



## **The Role of Technologies in Relationship Management and Internal Marketing: a preliminary contribution**

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### **Abstract**

#### **Purpose:**

The present study aims to understand the impact and the role of technologies in a hospital context, and in relationships management from an internal perspective (internal marketing). Based on a case study, the investigation also aims to analyze how internal communication is carried out between employees as well as employees and managers.

#### **Methodology:**

Following a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five employees of the health institution (two nurses, a lawyer, a data analyst and a computer technician), and a focus group with eight employees also of

Braga Hospital (four nurses, a computer technician, an administrative, an operational assistant, and a technical / administrative assistant).

**Originality:** Connecting the notion of health information systems with the concepts of Internal Marketing, Internal Communication and Relationship Management, this study highlights, through a specific case, the way hospitals have tried to follow and adjust to both society's evolution and exponential technological advance. Through investments at technological level, the goal is to facilitate health professional's work and consequently the care provided to patients.

**Findings:** Leadership management increasingly assumes responsibility, with special importance regarding management and internal marketing management (i.e. relationship between company and employees), which can promote feelings of affection, satisfaction, and loyalty at management teams' level.

**Practical implications:** This study contributed to the discussion and a better understanding of technology management, internal marketing/communication, and its importance in a hospital context, the reality of Braga Hospital, which can serve as a reference for other hospitals.

**Limitations:** The present study followed an entirely qualitative approach, therefore its difficult the generalization of results since the sample was non-probabilistic and subject to a certain research context.

**Keywords:** *Health Technologies, Internal Communication, Relational Marketing, Internal Marketing.*

## **1. Introduction**

In an everchanging society, an era marked by rapid technological advancement and its affirmation and imposition, it is imperative for the institutions to adjust to this new reality. The health area is by no means an exception to this evolution, in recent decades there have been several technological investments in hospitals to facilitate health professional's work and consequently the care provided to patients. With the development of ICT, health associations had to adapt to new operating methods. Technologies can be understood, as a set of knowledge, specifically scientific, applied to a certain branch of activity (Goodman, 2004). In turn, (Vicente et al., 2011) states that the introduction of new technologies and information technology was one of the ways that companies found to make information available timely and to be able to respond more quickly and efficiently to the pressures of their surroundings . In recent years, several information systems have been developed, implemented, and updated.

Currently, more than 60 IS are available in primary health care and hospital care. The objective is to improve the quality of health care provision and management, increase efficiency and technologically update health institutions, improving public services, with repercussions for citizens and health professionals (Ministry of Health, 2018). The impact of IT on the NHS began to occur in 2010, but only in 2011 had a most significant impact, starting medicines electronic prescription, with the objective of facilitating the citizen's access to medicines, so that he did not have to pass throughout the administrative circuit has happened until then. This

advancement in health has brought benefits to doctors, pharmacists, citizens, and the health system in general, with great cost reduction and simplification of procedures (Sousa & Alves, 2019). The present study focuses on internal research at Hospital de Braga. Despite being a relatively recent hospital, opened in May 2011, its history began many years ago.

This hospital unit provides healthcare to approximately 1.2 Million people in the districts of Braga and Viana do Castelo. There is an expected contribution to the discussion of management, internal marketing, and internal communication in a hospital context. At the academic level, this investigation increases the information on the internal communication practices adopted by hospitals and highlights the importance of adopting internal marketing within an organization, for the satisfaction and motivation of employees.

## **2. Health Information Technologies**

In health organizations, the use of IT is essential, both in the public and private sectors (Pollitt, 1993). A hospital is one of the most complex organizational models, since it requires a multitude of information for its internal operations, as well as those related to the health society in which it operates. With the advent of information technology, devices, such as the computer, have become increasingly sophisticated, enabling greater speed in obtaining and using information (Barra et al., 2006). Technological advances in hospitals have been growing noticeably. Mechling & Sweeney, (1997), clarify that in public sector, contrasting to what happens in the private sector, when the Government is questioned why it fails to gain greater value with the use of IT, this responds, justifying, that for in addition to not having long-term leadership, this is also due to a lack of funds.

Nowadays, there is a noticed difficulty in financing higher value projects, which may have associated risks, and inevitably, these risks cannot be controlled. Therefore, the Government tends to try to avoid taking risks and chooses to reduce spending on projects whose risk is considered high, thus preferring to maintain existing systems, even if they no longer respond to needs. of its users. Technologies are a fundamental part for the good functioning of a company and hospital entities are no exception in this matter.

