The impact of internal marketing on employee attitudes and behaviours in local public sector organisations

O papel do marketing interno nas atitudes e comportamentos dos colaboradores das organizações do sector público local

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to extend the knowledge on the relationships between internal marketing (IM), job satisfaction, organisational commitment, organisational trust, and job performance, by proposing and testing a model describing the impact of IM on these employees' attitudes and behaviours. The data collection was carried out using a questionnaire applied to employees of the Portuguese local public sector (namely the five Municipalities of Alto Tâmega region). A total of 565 valid questionnaires were obtained and treated using structural equation modelling. The results show that IM positively and directly influences job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and organisational trust, but do not directly influence job performance. Job performance is influenced by organisational commitment and organisational trust, but not by job satisfaction. However, the indirect effect of job satisfaction on job performance, mediated by organisational commitment and trust, is significant. In turn, job satisfaction directly influences organisational commitment, which, in turn, has a direct impact on organisational trust. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first time that a study of the relationship between IM and organisational trust has been conducted in the Portuguese local public sector context. Hopefully, the results obtained will significantly contribute to the development of the investigation of the effects of IM on this sector and to future research studies on internal marketing and public management.

Keywords: Internal marketing, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, organisational trust, job performance, local public sector.

Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é alargar os conhecimentos sobre as relações entre marketing interno (IM), satisfação profissional, compromisso organizacional, confiança organizacional e desempenho profissional, propondo e testando um modelo sobre o papel do IM nas atitudes e comportamentos dos colaboradores. A recolha de dados foi realizada utilizando um questionário aplicado aos colaboradores do sector público local português. Foram obtidos e tratados um total de 565 questionários válidos utilizando a técnica de modelação de equações estruturais. Os resultados mostram que o MI influencia positiva e diretamente a satisfação profissional, o comprometimento organizacional, e a confiança organizacional, mas não diretamente o desempenho profissional. O desempenho no trabalho é influenciado pelo comprometimento organizacional e pela confiança organizacional, mas não pela satisfação no trabalho. Contudo, o efeito indireto da satisfação no trabalho sobre o desempenho no trabalho, mediado pelo comprometimento e confiança organizacional, é significativo. Por sua vez, a satisfação no trabalho influencia diretamente o comprometimento organizacional, o que por sua vez tem um impacto direto na confiança organizacional. Tanto quanto sabemos, é a primeira vez que o estudo da relação entre MI e a confiança organizacional foi investigado no contexto do sector público local. Espera-se que os resultados tenham dado mais um passo na investigação dos efeitos do IM neste sector, contribuindo para a investigação futura nas literaturas sobre marketing interno e gestão pública.

Palavras-chave: Marketing interno, satisfação profissional, comprometimento organizacional, confiança organizacional, desempenho profissional, sector público local.

1. Introduction

To achieve and maintain a competitive position and be sustainable, strategies that emphasize performance to ensure survival are greatly needed (Qaisar & Muhamad, 2021). Although much of the literature on organisational performance and competitive advantage has adopted an external focus (on customers and competitors), the internal context is equally essential to help match the challenges facing organisations operating in environments driven by technological revolutions, globalisation, changing consumer needs, changing employee expectations, etc. (Qaisar & Muhamad, 2021). This internal focus can be analysed by taking into account the management philosophy called internal marketing.

The human factor is fundamental for the organization to achieve success. Employees are seen as one of the essential resources of any organization, and their motivation is a conditioning factor for an organization' success (Azêdo & Alves, 2013). The importance of an engaged workforce is greater than ever. Employees who identify with their work put effort into it, prompting organisations to develop various strategies to increase employee engagement (Ohemeng et al., 2019). Organisations that want engaged and creative employees

should consider demonstrating and maintaining relationships with them using internal marketing (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003).

Internal marketing was initially proposed in the services marketing literature as a response to the challenge of delivering high service quality (Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000). From an internal marketing perspective, the employees are seen as internal customers who should be recognized and valued in such a way that they will, in turn, wish to contribute to the success of the organization (Leeflang, 2011). Effective internal marketing should be a continual endeavour that benefits both the organization and its employees, transforming the whole organization into a customer-centred one (Dunne & Barnes, 2000).

Internal marketing outcomes has been the object of several investigations (Qiu et al., 2021; Qaisar & Muhamad, 2021). Internal marketing is a fundamental key element in generating a competitive advantage by increasing organisational effectiveness, service excellence, and innovation through the satisfaction of internal consumers' requirements (Sun et al., 2020). Internal marketing practices, provided that they are used strategically and appropriately, can bring many different advantages for organisations, providing an increase in results and, therefore, success, and, at the same time, recognizing not only the organization but also the people who are part of it (Moura et al., 2015).

The general objective of this study focuses on the possible consequences of applying this type of marketing within organisations. The study aims to analyse the impact that internal marketing practices may have on some specific attitudes and behaviours of employees, namely on employee job satisfaction, organisational commitment, organisational trust and job performance. In this context, a conceptual model exploring the direct relationships between internal marketing, job satisfaction, organisational commitment and organisational trust (regarded as an indicative of the quality of the relationship between the organization and its employees – internal relationship quality), and job performance was developed. On the other hand, the direct effect that internal relationship quality (job satisfaction, organisational commitment and organisational trust) has on job performance is also analysed. Finally, we explore the relationships between job satisfaction, organisational commitment and organisational trust.

The purpose of this study is to make the following contributions: Firstly, to our knowledge, there has been little research focusing on these combined specific variables/consequences (job satisfaction, organisational commitment, organisational trust, job performance) in internal marketing literature. Secondly, in accordance with Li et al. (2021, p.3), "there is a lack of discussion of organization-employee relationship in the literature on relationship marketing", particularly from the perspective of employees. This study, in conformity with the approach advocated by Li et al. (2021), adapts relationship quality theories to internal relationships and defines internal relationship quality as the outcome of positive interactions between the organization and its employees. In this context, job satisfaction, organisational commitment and organisational trust are taken as the measurement variables of internal relationship quality.

Thirdly, this study is applied within the context of Portuguese local public sector organisations, namely in five municipalities of Alto Tâmega region. Qiu et al. (2021) stressed the need to compare the effects that internal marketing has on different sectors. "Despite more than four decades of discussion of internal marketing, its application in organisations remains limited" (Qaisar & Muhamad, 2021, p. 268). The authors have found that, in internal marketing research, most of the studies carried out so far focus on the service sector, and that finance and banking, hospitality, healthcare and retail are among the most frequently scrutinised areas. We consider that studying these relationships within this particular setting (public sector) is timely, as studies dealing with internal marketing in Portuguese local public sector organisations are so far quite limited.

Local government has had a major influence in aiding national growth both at the national and local levels (Simangunsong & Rohmadin, 2018). As the local public sector plays a major role in the progress of every country, we considered that it was essential to investigate the effects of internal marketing within this sector. The public sector has been undergoing significant changes to implement a new organisational model more closely aligned with management-oriented practices, and the traditional bureaucratic "modus operandi" of local government is being increasingly challenged by a changing external and internal environment (Rodrigues & Pinho, 2012). Local authorities need to modernise their operations, their internal organisation and management approaches in order to at once meet the challenges of maintaining public action under budgetary limits, ensuring quality and securing public service continuity (Safy-Godineau et al., 2021). Furthermore, the perception that public organisations are more bureaucratic than private companies is often reinforced by the need for accountability in the public sector, even though red tape and hierarchical control are organisational characteristics found in private sector as well (Boyne, 2002 *in* Kjeldsen & Hansen, 2018). Due to its complex and bureaucratic nature, we can affirm that the implementation of internal marketing in this sector is more urgent than ever. In this context, marketing, especially its internal application (internal marketing), can be a "solution to improve the role of local government in providing public services" (Simangunsong & Rohmadin, 2018, p.109).

