



## Research Article

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# Psychological Contract, Internal Branding and Employee Turnover in an IT Company

**Abílio Oliveira**

*Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL),  
ISTAR-IUL, Lisboa, Portugal*

**Sérgio Moro**

*Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL),  
ISTAR-IUL, Lisboa, Portugal*

**Pedro Torres**

*Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL),  
Lisboa, Portugal*

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### Abstract

*We are living in a time of huge competitiveness, where many institutions fight hard for their survival. Unemployment, exclusion, xenophobia, poverty and disrespect towards nature and our peers are causing unbearable impact to humanity. This situation is challenging us to retrieve and keep alive the true values, without any distinction of cultures, religions and ways of thinking. Only this way we can contribute to a fairer, inclusive and better society. A corporation can contribute to the employees' well-being, personal and professional fulfillment. The present study is focused in the employee turnover and how it is affected by the internal branding and the psychological contract, in a company of informatic services – in which we mainly considered its organization and human resources. So, we aimed to contribute to the understanding of: internal branding and psychological contract, and their interrelation; effects of internal branding and psychological contract in employees; the turnover (common in this company of informatics services). A questionnaire was developed to measure the internal branding and employees' psychological contract. We used several statistical techniques to analyze the data, namely, descriptive statistics analysis, factorial analysis in principal components, comparison of means and correlations among the resulting dimensions. Findings reveal low values for the internal branding and psychological contract, although, men feel slightly more satisfied with their situation than women. A positive association was found between the internal branding and the psychological contract, admitted as a possible cause of turnover. Anyway, results denote an insufficient concern of the company towards its human resources.*

**Keywords:** *IT consultancy; turnover; psychological contract; internal branding; human resources*

## 1. Introduction

The importance of human resources management has been emphasized by the growing international competitiveness, in a smaller world where competition can be at the next door or on the other side of the world (Kersiene & Savaneviciene, 2015). This globalization phenomenon has been driven mostly by an increased mobility and especially the rise of information technology, including the advent of the Internet and social media (Ross & Woo, 2011). Thus, executive boards of administrations worldwide are aware of the relevance of hiring and keeping the best

professionals motivated and aligned with the organization's strategy, leveraging human resources management as both a key area within corporations and as a managerial science which has deserved increasing attention by scholars (Kaufman, 2015). Therefore, corporations have developed processes to encourage brand-supporting behavior, aiming to align both internal processes and corporate culture, gradually also developing employer branding to attract potential talent who may feel identified with the corporation's values (Foster et al., 2010).

Employee turnover is a major concern for managers, as it becomes an increasing reality within the organizational behavior field (Hom et al., 2017). While a relatively low level of turnover among human resources is desired within a corporation, a high level can have debilitating effects as it implies large hiring and training costs of new employees (Hancock et al., 2013). To avoid a high turnover, internal branding is grounded on marketing initiatives to build loyalty among human resources. Additionally, a psychological contract which is based on beliefs about the reciprocal obligations between employees and organizations can help to reduce turnover (Foster et al., 2010). According to the current state-of-the-art businesses, human resources should not work up to exhaustion without expecting any reward. In order to attract and keep the best resources, corporations fiercely compete between each other. Human resources that have their expectations fulfilled are less likely to leave the company where they work, as they recognize the company's attention to reward them appropriately (Coyle-Shapiro & Morrow, 2006). Information technology (IT) is among the sectors with highest employee turnover, justified by the global shortage of skilled technicians (Ertürk & Vurgun, 2015). Schools and universities hardly reply of the large market demand for highly qualified professionals. Thus, corporations are turning to employer branding to attract these resources, with the academic literature acknowledging the relevance of studies on this subject, including cases from several countries worldwide, such as Russia (Kucherov & Zamulin, 2016) and India (Devasthali, 2015). However, IT corporations are also investing in internal branding and psychological contracts, although scholars have devoted less attention to this equally relevant field of research (e.g., Sharma & Kamalanabhan, 2014).

### *1.1 About Turnover, internal branding, and psychological contract*

Employee turnover has been a subject of research for scholars at least during the second half of the 1900s. Particularly, turnover is a common trend in a market labor thirsty for a myriad of technical skills that have followed technological advances, with corporations looking for the best prospects to benefit from those advances (Holzer, 2013). Corporations need to prevent excessive absenteeism and turnover to avoid incurring in disproportionate costs associated to hiring new workers to compensate the gaps in the labor processes (Mowday et al., 2013). Salary dissatisfaction, frustrating job activities, lack of career opportunities, negative appraisal or lack of recognition of employee's work, are some of these reasons that may lead to turnover, which also depends on possible attractive offers by other corporations. We may consider eight motivational forces of attachment and withdrawal of employees: affective; contractual; constituent; alternative; calculative; normative; behavioral; and moral. There is also a need to measure turnover motivations to guide managers in identifying and tracking employees' intentions and defining adequate target interventions according to the motives that cause withdrawal (Maertz & Campion, 2004). This is still a relevant research trend, with researchers going further to identify and profile future quitters (e.g., Zimmerman et al., 2016).