In recent years, several information systems have been developed, implemented, and updated. Currently, more than 60 IS are available in primary health care and hospital care. The objective is to improve the quality of health care provision and management, increase efficiency and technologically update health institutions, improving public services, with repercussions for citizens and health professionals (Ministry of Health, 2018). The impact of IT on the NHS began to occur in 2010, but it was in 2011 that this was most significant, starting the electronic prescription of medicines, with the objective of facilitating the citizen's access to medicines, so that they do not have to pass throughout the administrative circuit has happened until then. This advancement in health has brought advantages to doctors, pharmacists, citizens, and the health system in general, with great cost reduction and simplification of procedures (Ministry of Health, 2018). Between 2011 and 2015, the number of paper recipes tended to increase: in 2011 we had 49,545,541 recipes, in 2015 we observed the existence of more than double, 112,256.823.

As of 2016, the results began to be more positive in this regard, with a very sharp decrease in this form of medical prescription (58,877,162), with 2017 being the year with the lowest number of paper recipes. In 2012, nationwide files were created, containing health data, using information technologies and within the framework of the NHS. This same year was also

marked by the launch of the health data platform, developed by the commission for clinical computerization and by the shared services of the Ministry of Health (Ministério da Saúde, 2018). The PDS aims to bring people closer to the NHS and is recognized as a privileged instrument of health information as well as access to services (Ministério da Saúde, 2013). It allows health professionals to access users' clinical information anywhere in the country and direct contact between the user and their family doctor (Ministério da Saúde, 2015). All information can be accessed and shared on the user's portal, an online platform, available since 2012, with all the information from the NHS. This portal aims to bring citizens, health professionals and NHS institutions closer together. The user portal allows when entering personal data, making appointments, renewing medication, access the living will, among other services.

The health sector, given its demand and importance, is obliged to organize itself to respond to people's needs and to offer more effective care, providing all the necessary information for the patients care. A hospital is considered an organization model of the most complex that exists, as it lacks a multiplicity of information for its internal functioning in addition to those related to the health society in which it operates (Souza et al., 2012). Health information systems involve several concepts, several methods, and a series of reference disciplines, such as health, organizational management, information management and, finally, health information systems.

It is known that the volume of information in a hospital is enormous, and it is essential that there is control in all processes performed daily, so that no type of waste occurs, and so that no task is done in duplicate. Hospitals, as organizational units, have adopted computer systems for their daily use, with the objective of reducing operational needs of the various sectors and services and providing their mutual integration. An SI must provide accurate, objective, and complete information.

In health sector, organizations need information systems that ensure timely and necessary information for different health professionals. ICT is used to guarantee the role of IS, as an infrastructure to support the information flow. Regardless of the size, nature, or activity of an organization, it needs information to execute, and continue its mission and fulfil all objectives it proposes (Machnik & Lubowiecki-Vikuk, 2020). Computer systems must be solid structures, without failures, capable of guaranteeing efficient processes for the collection, processing, organization, and management of data resulting from assistance processes (Mota et al., 2014). Management inefficiency can cause budget increases, time slips and technical performance and low level of usability (Laudon & Laudon, 2014). Failure to align IS strategies can lead to lost opportunities, wasted resources and, in turn, poor performance, which is especially negative and detrimental when it comes to healthcare services. (Bush, et al., 2009). The strategy must therefore go through the creation of a long-term plan to achieve the defined objectives and goals (Ammenwerth, et al., 2003).

Change management is particularly important, and should be considered, whenever planning to implement an information system, trying to minimize and control its resistance and negative impacts. A hospital with a specific financial objective that intends to achieve a goal and at the same time reduce costs, must implement a strategy to achieve it, in the most viable way possible, as any failure that may result, can be a loss for the organization. (Lubowiecki-Vikuk & Dryglas, 2019). Thus, it is necessary that there is an alignment with the organizational strategy, to achieve the proposed objectives and achieve high levels of performance (Silva et al., 2020). Therefore, and in view of the above, internal marketing and relationship management (at

employees' level) may play an important role in this matter. So, in the following section some of these concepts and underlying literature will be addressed.