This article is divided into five parts: the first presents a brief review of the literature and introduces the conceptual model, the second explains the methodology, the third shows the results obtained, the fourth offers the results discussion, and the fifth presents the main conclusions of the study.

2. Literature review and proposed conceptual model

2.1. Internal Marketing

Organisations are currently aware that internal marketing is an essential concept, both in terms of its philosophy and its practice as a marketing tool (Rodrigues et al., 2018). Internal marketing is a fundamental tool for all organisations (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2002). The internal marketing concept initially derived from a concern to improve the excellence of (internal) service provided by employees (Qiu et al., 2021). In the early phase of the development of internal marketing, most research focused on employee satisfaction and analysed the role of internal marketing in improving service quality (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2002, Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000). Since these early conceptualizations of internal marketing, research in this area has advanced considerably (Qiu et al., 2021). However, as the authors stated, there is no consistent way of defining and conceptualizing internal marketing. According to Grönroos (2001), internal marketing focuses on forming internal relationships among the employees of an organization regardless of their position. It allows for the introduction of a communication that can satisfy the needs of the employees. It became clear that an organization that employs internal marketing practices can better benefit employees, encouraging them to achieve better results (Huang & Rundle-Thiele, 2014).

Internal marketing is therefore regarded as a fundamental tool, whose primary purpose is the existence of an organization focused on the internal customer that aims to encourage its employees and allow them to achieve the organization's goals. Sohail and Jang (2017) consider that internal marketing is a vital instrument for improving work processes, interpersonal relations, information flow, employee training and development, and their connection with the organisation, and whose aim is the achievement of an effective and efficient employee management (internal customers) within organisations. Employees at all levels of the organization can be motivated, mobilized, co-opted, and managed through the use of marketing, human resource management, and related theories, techniques, and principles in order to continuously improve the service provided to external customers and to each other, which is what internal marketing is all about (King, 1991). In this study, internal marketing is viewed as a management philosophy that values the organization's human resources. This philosophy encourages the engagement, mobilization and supervision of organisational members to promote customer-focused values (both internal and external) and support the implementation of organisational changes (Rodrigues et al., 2016).

Jou et al. (2008) perceive internal marketing as a concept that helped arouse the interest of academics in both marketing and human resource management. The authors developed a scale to measure internal marketing that comprises six factors: empathy and consideration (paying attention to employees personal needs), benchmarking (what competitors have to offer to their employees), job quality (the financial and emotional values associated with the employees' job), upward communication (the opportunity for employees to communicate their dissatisfactions or suggestions to their managers), information sharing (strategy used by managers to convey organisational messages, missions and values to their subordinates), and promotional activities (whether the company engages in promotional or public relation activities).

Several investigations have examined the consequences of implementing the concept of internal marketing. As Qiu et al. (2021, p. 7) point out, "Considerable qualitative and quantitative work in the internal marketing stream confirms various employee-attitudinal benefits from internal marketing implementation". For example, Jou et al. (2008) sustain that internal marketing is associated with job satisfaction, customer behaviour, organisational support, organisational commitment, and work group socialization, which induces a change in customer satisfaction. Kesen et al. (2017) studied the effects of internal marketing on organisational trust in the hotel industry, and confirmed that internal marketing affects trust in the organization. The results obtained from the study offer promising outcomes for the organization, when implemented appropriately (Qaisar & Muhamad, 2021); however, as far as we know, the principles of internal marketing have not been actively applied within the local public sector environment. Qaisar and Muhamad (2021), for instance, argue that there is a lack of research on the role of organisational characteristics in internal marketing.

Based on the literature review, the following model is proposed (Figure 1). It consists of five variables and nine hypotheses. The model analyses the effects of internal marketing on certain employees' attitudes and behaviours. The independent variable is internal marketing and the final dependent variable is job performance. This model assumes that the job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and organisational trust (indicative of the internal relationship quality) variables are influenced by internal marketing and impact job performance. Theoretically this study employs Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano et al., 2017) to explore the relationship between internal marketing, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, organisational trust and job performance. This theory outlines the reasons why employees decide to commit more or less to their job, depending on their perception of the support, rewards, and cost of the relationship, which will determine whether or not they will choose to maintain this social interaction and put in their best efforts (Ohemeng et al., 2019).

In this model, the use of internal marketing is seen as a way to foster good relationships between local public sector organisations and their employees. It is believed that these relationships are reflected in the employees' positive attitudes and behaviours and influence their satisfaction, commitment, trust in the organisation, and job performance. Along with satisfaction, trust and commitment, which are recognised as key relational mediators, are of great importance in the field of relationship marketing and are central to the relational mediators model of relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt,

1994; Brown et al., 2019). In the internal context, this model applies relationship quality theories to internal relationships, defining internal relationship quality as the result of various positive connections between the organisation and its employees (Li et al., 2021). As such, job satisfaction,

organisational commitment and organisational trust are seen as indicators of internal relationship quality.

The hypotheses of the conceptual model are discussed in the following section.

Figure 1 - Proposed conceptual model
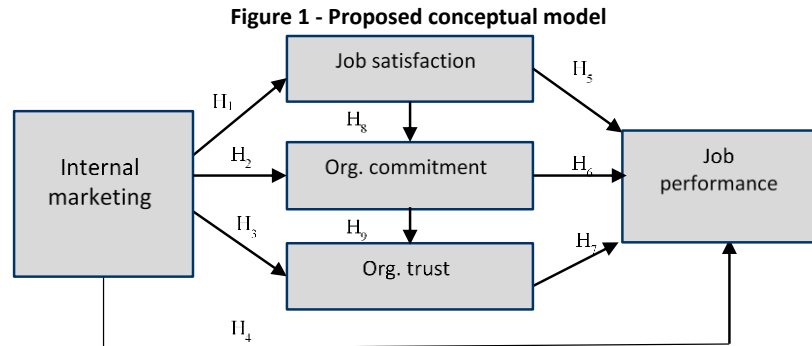
Source: Own elaboration.

2.2 Internal marketing and job satisfaction

Satisfaction is essential for the survival of any private or public organization (Nicholls et al., 1988). An organization that is concerned with its employees' satisfaction and invests in their training helps them perform better, and this sort of performance will trigger an increase in operational performance (Kaur et al., 2009). Hoppock (1935, p. 47) defines job satisfaction as "a combination of psychological, physiological, and environmental factors that cause a person to state 'I am satisfied with my work'". In turn, Locke (1976, p.1300) defines it as "a pleasant or positive emotional state resulting from an appreciation [perception] concerning a work experience". In turn, Vroom (1964) defines job satisfaction as "affective orientations on the part of individuals towards work roles which they are currently occupying".