Internal branding rises from the need to regularly recognize human resources as they perform their tasks. Promoting brand communication and support through workers is considered vital for a successful overall branding strategy (Punjaisri et al., 2009). An employee aware of the corporate brand reveals positive sentiments and proud in representing it, therefore, taking care and nurturing employees, they will spontaneously assist in selling the brand to clients, contributing to brand success. Internal branding enables an alignment between both internal and external brand images of the corporation. Thus, it ensures all the corporation understands and actively seeks to deliver brand's promises (Tosti & Stotz, 2002). So, human resources management needs to set its roots on internal branding, as it helps not only in turning regular employees into brand champions (Löhndorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014), leveraging business, but also in reducing turnover by motivating personnel (Slavich et al., 2014). Internal branding potentiates attraction and retention of the best human

resources, optimizing recruitment processes, incentivizing its productivity, loyalty and retention.

Psychological contract was defined as the workers' perceptions of the mutual obligations between them and the employer (Rousseau, 1989), representing a continuous negotiation process between employee and employer after an initial learning and socialization period, in a pursuit of the best possible alignment between both sides' expectations (Arthur & Kolson, 2017). It is a tacit contract, concerning what the employee is willing to offer in exchange for a rewarding work. So, there is a strong link between employees' perceptions that the contract is being fulfilled and their emotional attachment with the organization. Employees' commitment, according to a psychological contract, leads them to have stronger loyalty sentiments, helping to prevent turnover, which enhance an intrinsic bond between the psychological contract and internal branding (Terglav et al., 2016). This is considered vital for a full commitment of employees with the brand.

### 1.2 *IT outsourcing and turnover*

The world is hunger for IT, as all corporations keep investing on advanced information systems to improve their businesses. The advent of the Internet led to adapt technologies and new ways of conduct business, including e-commerce and social media (Moro et al., 2017), unveiling a world of Big Data, which needs to be harvested and harnessed to reveal insights and trends that may guide future investments (Amado et al., 2017), in a profusion of different needs for IT skills (Olszak & Gajowska, 2017). However, schools and universities lag to supply all the required skills, given the fast pace at which new technologies emerge, leading to a shortage of IT professionals (Salas-Pilco & Law, 2018). So, specialized IT consultancy and outsourcing corporations have risen, as a response to the Internet emergence, including large multinationals covering almost all countries across the globe, such as Accenture, CGI, Wipro, and CapGemini – aiming to supply the needed IT skills to their customers, answering IT projects and processes. From a customer's perspective, one of the major advantages of hiring IT resources to those consultancy firms is the fast supply of experienced consultants that otherwise would require the corporation to hire and train them (Lacity & Willcocks, 2000). Additionally, by adjudicating an IT project to an external supplier the corporation mitigates risks associated with the project and the involved technologies. Consultancy corporations typically develop their work in their customers' facilities, since common activities involve working with customers' staff to support them in their work, which is emphasized for employees working in outsourcing, as human resources are hired for their specialized skills to fill in a gap in customers' teams. Usually employees of an outsourcing employer get to know much better the customer's employees and consequently, are better identified by the customer's brand, therefore, IT outsourcing poses a major challenge for internal branding, as it is more difficult to communicate with employees, while at the same time they are contaminated by the customer's brand. Consequently, IT outsourcing corporations tend to have a high turnover rate (Quan & Cha, 2010).

The evidence of a psychological contract breach may be a first indicator of a possible future turnover, very common in IT corporations. The psychological contract may play the role of a formal governance particularly in the case of IT outsourcing (Lioliou et al., 2014). Thus, literature acknowledges the particular relevance of the psychological contract to IT consultancy corporations while at the same time the additional challenges of internal branding due to the typical outsourcing role of employees.

## 2. **Methodology**

According to what we have been discussing, the present study addresses the case of a multinational IT company – with subsidiaries in several European, North American, and Latin American countries –, helping to shed additional light on how those two dimensions – internal branding and psychological contract – are actually contributing to the high turnover verified on the company. A Portuguese subsidiary was chosen, so the researchers could have inside access to the employees. At the time of data collection, all IT employees worked in consultancy or in outsourcing contracts, implying that almost all the working time was spent in the customer's facilities, and working directly with the customer's staff. Typically the activities provided included customized

developments and enterprise software configuration tasks (e.g., software such as SAP, or Siebel, among others). Most of the customers were large private Portuguese companies including banking and telecommunication sectors, and also in the public sector (e.g., foreign affairs' office). The Portuguese subsidiary faces the challenge of a high level of employee turnover. The human resources management office is aware of such issue and intends to understand how the brand and internal policies are perceived by employees, and what is their relation with the turnover rate.