### **3. Internal marketing**

The concept of internal marketing (IM) was first proposed by Berry as a solution to a problem of consistency of delivery and quality of service, that is, it was proposed as a solution and as a means to achieve excellence in service and customer satisfaction (de Farias, 2010). Despite some changes in the concept of marketing over the years, the focus remains the same, customer satisfaction. If in external marketing the traditionally known customer was talked about, the external customer, with the emergence of IM, a new idea and notion of customer, the internal customer, also emerges. Over time, this concept of customer has evolved, and if the importance was previously centred on the external customer, now there is also great importance on the internal customer. And who are these internal customers then?! They are all employees of an organization (George, 1990). The concept of IM arises from the idea that employees, within an organization must be seen as customers, in the same way as those who buy the product and / or service. The literature has clearly demonstrated the relationship between employee, customer and quality of service provided (Berry, 1987).

Human potential is now seen as one of the organization's main resources, and employees are considered fundamental to an organization's success. Satisfying their needs, becomes one of the priorities of any organization, and it is necessary to keep them motivated through targeted marketing within the company, IM. Although we can say that the principles of external marketing and internal marketing are the same, we must not forget that targets of the actions carried out, the operational policies, the motivational factors are quite different, if on the one hand I have external customers, on the other hand, there are internal customers. Organizational success will depend on the capacity and motivation that its employees will have in their work functions, because, generally, customers, base their opinion on the behaviour of the company's employees, and their attitudes can condition the repetition of a future visit. (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Gronroos (1994), with the same line of thought, also clarifies that employees have a very big impact on the purchase and decision from the buyers part, also referring that the main objective of the IM is to have motivated and customer-oriented employees . If employees are satisfied with the service provided by the organization, they will certainly provide the same type of service (Mishra, 2010). Winter (1985) also stresses that the role of the IM is to align, educate and motivate staff towards institutional objectives.

For Berry (1987), IM is concerned with providing internal products (jobs) that satisfy the vital needs of the internal market (employees) while satisfying the organization's objectives. IM is seen as the task of successfully hiring, teaching, and motivating employees capable of serving the customer well (Kotler, 1991). Currently, the concept is being increasingly discussed in the literature as a strategic tool to meet and exceed customer expectations (Lings, 2004). Companies, in order to have satisfied external customers, also need to have satisfied employees, so there must be a concern with the internal organizational market, aligning their objectives with those of the company so that the focus is better oriented to the outside (George , 1977). According to Costa (2010), the purpose of IM in relation to allowing the development of internal relationships in the organization (between the company and the employee and in the relationship between employees) is based on the following basic objectives: (1) preserving the motivation of employees , maintain customer perception and support their sense of orientation;

(2) create an advantageous internal environment for employees to respond to customers; and (3) providing marketing values to employees, through training programs.

Therefore, we can say that internal marketing works to better understand the organizational internal market, to know the needs of internal customers as well as give them an answer that satisfies them and motivates them in the functions they perform, expecting from them a greater commitment and organizational performance, thereby increasing the satisfaction of external customers.

Marketing in healthcare organizations is a relatively recent practice, and that said, for IM practices to work properly in healthcare, it is necessary that it follows the philosophy of business management (Azêdo & Alves, 2013). In the health area, internal marketing is mainly concerned with the way in which the organization's management develops its educational teachings, the way it communicates the organization's perspectives and creates reward systems that improve the capacity and satisfaction of its employees (Tsai, 2014). According to this same author, in a study carried out in relation to hospital nurses, it was found that the management activities used in the execution of internal marketing, also included activities to manage human resources (hospitals elaborated a rewards policy in relation to the efforts of nurses in their work, and when they reached the desired organizational performance goals, the leaders met the professionals' work needs). Organizations that have the teaching of their employees as one of their main objectives should shape their learning culture accordingly. To that end, Watkins & Ellinger (1998) suggest that dialogue, interaction, and knowledge exchange between members of different departments be encouraged.

If the leaders of an organization can positively guide the teachings and consequently the attitudes of their professionals, this can, in turn, increase the level of service provided to patients. Organizational commitment and job satisfaction therefore influence the quality of service, and thus Tsai, (2014) in his empirical study, identified some hypotheses for the question of behavioural changes on the part of nurses in their daily work, to that the results can be as positive as possible, and so that the commitment to the organization is increasingly greater and better: (1) create training influenced by internal marketing in organizations; (2) encourage continuous learning, highlighting the way in which leaders can empower their employees; (3) creating an organization that learns to influence organizational commitment; (4) using internal marketing as a mediator between the creation of a learning organization and organizational commitment.