Although the definitions of job satisfaction may vary, they all refer to an emotional attitude that people acquire from their work. Job satisfaction is a pleasurable emotional state that comes from some work or experiences at work (Locke, 1976); it is associated with the employees' perception of justice, fairness and respect (Rego, 2001) and portrays a positive way in which each individual analyses and appreciates his/her work (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004). Therefore, job satisfaction is characterized as a set of unfavourable or favourable feelings that shape employees' perception of their work (Mathieu et al., 2014).

An increasing amount of literature has been emphasizing the value of employee job satisfaction, as the competition between business activities or the effectiveness of employee behaviours has been receiving more and more attention from both scholars and practitioners (Cheng, 2020). According to the author, research work focusing on organisational behaviour, human resources, and strategic management has paid much attention to employee job satisfaction, and has suggested that it can play a major role in human resource or organisational psychology. Lee et al. (2012) consider that organisations have shown increasing scientific interest in job satisfaction, given that it can

positively influence job performance, and is bound to become an essential tool in improving productivity and the quality of services provided.

It is reasonable to conclude that internal marketing is a significant factor in influencing job-related attitudes, given the social and organisational support available in an environment that uses internal marketing practices. Hence, this study seeks to test the impact that internal marketing has on job satisfaction among employees of local public organisations. Several studies have already confirmed the positive relationship between the two concepts, but the quantity of studies focusing on local public institutions is still scarce. For example, Iliopoulos and Priporas (2011) conducted an investigation in Greek public hospitals and concluded that internal marketing had a considerable positive effect on job satisfaction in healthcare. In a study conducted among the employees of utility municipal firms, Ružić et al. (2015) highlight the strong impact of the application of internal marketing on employee motivation and job satisfaction. In the public medical sector, Sun et al. (2020) discovered that internal marketing represents a valuable competitive advantage and that it is a consequence of internal customer satisfaction and internal service quality. Likewise, in a study focusing on social and healthcare organisations, Rodrigues et al. (2016) confirmed that internal marketing practices have a positive effect on job satisfaction.

In other sectors (tourism industry), Huang and Rundle-Thiele (2014) demonstrated that hospitality employees' job satisfaction improved when practices such as internal communication and training are implemented, and that this new-found satisfaction had a positive impact on their job performance. A similar result was obtained by Mainardes et al. (2019) who concluded that internal marketing positively influences employee satisfaction in the banking sector. In a study applied to employees of three different services industries (healthcare, banking-finance, and insurance organisations), Taştan and Davoudi (2020) confirmed that employees who have a favourable perception about their

organisation's internal marketing activities will feel greater job satisfaction and, consequently, will perform better in their work roles.

Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1 - Internal marketing positively and directly influences job satisfaction.

2.3 Internal marketing and organisational commitment

Considerable attention has been directed towards organisational commitment from scholars and practitioners alike (Breitsohl & Ruhle, 2013). The impact of organisational commitment on organisational behaviour is undeniable. Organisational commitment is often recognized as an intervening factor in employees' attitudes and behaviours (Rodrigues et al., 2016; Chiu et al., 2020). Organisational commitment is defined as a psychological state described by the relationship between the employee and the organization and that has an effect on the employees' decision to maintain membership in the organisation or to leave the organization (Mowday et al., 1979). Committed employees are more supportive and adherent to the company's goals, more loyal to the company, and exhibit a lower desire to quit (Abdelazimahmed et al., 2022). For Meyer and Allen (1991), organisational commitment is a psychological and physical bond between an employee and an organization. The multidimensional model of organisational commitment proposed by Meyer and Allen (1991) includes three components: affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. This research will only study and analyse the affective component. In this conceptualization, affective commitment refers to the employees' strong emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in, a given organization. Employees who are affectively committed to the organization have built strong personal relationships with it and desire to remain in that organisation (Agarwal & Sajid, 2017). This concept encompasses the psychological attachment between a worker and his/her employer, and can be characterized as an energy that fosters the union between all employees, allowing them to work as a team to achieve the organization's goals (Rodrigues et al., 2016).

The present study considers that there is a relationship between internal marketing and organisational commitment. Allen and Meyer (1990) assert that the most influential factor in determining affective commitment are work experience antecedents that fulfil the employees' psychological need to feel comfortable within the organisation and competent in the work-role. We suggest that internal marketing could be a strong tool to achieve this goal.

Prior research has established that internal marketing is associated with organisational commitment. For example, Mero et al. (2020) confirms that the implementation of internal marketing strategies and activities strengthens employee organisational commitment in Ecuadorian co-operatives. In their study, Chiu et al. (2020) found out that the implementation of internal marketing increases organisational commitment, which will, in turn, improve job performance. Furthermore, organisational commitment partially mediates the relationship between internal marketing and job performance. Rodrigues et al. (2016) also confirm that internal marketing constitutes an important tool to increase employee organisational commitment. Similarly, when they looked at the public banking industry in India, Thomas and Rodrigues (2020) conclude that employees who are provided with internal marketing practices that include respectful treatment, favourable working conditions, independence in their work roles, and well-defined responsibilities, are more likely to be more committed to their banks and to the tasks they are asked to perform.

Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is presented:

H2 - Internal marketing positively and directly influences organisational commitment.

2.4 Internal marketing and organisational trust

The importance of trust to psychosocial functioning has been advocated since the beginning of contemporary psychology (Rotenberg, 2010). For Simpson (2007), trust is one of the most important components for the development and preservation of happy and well-functioning interpersonal relationships. Trust is also foundational to daily interpersonal relationships (Rempel et al., 1985), even between groups within companies (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001).

Trust is fundamental to the development and survival of organisations and interpersonal relationships (Zanini, 2007). Building trust among people in organisations is vital for efficiency (Thompson, 1967). If we have trust, we will act in the best possible way to fulfil our goals and, in turn, those of the organization. This implies that we will execute better when performing our duties. Trust is enhanced when the parties have good communication and when one seeks to prevent opportunistic actions that cause damage to one of the parties (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Most concepts involving trust share some common factors: trust helps overcome risk and hesitation in exchange relationships, and it emerges in situations that threatens the stability of a relationship. This situation usually occurs when one of the parties involved does not fully understand the motivations and interventions of the other party (Moreira & Lopes, 2005). At the organisational level, trust can lead to increased cooperation, sharing of sensitive information, and to a better performance of the trustor (Mayer & Davis, 1999; Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). For Cumming and Bromeily (1996), trust is an individual's belief, or a belief shared by a group, that another individual or group is honest according to his/her notion of trustworthiness. The authors also state that organisational trust is the conviction that the organisation will behave in accordance

with its commitments, both explicit or implicit (Cumming & Bromeily, 1996).

While the associations between internal marketing, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and job performance have already been empirically demonstrated in the literature (for example, Huang & Kundle-Thiele, 2014; Rodrigues et al., 2016; Iliopoulos & Priporas, 2011; Thomas & Rodrigues, 2020), the study of the relationship between internal marketing and organisational trust is one of the original aspects of this study since, to our knowledge, this is the first time that a research work focuses on studying the impact of this relationship on the Portuguese local public sector.