### 2.1 Main Objectives

This study aimed to contribute to: Understand the internal branding and psychological contract, and the interrelation between these concepts; and, measure the relation of internal branding and psychological contract in an attempt to justify the current turnover phenomenon observed in the studied company.

### 2.2 Participants and variables

A total of 61 people (N = 61) participated in this study (73% aged between 26 and 35 years, 64% men). Almost all participants were technicians in the company. As an independent variable the genre/sex was considered, and the dependent variables were the dimensions of internal branding and psychological contract.

### 2.3 Instrument and Procedure

Data concerning representations of internal branding and psychological contract were collected using a set of open-ended questions and closed items. A questionnaire was developed and tested, being later sent to the 79 company' employees, by e-mail, with a brief explanation of the study and about the main goal. All subjects gave a previous consent, being informed about their voluntary participation and anonymity, so, confidentiality was assured and they could give up the questionnaire at any time, if they wish. Participants could return their answered questionnaire by e-mail (after electronic filling) or deliver it by hand, to the researcher. The response rate was 77%, so we collected 61 completed questionnaires, while the remaining 18 participants did not return the questionnaires. Several main factorial principal components analyzes (PCA) were performed to determine the main dimensions of the two concepts, and univariate analysis of variance, in order to search for possible influence of the independent variable in the considered dimensions. We also determined the correlations between the dimensions found, having descriptive statistics for all items.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Dimensions of internal branding

In Tables 1 and 2, we present the factorial structure of the significant dimensions of internal branding, and the associated explained variances, after performing a first PCA (having KMO=0.75) with all the items of a previously tested internal branding scale. Five dimensions were identified (cf. Tables 1 and 2): The first one (explaining 14.1% of total variance,  $\alpha = 0.77$ ) groups items related to Company information; the second (14.0% of explained variance,  $\alpha = 0.71$ ) refers the Working conditions of the company; the third (13.8% of explained variance,  $\alpha = 0.69$ ) congregates indicators associated to Company responsibility; the fourth (13.4% of explained variance,  $\alpha = 0.69$ ), associates items according to the Company objectives; the fifth (11.9% of explained variance,  $\alpha = 0.78$ ) refers the Company's concerns with employees.

### 3.2 Dimensions of psychological contract

To find the main dimensions of psychological contract a PCA was performed (having KMO=0.74) with all the items of a tested psychological contract scale (cf. Tables 3 and 4). Seven main

dimensions – six items were determined as statistically non-significant, so, they were excluded from the PCA and excluded from further analysis – were selected for the psychological contract: The first dimension (explaining 15.2% of the total explained variance,  $\alpha = 0.90$ ) groups indicators relative to Belief in the company obligations; the second (explaining 11.3% of total variance,  $\alpha = 0.87$ ) drives us to the Compliance of the company obligations; the third (11.1% of explained variance,  $\alpha = 0.86$ ) groups items associated to Belief in the employee obligations; the fourth (7.2% of explained variance,  $\alpha = 0.79$ ) associates items according to possible Employee extra functions fulfillment; the fifth (5.9% of explained variance,  $\alpha = 0.64$ ) was designated as Company compliance on the employment relationship; the sixth (5.8% of explained variance,  $\alpha = 0.60$ ), congregates items about Company knowledge of the employee's life; and the seventh (5.8% of explained variance,  $\alpha = 0.61$ ), highlights the employee Compliance with company's obligations (cf. Tables 3 and 4).

**Table 1:** Factorial structure of internal branding

Items	Dimensions of internal branding				
	F1 Company information	F2 Working conditions of the company	F3 Company responsibility	F4 Company objectives	F5 Company's concerns with employees
In what extent do you think you know about the company?	.781	.095	.117	.098	-.141
Compared to last year, are more or less informed about the company's objectives and strategies?	.743	-.185	-.117	-.005	.352
Do you contribute to the overall success of the company?	.711	.070	.108	.015	.253
Do you feel that the company offers job security?	.315	.716	.005	.269	-.083
Marketing Plan Information...	-.128	.694	.199	-.080	.337
Information on Government Measures Affecting the Company...	-.176	.677	.069	.162	.172
Would you recommend the company as a good place to work?	.195	.582	-.134	.441	.181
Information about Community Involvement (citizenship)...	-.005	.012	.734	.339	-.029
Information about Bonus and Prize Program...	.300	-.187	.715	-.202	.077
Information on Changes in the direction and structure of the company's organizational chart...	.150	.443	.651	-.004	-.191
Information on Company Benefits (e.g. health insurance)...	-.293	.194	.635	.253	.207
Company Financial Health Information...	-.163	.172	-.065	.812	.158
Information on products and services of the company...	.114	.073	.242	.719	.135
Information on the company's strategy for the future...	.324	.198	.402	.617	-.192
Do you agree that the company worries about its employees?	.063	.206	-.051	.099	.831
Overall, are you satisfied with the communication in the company?	.235	.121	.078	.134	.810

