Benchmarking item.

Table 3: Correlation test (Pearson's R)

Correlations		Internal marketing
Affective Commitment	Pearson Correlation	.372**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	188
Normative Commitment	Pearson Correlation	.590**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	188
Instrumental Commitment	Pearson Correlation	.256**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	188

From the analysis in Table 3, we find that internal marketing correlates positively with affective commitment (0.372), with normative commit-

ment (0.590) and with instrumental commitment (0.256). Thus, we conclude that there is a moderate linear association between internal marketing and affective and normative commitment, while only a low level with instrumental commitment. Following this analytical process, we are able to confirm the validity of the hypotheses $H_{1.1}$, $H_{1.2}$ and $H_{1.3}$.

The Bohnenberge (2005) study also found evidence in favor of internal marketing influencing affective and normative commitment levels, while not finding any influence of internal marketing on instrumental commitment. In turn, Caruana and Calleya (1998) confirm internal marketing as influencing only affective commitment.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This study resulted in a range of conclusions which we believe may contribute to advancing our understanding of both this topic and the manner in which the studied service provision institutions act and engage with their employees, as well as how this in turn shapes and influences their respective commitment levels, since such commitment enhances positive behaviors and productivity, driving a better standard of overall quality service provision.

While there are some studies on this topic in the literature, our knowledge remains very restricted; hence the pertinence of our findings, particularly given the focus on the provision of services/healthcare to elderly citizens. We therefore deem these research findings relevant, given that they enable the evaluation of and subsequent informing of the institutions studied of just what changes they might undertake with the greatest likelihood of raising service provision quality standards and, consequently, attaining higher levels of employee commitment.

The analytical process applied proved the internal marketing factors such as Empathy and Consideration, Quality of Work, Valuing and Sharing Information, and Ascending Communications to be the most widely utilized at the institutions studied (that is, descriptive analysis of these variables reported an average level of recourse to internal marketing practices). Those identified as being least applied were the Benchmarking and Promotional Activities items.

In the organizational commitment related dimensions, we found that the affective and the instrumental types, with average values of 4.7 and 5.1 respectively, to be the predominant types of commitment. This demonstrates that respondents work at their respective institution because they both wish to and enjoy doing so (affective commitment), and remain employed there because the departure costs (financial and/or psychological) are high (instrumental commitment).

As regards the hypothesis questioning whether internal marketing positively influences organizational commitment, this was entirely and categorically proven. As regards the contributions towards organizational commitment made by various internal marketing facets, we concluded that the factors of Quality of Work, Ascending Communication, and Valuing and Sharing Information prove the most significant to organizational commitment at the institutions studied. Correspondingly, these three factors also make the greatest relative contributions towards explaining the influence on commitment.

Given that these institutions are undergoing a period of turbulence due to the ongoing economic crisis and corresponding decline in public and private funding, in conjunction with greater institutional competition and within the framework in which practically no attention is being paid to organizational behavior, it is now essential for institutional managers to engage with and motivate their employees. Hence, we would suggest the implementation of practices that enable and facilitate communication among members of staff and addressing causes of dissatisfaction, as well as gathering their suggestions. There is a need for internal communication programs convey-

ing messages, values, missions and objectives to members of staff, in conjunction with establishing activities that involve all the professionals in employment at the respective institution in order to ensure, firstly, that the institutional objectives are met and, secondly, that there is a broader sense of employee commitment.

In relation to research project limitations, we highlight that our respondents were drawn from only three institutions. Hence, we would suggest carrying out further studies covering a broader range of institutions to open up the scope for comparison between the results returned. We should also not overlook the fact that the study would likely benefit from stepping beyond a quantitative approach to also incorporate some form of qualitative dimension in a bid to enable a better understanding of the sense of being committed to an institution on the one hand, and, on the other, the actual impact of different internal marketing practices from the point of view of various stakeholders, in particular, employees, managers, users, and their respective families, taking into account the specific characteristics of this organizational type.

Furthermore, the literature on the relationship between these two constructs within the context of elderly care support institutions is, to the best of our knowledge, non-existent, so there is no scope for comparing our results with other studies.

We would propose that future research studies the complex relationship between the internal marketing and organizational commitment constructs, including an analysis of variables such as professional performance, absenteeism, and the level of intent to leave employment at the institution.

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