To the best of our knowledge, the relationship between internal marketing and organisational trust in the local public sector remains understudied. However, some studies focusing on other sectors have found a positive relationship between internal marketing and organisational trust (Kesen et al., 2017). Órfão (2010) found out that internal marketing has a beneficial effect on employees' perception of trust. Additionally, they stress that the internal marketing strategies employed by the organization give employees a greater sense of security, as they foster a more open and communicative atmosphere. Hsieh and Wang (2016) examine the influences of internal marketing on perceived organisational support, employee organisational trust, and employee work engagement in the hotel industry. Their study concluded that internal marketing was positively related to employee work engagement, and that this relationship was partially mediated by employee organisational trust and perceived organisational support; the latter was also found to partially mediate the relationship between internal marketing and employee organisational trust. Rasool et al. (2019) investigated the link between internal marketing practices and the attitudinal behaviour of frontline employees of the banking sector, and concluded that internal marketing is an effective way to improve employee engagement and build organisational trust. Fangue et al. (2020) investigated the impact of internal marketing on customer trust, both at the organisational and interpersonal levels, in micro finance institutions. Their study focused on external customers, but they also discovered that there is a positive correlation between internal marketing and both dimensions of trust.

Considering the above:

H3 - Internal marketing positively and directly influences organisational trust.

2.5 Internal marketing and job performance

To ensure continued organisational success, organisations are increasingly placing greater emphasis on job performance (Gruman & Saks, 2011). Goffman (1959, p. 15) defines performance as "an activity of an actor in action, serving to influence the course of that action." This statement is entirely connected to the concept of performance appraisal, and is essential to discern whether a performance is good or not. Performance appraisal has a necessary function in the organisational environment. It is connected to the employees and to the company members, to the way they structure themselves, and to the investment made so they can improve, namely at the level of their skills and abilities. Therefore, the appraisal process, when correctly conducted, can become an ally for the employees and organisations, since they will be able to recognise the potentialities and weaknesses not only of the employees, but also of the evaluators, and of the organization (Cappelli & Tavis, 2016).

Taştan and Davoudi (2020) argue that the impact of internal marketing activities on employees' job performance has been assessed in multiple industries and countries. There are some studies that demonstrate the direct impact of internal marketing on employee performance and the consequences it entails for the organisational level. Some of the more recent studies that managed to prove this correlation include the studies conducted by Imani et al. (2020), Abidin and Roslin (2019), and Taştan and Davoudi (2020). The results showed that employees who have a favourable perception on the internal marketing initiatives implemented by their organisation will experience higher job satisfaction and consequently, will have greater performance in their work roles (Taştan & Davoudi, 2020).

Alternatively, Rodrigues et al. (2016) conducted a study in an organisation providing social and healthcare services, and they concluded that there is not a direct relationship between internal marketing and employees' job performance; however, the interconnection between the implementation of internal marketing and job performance is mediated by job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4 - Internal marketing positively and directly influences job performance.

2.6 Job satisfaction, organisational commitment, organisational trust and job performance

Psychology has introduced a plethora of precursors to job performance, such as organisational commitment and job satisfaction (Taştan & Davoudi, 2020). Job satisfaction is an indicator of employees' contentedness regarding their jobs (Unguren & Arslan) and is important for the survival of any private or public institution (Nicholls et al., 1988). An organisation that is concerned with its employees' satisfaction and invests in their training helps them perform better and this sort of behaviour will, in turn, trigger an increase in operational performance (Kaur et al., 2009). More recent studies also confirm the positive impact that job satisfaction exerts on job performance. For example, Taştan and Davoudi (2020) confirmed that employees who are satisfied are more likely to demonstrate improved performance and to provide service that will satisfy customers.

Furthermore, investigations conducted by Porter et al. (1974) demonstrate that organisational commitment is not only a predictor of employee retention, but can similarly be a predictor of increased effort and improved performance. The level of commitment an employee has towards the organization is anticipated to enhance their job performance, as those with a strong commitment to the organization "will demonstrate a greater eagerness to strive for its goals and objectives" (Kim, 2005, p.246). Kim (2005) found out that greater job satisfaction and commitment to the organisation correspond to better institutional performance. Rodrigues et al. (2016) highlight the positive impact of organisational commitment on job performance. The results of the study developed by Chiu et al. (2020) confirm that organisational commitment has a positive effect on job performance, and partially mediates the relationship between internal marketing and job performance.

Lastly, organisational trust is deemed to be of paramount importance to the scientific community (Orfão, 2010) and is a key factor in the success and efficiency of organisations. Trust between members of an organisation can greatly aid in the optimisation of the performance of the different organisational functions (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). Órfão's (2010) research confirms the hypothesis that there is a positive correlation between organisational trust and job performance. This has been corroborated by Singh and Desa (2018) who, in a study conducted among public employees, have established that there is a direct link between organisational trust and job performance, e.g., a higher level of organisational trust is linked to better job performance.

In line with the conceptual background and supported by the review of the literature, the following hypotheses are developed:

H5 - Job satisfaction positively and directly influences job performance.

H6 - Organisational commitment positively and directly influences job performance.

H7 – Organisational trust positively and directly influences job performance.

2.7 Job satisfaction, organisational commitment and organisational trust

Lack of job satisfaction and commitment among their employees have costly consequences for organisations, since their employees are more likely to make more mistakes that will affect their work performance, they will have to face higher absenteeism, more stress and greater turnover intentions (Agarwal & Sajid, 2017). For that reason, studying these concepts and their relationships has become more important than ever. The present model also suggests that there are direct and positive relationships between job satisfaction and organisational commitment. There are some studies that confirm the positive influence of job satisfaction on organisational commitment. For example, Malik et al. (2010),

claim that researchers have established that job satisfaction is the result of immediate emotions related to positive or negative job experiences, whereas commitment to the organization develops over time as the individual forms a more comprehensive understanding of the organization, of its values and expectations, and of his/her own future in it. Therefore, organisational commitment is perceived to be affected by job satisfaction. Malik et al. (2010) conducted a study in public universities of Pakistan, and confirmed that job satisfaction has a significant influence on organisational commitment. In a study that compared public and private sector employees, Agarwal and Sajid (2017) found out that job satisfaction predicts affective and normative commitment more significantly in public sector than in private sector. Another example is the study of Rodrigues et al. (2016) which also found that the higher the levels of satisfaction (that include the employees' wage) of professionals providing social and healthcare, the higher their levels of commitment to the organisation they work for.

Finally, this study will empirically test the relationship between commitment and trust. Brown et al. (2019) argue that research has already demonstrated that trust enhances commitment (e.g., the seminal article about trust and commitment in relationship marketing by Morgan & Hunt, 1994). However, Brown et al. (2019) decided to re-examine the causality between trust and commitment. The authors have found that the commitment-to-trust model offers a feasible alternative for Morgan and Hunt's (1994) trust-to-commitment model, and that in business-to-business relationships, commitment does definitely influence trust. Drawing from Brown et al. (2019), in this study we will look at organisational trust as a consequence of organisational commitment, that is, we assume that when employees are committed to their organization, it will be easier for them to trust the company. Additionally, when employees are committed to their organization, they tend to invest more in its successes and goals, which further strengthens trust. The reasoning behind this assertion could be related to the type of employment, organisational setting, culture, and environment existing in (local) public sector organisations.

Individuals have various reasons for being committed to organizations (Meyer & Allen, 1997). As already mentioned, in the present study, organizational commitment was measured by the affective dimension that reflects the willingness to remain in the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1997), and refers to a psychological state wherein the employee shares the organization's values and pursues its goals (Mowday et al., 1979).