Also in relation to new employees, it is important that in a first stage, they are provided with ways to get to know the new job, the company, its internal functioning, the functional relations that it establishes with other services and bodies, that is essential both for the development of each new employee and for his motivation (Frye, Kang, Huh, & Lee, 2020). A health organization that cares about its employees and cares about its continuous teaching, can ensure a stable provision of quality health care, and in turn patient satisfaction. The use of internal marketing, consequently, makes the employees of a hospital transmit the objectives of the hospital abroad (Tsai, 2014).

#### **4. Methodology approach**

A literature review was presented in the previous chapter, which is important in exploring the topic under analysis, with the intention of addressing the three main themes of the study: technology, internal marketing, and relationship management. It was, therefore, an initial stage,

of exploratory research, based on scientific articles in the area of internal marketing and technologies, books and other scientific publications essential for research. After the theoretical foundation, it is now pertinent to establish an investigation methodology to understand, thus, what is the role of technologies in the hospital context and in relationship management and internal marketing. At this stage of the study, it is up to the researchers to explain what the study problem is, understood according to Quivy & Campenhoudt (2008) as the approach or theoretical perspective that one decides to adopt to deal with the problem posed by the starting question. The methodology chosen to address this theme is based on qualitative research. As a general objective, the present investigation meets the understanding of the theme that supports the master's thesis, the role of technologies in relationship management and internal marketing in a hospital context - Hospital de Braga. In this investigation, the participants in the focus group are a non-probabilistic sample, which means that they were selected on purpose by the researchers to collect the necessary information. The criteria for the selection of stakeholders, related to the specific context of the study, focused on the fact that individuals work at the Hospital de Braga, it was attempted that there was some diversity in the ages of the stakeholders so that there was a slightly different perspective about the study problem. The realization of the focus group counted on the collaboration of 8 participants.

From this general objective of the investigation, five specific objectives emerge, through which it will be possible to perceive, the impact of technology and IM at Braga Hospital. The specific objectives of this investigation are: to understand the degree of dependence on the use of Technologies in a hospital context; understand how IT in the hospital context facilitates the tasks of employees; understand the evolution of IT over the years at Hospital de Braga; understand how IT facilitates internal communication; and understand the importance of internal marketing strategies for employee satisfaction and motivation. Despite being a relatively recent hospital, opened in May 2011, its history began many years ago. This hospital unit provides healthcare to approximately 1.2 Million people in the districts of Braga and Viana do Castelo. Inaugurated in May 2011, Hospital de Braga replaced the former Hospital de S. Marcos, and thus became a highly differentiated unit in healthcare in the Minho region (Hospital de Braga: História, 2019).

The complex consists of 4 distinct buildings, with the inpatient and outpatient areas separated. It has an inpatient capacity of up to 705 beds, distributed in single or double rooms, the Braga Hospital also has 12 operating theatre rooms, 60 consultation offices, 3 auditoriums, a library, a commercial space and 2200 parking spaces. There is also a helipad that allows fast and safe transport of patients in an emergency. Braga Hospital offers a range of 38 specialties. The Emergency Service of Hospital de Braga is divided into three distinct areas (General Emergency, Pediatric Emergency and Gynecology and Obstetrics Emergency), to respond as quickly as possible to the needs of patients. Comprising a universe of more than 2400 employees, this Hospital stands out for its levels of quality, productivity, and efficiency. In recent years, several information systems and technologies have been developed, implemented, and updated in health institutions. The objective is to improve the quality of healthcare provision and management, increase efficiency and technologically update institutions, improving public services, with repercussions for citizens and professionals. According to technological evolution, health IS also has developed rapidly, so that information is used in the most efficient way in the management processes of health services, allowing an efficient use of resources involved in the provision of healthcare services. health care, (Andrade & Falk, 2001).

Information technologies (IT) and information systems (SI) are spread in different ways, in hospital entities, among the simplest communication and information applications, to the most sophisticated equipment for diagnosis and disease screening, and in relation to all this, Braga Hospital is no exception. Freixo & Rocha, (2014), also state that information systems are more than an advantage, they are a requirement, and should be experienced by organizations as a constant concern. “Since 2014, it is considered the best hospital in the country, for obtaining the best national classification in clinical excellence in the national health assessment system (SINAS), developed by the health regulatory authority. Since 2015 it has been winning the first place in the group of best medium / large-sized hospitals of the National Health Service in the awards: TOP 5 - Hospital Excellence, promoted by IASIST - multinational hospital benchmarking company”.