Public sector organisations are based on "general public values adhered to serving the common good", so employees with a strong public service motivation are more likely to be satisfied with their positions, as they are given the opportunity to serve the public environment of their organisations (Kjeldsen & Hansen, 2018, p. 28), and are naturally more (affective) committed to their organisations. Also, employees working for public sector organisations enjoy a high level of job security, predetermined pay raises and assured progression (Agarwal &

Sajid, 2017). That is why, according to the authors, public sector employees generally exhibit a greater affective and normative commitment to their respective organisations than those who work in the private sector.

In this context, it seems reasonable to assume that, either because of a strong motivation for public service or because of the job security and/or other working conditions provided in this type of organisations, civil servants tend to have an "innate" sense of (affective) organisational commitment. These factors, in our opinion, potentially contribute to the creation of an organisational trust environment. For example, according to social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), employees' attitudes towards job security will have an effect on the amount of trust they put in the organisation.

Considering the above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H8 - Job satisfaction positively and directly influences organisational commitment.

H9 - Organisational commitment positively and directly influences organisational trust.

3. Methodology

This study used a quantitative approach to data collection and analysis. The research was designed as a cross-sectional, descriptive study because of the character of the hypotheses.

Data collection was carried out using a face-to-face questionnaire applied to all the employees (1297) of the five Portuguese local authorities located in the region of Alto Tâmega. Taking into account operational and time constraints, a convenience sampling process was used. The sample comprised participants who fully completed the data collection questionnaire. We chose a sample of 565 workers (response rate of 43.56%) who had completed the data collection questionnaire, regardless of their position. A pre-test to evaluate the clarity and organization of the questionnaire was carried out with fifteen workers from other local public sector institutions in a different region. The pre-test led to some modifications to the questionnaire (the presentation form for the scale items, for example), but the individuals who took part in the pre-test were not part of the final sample. Permission to carry out the questionnaires was requested from the mayors of the five Municipalities under study. In each Municipality a key informant was chosen to help the researchers apply the questionnaires in the municipal council departments. In order to improve response rate, accountability and transparency, participants were informed that the questionnaire was confidential and that the results would only be presented as statistical summaries in the final report.

Upon review of the literature, the following scales were chosen to measure the five constructs (Table 1).

Table 1 - Scales used

Variable	Recommended Scale	Items
Internal Marketing	Jou et al. (2008)	26
Job satisfaction	Hackman & Oldham (1975)	5
Organisational commitment	Meyer & Allen (1997)	6
Organisational trust	Doney & Cannon (1997)	8
Job performance	Williams & Anderson (1991)	7

Source: Own elaboration.

All scales used in the construction of the questionnaire were served by five-point Likert scales. Participants showed their level of agreement to statements related to internal marketing, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and organisational trust using responses ranging from 1 - strongly disagree to 5 - strongly agree. The job performance variable was based on the same scale, but went from 1 - almost never to 5 - almost always. The questionnaire also contains demographic and professional questions: gender, age, education, and place of residence, and professional questions about employment status, professional category, current position, seniority in the current position, and seniority in the organization.

Statistical analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 24 for Windows. For the execution of Structural Equation Models, the program AMOS, version 22 for Windows, was used. The scales were validated using confirmatory factor analysis and Structural Equation Models (measurement model). Factor validity, convergent validity, discriminant validity, reliability, and model goodness of fit were assessed. The following reference values were used

(Hair et al., 2010; Marôco, 2010): standardized factor loading above 0.50 (factor validity); average variance extracted (AVE) above 0.50 (convergent validity); the square root of the AVE is greater than the correlations between the dimensions (discriminant validity); construct reliability above 0. 70 (reliability); chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio below 3, CFI (Comparative Fit Index) above 0.90 and RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) below 0.07 (quality of fit). Structural Equation Models were also used to study the causal relationships among the constructs to provide answers to the study's hypotheses (structural model).

4. Presentation of results

4.1 Sample Profile

The sample consists of 565 employees of local public sector organisations aged between 25 and 66 years (M = 48.3, SD = 8.3), predominantly male (57.0%). The majority of the participants have concluded secondary education (43.0%), 37.7% of them have completed primary education and 19.3% hold a higher education degree. The employees participating in

the study were working for 5 local public sector organisations in the municipalities of Chaves (38.2%), Montalegre (23.2%), Boticas (14.2%), Vila Pouca de Aguiar (12.4%), and Ribeira de Pena (12.0%). As for the participants' professional category, operational assistants (50.1%), technical assistants (27.3%), and senior technicians (18.4%) stand out. On average, they have worked in the organization for 21.7 years (Table 2).

Table 2 - Characterization of the sample - sociodemographic and professional data (N=565)

Variable		n	%
Gender	Female	243	43.0%
	Male	322	57.0%
Education	Elementary School	213	37.7%
	High School	243	43.0%
	Higher education	109	19.3%
Residence/Municipality	Boticas	80	14.2%
	Chaves	216	38.2%
	Montalegre	131	23.2%
	Ribeira de Pena	68	12.0%
	Vila Pouca de Aguiar	70	12.4%
Professional Category	Operational Assistant	283	50.1%
	Technical Assistant	154	27.3%
	Higher Technician	104	18.4%
	Technical Coordinator	18	3.2%
	Operational Foreman	4	0.7%
	Foreman	1	0.2%
	Municipal Supervisor	1	0.2%
Age	Minimum= 25, Maximum= 66, Mean value = 48.3, Standard deviation = 8.3		
Length of service in the organization (years)	Minimum = 3, Maximum = 46, mean value = 21.7, Standard deviation = 8.5		

Source: Own elaboration.

4.2 Measurement Model

The items of the scales were grouped into dimensions (constructs) according to the literature consulted. Their factor structure was analysed using Structural Equation Models. The procedures proposed by Hair et al. (2010) were followed for their validation. The maximum likelihood method was used, assuming that there is a correlation between the different dimensions.

The normality of the data was verified by analysing the symmetry and kurtosis coefficients. The values obtained below 3 (the highest absolute value of symmetry was -2.024 and kurtosis was 2.831) ensure the approximation to multivariate normality, without jeopardizing the quality of the adjustment indexes and parameter estimates (Marôco, 2010).

A first analysis of the overall goodness of fit, reliability, and validity of the instrument revealed the existence of items with low factor loadings and goodness of fit indexes below the reference values, raising some doubts about the validity and reliability of the instrument. Following Hair et al. (2010), the items with standardized factor loadings below 0.50 were excluded (items with factor loadings between brackets in Table 3). Therefore, 1 item was removed from the job satisfaction scale, three from the organisational commitment scale, two from the organisational trust scale, and two items from the job performance scale.

After the removal of the items, all those that remained have standardized factor loadings above 0.50, thus ensuring the factor validity of each construct, confirming that the specification of the items is correct (Marôco, 2010).

Table 3 - Standardized Factor Loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR) of the measurement model

Items/scales	Factor loadings	AVE	CR
Job satisfaction (adapted from Hackman and Oldham, 1975)		**0.507**	**0.802**
1. Overall, I am very satisfied with this job.	0.800		
2. I often think about quitting this job. *	0.582		
3. Overall, I am satisfied with the kind of tasks I do in this job.	0.705		
4. In my opinion, most people who have this job, or related jobs, are satisfied with their tasks.	0.743		
5. In my opinion, people with this job, or related jobs, often think about quitting. *	(0.345)		
Organisational Commitment (adapted from Meyer and Allen, 1997)		**0.496**	**0.744**
1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization.	0.729		

Items/scales	Factor loadings	AVE	CR
2. I actually feel the problems of this organization as if they were my own.	(0.272)		
3. I don't feel like I am "part of the family" in this organization. *	(0.366)		
4. I don't feel emotionally connected to this organization.*	0.585		
5. This organization has great personal significance to me.	0.783		
6. I do not have a strong sense of belonging to my organization. *	(0.398)		
Organisational Trust (adapted from Doney and Cannon, 1997)		**0.634**	**0.912**
1. This organization always keeps the promises they made me.	0.766		
2. This organization is not always honest with me. *	(0.206)		
3. I believe in the information provided by this organization.	0.737		
4. This organization is really interested in the success of our relationship.	0.829		
5. When it makes important decisions, this organization considers my well-being as well as its own.	0.873		
6. I trust this organization to consider my best interests.	0.842		
7. This organization is trustworthy.	0.720		
8. I think that I need to be cautious with this organization. *	(0.340)		
Internal Marketing (adapted from Jou et al., 2008)		**0.527**	**0.958**
1. My boss discusses with me my professional future in the institution.	0.630		
2. My boss tries to understand what his employees think about the way he leads.	0.717		
3. My boss often pays attention to the family life of his employees.	0.627		
4. My boss makes efforts to become fully acquainted with the way his employees develop their work.	0.574		
5. My boss makes a voluntary effort to find out if we have problems at work.	0.708		
6. The institution regularly investigates and collects information about the salaries paid by other organisations operating in the same sector.	0.668		
7. The institution regularly investigates and collects information on what benefits are given by organisations from the same sector.	0.618		
8. The institution tries to make our work content interesting.	0.731		
9. The institution offers us good additional benefits.	0.646		
10. The institution offers us many opportunities for promotion.	0.673		
11. The institution respects its employees.	0.619		
12. The institution is kind to its employees.	0.669		
13. The institution tries its best to provide us with a comfortable working environment.	0.683		
14. The institution has official communication channels that allow me to give my opinion.	0.649		
15. The institution has sufficient channels for vertical communication.	0.729		
16. When we have any opinions regarding the action of our institution or our work, we can always express those opinions officially to our boss through e-mail or suggestion box.	0.684		
17. We can often understand the policies and activities of our institution by attending formal meetings, such as service meetings.	0.699		
18. The institution announces new policies to its employees through seminars or explanatory meetings.	0.753		
19. The institution often uses educational training to share its values and goals with us.	0.751		
20. The institution frequently uses regular meetings to reward high-performing employees.	0.754		
21. My boss often uses on-duty meetings to communicate institution policies related to our work.	0.703		
22. The institution organizes many service competitions in an attempt to improve employee performance.	0.727		
23. The institution often tries to increase our commitment to it through various external activities, such as press conferences or solidarity actions.	0.728		
24. The institution often organizes sporting events for all services/departments to increase interaction between employees.	0.710		
25. The institution often supports its employees in informal settings (such as cooperation in the social clubs they belong to) in an attempt to increase the commitment of its professionals towards the institution.	0.745		
26. My boss always makes us feel that we should give our best at work.	0.588		
Job Performance (adapted from Williams and Anderson, 1991)		**0.599**	**0.878**
1. I adequately perform the tasks assigned to me.	0.853		
2. I fully fulfil the responsibilities specified in my job description.	0.903		
3. I always perform the tasks that have been assigned to me.	0.841		
4. I fully meet the formal performance requirements demanded by my job.	0.707		
5. I neglect aspects of the job that are mandatory. *	(0.155)		
6. I show the right commitment when I take part in activities that directly affect my performance appraisal.	0.494		
7. I fail to perform essential tasks. *	(0.219)		

Source: Own elaboration.

Legend: * items with inverted scores. / **Note:** Items with factor loadings between brackets were removed.

Convergent validity was assessed using average variance extracted (AVE) (Table 3). Values greater than or equal to 0.50 are indicators of adequate convergent validity (Hair et al., 2010). All constructs meet this condition, except for the organisational commitment concept, which obtained an AVE value of 0.496. However, since the value obtained was close to 0.5 and the relevance of this construct for the model, it was included in the analysis.

As for reliability (or internal consistency), all constructs showed Composite Reliability values above 0.70 (Table 3), a threshold value indicated by several authors (Hair et al., 2010; Marôco, 2010) as the minimum value to ensure the construct reliability.

The verification of discriminant validity was performed by comparing the square root of the VME of each pair of dimensions with the correlation coefficients between these dimensions. According to Hair et al. (2010), if the square root values of the AVE present higher values than the correlations between the dimensions, discriminant validity is guaranteed. The values of correlations and VME presented in Table 4 show that all dimensions meet these conditions, ensuring their discriminant validity.

Table 4 - Correlations between the scales and square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Items/scales	Job satisfaction	Org. commitment	Org. trust	Internal marketing	Job performance
Job satisfaction	(0.712)	-	-	-	-
Org. commitment	0.677	(0.704)	-	-	-
Org. trust	0.554	0.629	(0.797)	-	-
Internal marketing	0.520	0.496	0.681	(0.686)	-
Job performance	0.213	0.409	0.155	0.027	(0.774)

Source: Own elaboration.

Notes: The diagonal elements (between brackets) refer to the square root of the AVE. The elements outside the diagonal correspond to the correlations between the scales.

To assess goodness of fit, the indexes suggested by Hair et al. (2010) are presented: the value of the Chi-Square statistic and the respective degrees of freedom, the CFI (Comparative Fit Index), and the RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation). The Chi-Square test (X2 = 2291.11; degrees of freedom = 892; p < 0.001) is significant. The values of X2/gl ratio = 2.57, CFI = 0.908 and RMSEA = 0.058 (90% CI: 0.055-0.061) guarantee, according to Marôco (2010) and Hair et al (2010), a suitable goodness of fit of the model. Thus, the reliability and validity of the instruments are ensured, as was the overall quality of the adjusted model.

4.3 Structural model

Structural Equation Model was used to test the structural model, as presented in Table 5. The model showed an adequate goodness of fit with X2/gl = 2.57; CFI = 0.908; RMSEA = 0.058 (90% CI: 0.055-0.061). The results included in Table 5 show that internal marketing significantly, and directly, influences job satisfaction (B = 0.618; β = 0.519; p < 0.001), organisational commitment (B = 0.229; β = 0.225; p < 0.001), and organisational trust (B = 0.662; β = 0.433; p < 0.001), but not job performance (B = -0.033; β = -0.034; p = 0.678). The indirect effect of internal marketing on job performance is not statistically significant either (B = 0.058; β = 0.061; p = 0.379).

Job Performance is directly influenced by organisational commitment (B = 0.695; β = 0.750; p < 0.001) and organisational trust (B = 0.266; β = 0.430; p = 0.008), but not by job satisfaction (B = 0.019; β = 0.023; p = 0.750). However, the indirect effect of job satisfaction on job performance, mediated by commitment and trust, is significant (B = 0.190; β = 0.239; p = 0.010).