Braga Hospital has several types of technology, information systems, equipment with technology considered first, to help provide health care to about 1.2 Million people from the districts of Braga and Viana do Castelo. Currently, several general computer applications are in use in the health organization, such as:

- SICTH - a Computer System for Consultation in Time and Hours
- SIGLIC - a Computerized Management System for Registrants for Surgery
- GESTCARE CCI - an IT System for registering and monitoring the National Network of Integrated Continuous Care.
- RNU - National Registry of Users
- PDS - a Health Data Platform (registration of safe surgery, electronic prescription, and others)
- SIM @ SNS - a National Health Service Monitoring Information System with three components: SDM @ SNS, SIARS and IMM @ UF
- SICA - a Contracting and Monitoring Information System
- SIMH - an Information System for Hospital Morbidity

In addition to these general computer applications, there is also a specific computer system in use at Hospital de Braga, with the name Glintt, used by administrative and clinical areas, for hospital and patient management.

## **5. Conclusions**

The present study highlights the role of technologies in the hospital context, more specifically at the Hospital de Braga. The study included five semi-structured interviews, and a focus group with eight participants, and in that sense, it was found that the technologies implemented are in general quite beneficial for hospital employees, revealing quite satisfactory results. Regarding the implemented internal marketing measures, the results were not so positive and exciting. As for the strategy used for internal communication, opinions were slightly different among employees, however, and in general, new technologies are also used as a means of communication. The starting point of this study arose with the need to understand whether the employees of Hospital de Braga are dependent on the use of technologies to carry out their daily tasks. It is concluded that the advances brought by technology in the hospital are increasingly visible. The new technologies, introduced a set of new organizational aspects, increased the capacity to archive documentation, analyse and transmit large volumes of complex information, in a more secure, flexible, reliable, and immediate way.

The Braga hospital is one of the most technologically advanced hospitals in the country, and as it becomes more digital, consequently its employees become more dependent on this technology. This fact is known and made aware among professionals, and the ease with which they are now able to access all information is unquestionable. However, and despite all this dependence, there are still areas in the hospital that do not use only technology, and sporadically, there is still something or other that has to be done using paper. Finally, in relation to internal communication between managers and employees, collaborators and managers, technology, more specifically email, emerged to create a greater “rapprochement” between them, there is now an ease in communicating and dealing with many matters between superiors and collaborators. The email is seen as a reminder and sometimes a security of what was treated. There is, however, an interest on the part of some managers in selecting the subjects that they think are pertinent to be registered, which ends up not giving freedom to the collaborators to deal with all the subjects that they think opportune via email.

However, it must also not fall into extremes, sometimes there is in some professionals a lack of care, and end up using the media of an excessive manner, which turns out to be harmful in internal relations at the health organization, leading to everything being dealt with in a more virtual way, and ignoring the need to create some types of bonds necessary for the proper functioning of the hospital. Technologies, if used properly, with awareness, can be a good communication strategy within an organization. All the objectives defined initially for this investigation, were fortunately achieved. However, there are some practical implications that this study may have at the academic level and in the hospital sector, which is important to identify. In general, it is expected to have contributed to the discussion of management, internal marketing, and internal communication in a hospital context. At the academic level, this investigation increases the information on the internal communication practices adopted by hospitals and highlights the importance of adopting internal marketing within an organization, for the satisfaction and motivation of employees. As in other investigations, there were also some limitations that are important to reflect on. Therefore, we present below the main limitations of the study, which may facilitate the development of new studies. The present study followed an entirely qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews, and the development of a focus group. However, it will also be important in future work to consider a quantitative approach (i.e., administering surveys by questionnaire) that allows researchers to increase the strength of the data collection instruments and thereby improve the quality of the results obtained. There was a difficulty in generalizing the results obtained, since the sample was non-probabilistic and subject to a certain context of investigation. The range of professions of the focus group and interview participants should be larger and more diverse, focusing on ages over 35. It is also suggested a study extended to other public hospitals in the country, to be able to make data comparability. In an interdisciplinary perspective, this study presents preliminary contributions in the management of information technologies, internal marketing, and relationship management (between employees and between employees with management).

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