Job satisfaction has a direct influence on organisational commitment (B = 0.413; β = 0.482; < 0.001), which in turn has a direct influence on organisational trust (B = 0.885; β = 0.591; < 0.001).

Table 5 - Standardized and non-standardized coefficients of the structural model

	Non-standardized coefficient (B)	Standardized coefficient (β)	p
Direct effects			
H1. Internal marketing -> Job satisfaction	0.618	0.519	**< 0.001**
H2. Internal marketing -> Organisational commitment	0.229	0.225	**< 0.001**
H3. Internal marketing -> Organisational trust	0.662	0.433	**< 0.001**
H4. Internal marketing -> Job performance	-0.033	-0.034	0.678
H5. Job satisfaction -> Job performance	0.019	0.023	0.750
H6. Organisational commitment -> Job performance	0.695	0.750	**< 0.001**
H7. Organisational trust -> Job performance	0.266	0.430	**0.008**
H8. Job satisfaction -> Organisational commitment	0.413	0.482	**< 0.001**

	Non-standardized coefficient (B)	Standardized coefficient (β)	*p*
H9. Organisational commitment -> Organisational trust	0.885	0.591	**< 0.001**
Indirect effects			
Internal marketing -> Job performance	0.058	0.061	0.379
Internal marketing -> Organisational commitment	0.255	0.250	**0.010**
Internal marketing -> Organisational trust	0.429	0.280	**0.010**
Job satisfaction -> Organisational trust	0.365	0.284	**0.010**
Job satisfaction -> Job performance	0.190	0.239	**0.010**
Organisational commitment -> Job performance	0.235	0.254	**0.010**
Model fit: X^2 = 2291.11; degrees of freedom = 893; p < 0.001; X^2 / degrees of freedom = 2.57 CFI = 0.908; RMSEA = 0.058 (IC90%: 0.055-0.061)			

Source: Own elaboration.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this section is to discuss the results described above and present the study's main conclusions. To analyse the results of the empirical research, it is essential to keep in mind the overall purpose of this study: to analyse the use of internal marketing and its relationship with job satisfaction, organisational commitment, organisational trust, and job performance among the employees of five Portuguese local authorities (Alto Tâmega region local authorities).

The first hypothesis of this research establishes a connection between the internal marketing construct and job satisfaction (H1). The results confirm this positive association, which is in line with the results obtained by other research studies that provide ample evidence that the use of internal marketing techniques increases the levels of job satisfaction (Huang & Kundle-Thiele, 2014; Rodrigues et al., 2016; Iliopoulos & Priporas, 2011; Ružić et al., 2015; Taştan & Davoudi, 2020; Azêdo & Alves, 2014; Mainardes et al., 2019; Sun et al., 2020).

The second hypothesis establishes a connection between internal marketing and organisational commitment (H2). This hypothesis is supported by the data collected and is consistent with the results of other studies (for example, Mero et al., 2020; Chiu et al., 2020; Thomas & Rodrigues, 2020; Rodrigues et al., 2016). It can be said that the higher the level of internal marketing, the greater the employee's commitment to the organization, i.e., the use of internal marketing practices in organisations helps employees feel the organization as if it were their own, which in turn, increases employee commitment (Shekary et al., 2012).

The third hypothesis aims to analyse whether or not internal marketing impacts organizational trust. The results of data analysis confirm that it presents a positive and statistically significant standardized coefficient, so one can conclude that the hypothesis is confirmed (H3). As explained in the literature review, trust is understood as the basis that assists interpersonal relationships, a fundamental attribute to any relationship between people, groups, or organisations, that will help preserve the ties that bind them. When internal marketing practices are implemented in organisations, employees are more likely to trust the organization in which they operate. This

result confirms the studies conducted by Kesen et al. (2017), Órfão (2010), Hsieh and Wang, (2016), Rasool et al. (2019) and Fangue et al. (2020). As far as we know, this is the first study that confirms the importance of this relationship in the Portuguese local public sector.

The fourth hypothesis (H4) aims to test the existence of a relationship between internal marketing and job performance. Contrary to what was expected, this direct relationship presents a negative standardized coefficient. The results are not significant, nonetheless the data did not support the hypothesis in question. The results showed that the use of internal marketing techniques in the studied local authorities positively influences employees' satisfaction and organisational commitment, but that it doesn't have a direct influence on their job performance. This result is consistent with the findings of Rodrigues et al. (2016), which confirmed that there is a connection between internal marketing implementation and performance, but that this connection is merely indirect (through the job satisfaction and organisational commitment mediating variables). However, this result is totally opposite to the findings provided by the studies conducted Imani et al. (2020), Taştan and Davoudi (2020), and Abidin and Roslin (2019).

The fifth research hypothesis analyses the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance (H5). Data collected was not capable of confirming said hypothesis, i.e., evidence clearly showed this sort of relationship does not occur in the organisations where the study took place. It appears that this relationship is complex and might occur only in certain situations. It has been argued that inflexible work policies, limited work autonomy, absence of a clear connection between employee performance and rewards and lack of motivation in the public sector tend to lead to lower job satisfaction and organisational commitment as compared to the private sector (Wang et al., 2012, *in* Agarwal & Sajid, 2017). Hence, creating and maintaining this job-related attitude can be challenging, especially in the public sector context. This relationship may also be difficult to identify due to the characteristics of the performance appraisal procedures conducted in the public sector domain (Rodrigues & Pinho, 2010).

The sixth hypothesis establishes a connection between organisational commitment and job performance. This hypothesis (H6) is confirmed by the results obtained. We can conclude that organisational commitment positively impacts job performance. In accordance with the findings of Rodrigues et al. (2016), this result suggests that a municipality that fosters the commitment of its employees is able to obtain higher levels of professional performance. This result is also consistent with previous studies (for example, Chiu et al., 2020).

The seventh hypothesis examines the impact of organisational trust on job performance (H7). Based on the data obtained, this relationship was confirmed: the greater the trust in the organization, the greater the job performance. The results suggest that those employed in organisations with higher levels of organisational trust are more likely to demonstrate greater job performance than those working in organisations with lower levels of trust. This result is consistent with the findings of Órfão (2010), Ennen et al. (2015) and Singh and Desa (2018).

The eighth hypothesis establishes a connection between job satisfaction and organisational commitment (H8). The results imply that the higher the levels of employee job satisfaction, the greater their commitment to the organization in which they work. Other studies have found the same results (Rodrigues et al., 2016; Malik et al., 2010). Agarwal and Sajid (2017), for instance, discovered the positive impact of job satisfaction on organisational commitment in public sector employees. The authors conclude that when there is an increase in job satisfaction, public sector employees are more likely to express greater levels of affective and normative commitment to their organisations than those who work for private sector organisations.

The ninth and final hypothesis establishes a connection between organisational commitment and organisational trust (H9). The results confirm the existence of this positive relationship. In the municipalities where the studies were conducted, evidence collected shows that the greater the affective commitment that employees have towards the organisation, the greater their organisational trust. To our knowledge, this is the first time that a similar conclusion is confirmed for the Portuguese local public sector. We consider this to be an important result and one that is in clear accordance with the findings of Brown et al. (2019) when the authors re-examined the traditional trust-to-commitment model (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and confirmed that the opposite relationship model (commitment-to-trust) may also exist. Given the lack of studies that prove this relationship in the local public sector, we consider that further studies are needed to better contextualise this influence.

6. Conclusion and implications

Public managers and policy makers are faced with numerous challenges that require them to adopt and apply the most successful practices and to make use of the most modern tools available (Ružić et al., 2015). The authors assert that the performance of public sector employees should be customer/citizen-oriented and that they should strive to provide high quality service, just as it happens in the private sector. Achieving satisfaction among customers/citizens depends on the level of satisfaction that public sector employees get from their work roles and on their level of motivation. Against this background, there is no doubt that the public sector represents fertile ground for the implementation of internal marketing programmes (Ružić et al., 2015), especially at the local level. Therefore, the present study aimed to assess the impact of internal marketing on employee attitude and behaviours, in Portuguese local public sector.

The results of this study clearly showed that internal marketing plays a key role in the attitudes and behaviours of the employees who were at the service of the municipalities where the study was conducted. The implementation of internal marketing practices is a strong predictor of job satisfaction, organisational trust and, to a lesser extent, organisational commitment. Job performance is directly affected by organisational commitment and trust. There are, thus, clear advantages of implementing internal marketing in local public sector organisations, especially in terms of creating a supportive environment that generates organisational trust.

The aim of this study was to make a significant contribution to the theoretical development of the internal marketing concept by seeking to increase current knowledge on the role of internal marketing in improving job satisfaction, organisational trust, organisational commitment, and job performance in local public sector employees. As already mentioned, there are very little studies focusing on the aforementioned relationships. Therefore, the best way to contribute to the evolution of the theory, in internal marketing and public management literatures, is to make sure that most hypotheses put forward and relationships established between the model constructs are hereby confirmed for local public sector organisations.

The results confirmed that internal marketing strongly and significantly impacts job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and trust, but does not directly contribute to increased job performance. Our results confirm the findings of previous studies (Rodrigues et al., 2016) that argue that the relationship between internal marketing and job performance may be indirect, mediated by several employee's attitudes and behaviours. Further research ought to study more closely the reasons behind this result.

As far as we know, the predictor role of internal relationship quality (job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and organisational trust) in job performance is still relatively understudied, especially in the Portuguese local public sector context. Thus, the results from this study present a contribution to the literature on internal relationship marketing. Furthermore, the confirmation of the relationship between organisational commitment and organisational trust represents an important theoretical contribution to the literature focusing

on relationship marketing because there are few empirical data available on this relationship. Differing from previous research highlighting a trust-to-commitment model (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), our research outcomes confirm that local public sector employees who are committed to their organization are more likely to exhibit greater organizational trust.

The results of this study reinforce the assumptions of the social exchange theory approach (Blau, 1964), thereby lending further support to the application of this theory in predicting and understanding employee's attitudes and behaviours. Positive attitudes towards organisations are expected from employees who feel supported by the organization they work for. Thus, the influence of internal marketing on satisfaction, commitment, and trust represents a win-win social exchange. This means that the influence of internal marketing on job satisfaction, organisational commitment and organisational trust endorses a beneficial social exchange for both parties – organisational commitment and organisational trust have positive implications on job performance.

Another contribution of this study is the analysis of the implementation of internal marketing in organisations using the employees' perceptions on the internal marketing practices carried out. As suggested by Qiu et al. (2021, p. 8) in their future research agenda for internal marketing, there is a need to "widening the focus of internal marketing research away from its sole focus on the frontline employee", since "Internal marketing should not be the remit of, or focused on, one department but be considered an organization-wide orientation". In the present study, the perceptions of all employees of the local public sector organisations were measured, regardless of whether (or not) they perform frontline public service functions. In view of the results of this study, we can conclude that internal marketing is valuable to all internal stakeholders.

Some recommendations related to practical contributions can also be made. The results of this study highlight the role of internal marketing practices. Therefore, local authorities should recognize the significance of internal marketing and devote the same amount of attention to it as they do to external marketing. Accordingly, managers must be aware of the importance of implementing an internal marketing programme within their organizations and find out the best possible ways to create such programme. By implementing an internal marketing programme (that provides employees with empathy and consideration, benchmarking, job quality and reward, upward communication, value and information sharing, and promotional activities), the public institutions under study will act to improve employee attitudes and behaviours, namely job satisfaction.

Given the importance of employee satisfaction in the development of external customers' satisfaction (Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000), internal marketing practices within the studied organisations should be constantly reinforced. Incorporating

internal marketing strategies in the local public sector organisations will also encourage employees to commit to and put their trust in their organization. Internal marketing creates committed and trusting internal customers who perform better. Hence, local authorities' managers should develop and implement internal marketing activities to achieve job performance.

Job satisfaction, organisational commitment and organisational trust produce positive attitudes in employees and could therefore be regarded as effective internal dynamics/relationships (indicators of internal relationship quality). The results also confirm that job satisfaction directly influences organisational commitment, which in turn has a direct impact on organisational trust. Thus, local public sector managers should be ready to redefine their roles and to attempt to establish an internal marketing strategy that would ensure good internal relationships between local public sector organisations and their employees (internal relationship quality).

The study is significant for organisations providing local public services, since it can help them understand some organisational variables that play a critical role on employee performance. To ensure effective management of the service delivery process and, as a result, attain customer satisfaction, local authorities must be aware of the precursors of job performance as are the implementation of internal marketing programmes and the consequences of this application.

It is worth mentioning that, even though some of the conclusions reached with this study had already been presented in other similar studies, few results have been applied to the Portuguese local public sector; that way, this study will, hopefully, contribute to the development of the investigation of the variables under analysis (and of their role in this particular sector) and to future research studies on internal marketing and public management. Taken together, these findings offer a deeper understanding of the existing internal marketing research and suggest ways in which public service managers and decision makers can promote job performance in local government organizations.

We are aware that this study has some limitations, as it usually happens with all studies. For instance, limitations related to time and resources available for the preparation of this study were identified. Another limitation was the sensitivity of the concepts under study, i.e., the respondents showed some initial resistance to participating in the study because some of the participants feared that they could be identified in the respondent profile section of the questionnaire.

This work is totally based on evidence collected from local public sector organisations in a specific region of Portugal. Data was obtained from five municipalities located in Alto Tâmega region. Consequently, the findings are tailored in accordance with the unique features of these specific municipalities, but should nonetheless be interpreted in a broader perspective.

Another limitation has to do with the fact that all variables in the analysis were assessed from the same key informant perceptions and were collected simultaneously. The risk of common method variance can be avoided in future studies by measuring dependent and independent variables at different time periods, providing a clearer view of the true relationship between them. Likewise, the use of self-report measures is largely based on a person's self-perception. It is presumed that individuals possess self-analytical abilities and insight, yet there is a potential danger in this technique as there is no way to guarantee that respondents will give an accurate self-assessment. This sort of behaviour can perfectly lead to social desirability bias. Hopefully, this research will encourage further studies in this area. The effort underlying the realization of this research will be rewarded, should the issues exposed in this study challenge other researchers to deepen the questions discussed or should it give rise to other more relevant ones.

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Credit author statement

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