Source: Own

**Table 2:** Explained variance and Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) for the internal branding dimensions

Dimensions	Eigenvalues	Explained variance (%)	Cumulative %	Alpha ( $\alpha$ )
F1	2.3	14.1	14.1	.77
F2	2.2	14.0	28.1	.71
F3	2.2	13.8	41.9	.69
F4	2.2	13.4	55.4	.69
F5	1.9	11.9	67.3	.78

Source: Own

**Table 3:** Factorial structure of psychological contract

Items	Dimensions of psychological contract						
	F1 (see below)	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7
The company is obliged to enable me to progress in my career.	.892	.146	.071	.002	.018	.119	.010
The company is obliged to pay me according to the function performed	.818	-.006	.171	-.214	-.044	.307	.096
The company is obliged to take into account my opinion	.810	.081	.181	-.077	.000	.131	.137
The company is obliged to know the most important aspects of my professional past	.802	.112	-.069	.159	.041	-.286	-.028
The company is obliged to compensate me monetarily according to the work developed	.800	.064	.035	-.087	.166	.240	.014
The company is obliged to award me premium (s) based on performance	.740	.195	.080	.085	.175	-.211	-.109
I have an obligation to perform my duties in accordance with the	.494	.213	-.021	.161	.430	.364	.183
The company Compensates me monetarily in function of the work developed	.040	.862	.061	.152	.015	.075	.074
The company takes into account my opinion	.184	.821	-.150	-.082	.049	.173	.095
The company enables me to progress in my career.	.121	.805	-.159	.074	.062	.046	.233
The company pays me according to the function performed	.085	.778	.115	-.279	-.086	.115	.238
The company Ensures me good quality care in the disease	.173	.603	.143	-.160	.072	.157	-.278
I am obliged to always give a good image of the company	-.041	.074	.798	.047	.146	-.278	-.063
I am obliged to respect the company's assets	.193	-.151	.796	-.086	-.041	.040	.335
I am obliged to carry out my duties in accordance with the	.449	.019	.730	.111	.190	.109	-.008
I am obliged to speak to my direct leadership when I identify aspects to improve	.398	-.104	.718	-.129	-.114	.077	.257
I am obliged to be receptive to requests to ensure tasks not required by my duties	-.189	-.074	.692	.431	-.203	-.084	-.068
I am required to be available to change roles	-.048	.167	.688	.103	-.324	.045	-.235
I offer myself to do tasks not required by my duties	-.085	-.138	.166	.846	.138	.135	.067
I am receptive to requests to ensure tasks not required by my duties	-.023	.008	.003	.823	.161	-.057	.198
The company fully complies with the collective labor agreement	.059	-.057	-.097	.246	.849	.081	.057
The company is obliged to pay me the order on the stipulated date	.166	.125	-.002	-.020	.677	-.034	-.060
The company supports me with regard to my specific personal interests	.117	.248	-.211	-.129	.026	.726	-.048
The company knows the most important aspects of my professional past	.345	.305	.098	.270	.142	.632	.127
I always give good company image	-.018	.161	.163	.073	.049	-.108	.754
I am available to change roles	.114	.309	-.116	.267	-.111	.181	.712
Respect for company assets	.165	.157	.140	.055	.329	.111	.473

  

F1 Belief in the company obligations	F2 Compliance of the company obligations	F3 Belief in the employee obligations	F4 Employee extra function fulfillment	F5 Company compliance on the employment relationship	F6 Company knowledge of the employee's life	F7 Compliance with obligations to the company
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Source: Own

**Table 4:** Explained variance and Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) for the psychological contract dimensions

Dimensions	Eigenvalues	Explained variance (%)	Cumulative %	Alpha ( $\alpha$ )
F1	5.2	15.2	15.2	.90
F2	3.8	11.3	26.5	.87
F3	3.8	11.1	37.6	.86
F4	2.5	7.2	44.8	.79
F5	2.0	5.9	50.7	.64
F6	2.0	5.8	56.5	.60
F7	2.0	5.8	62.3	.61

Source: Own

To investigate possible influence of the gender/sex on the dimensions of internal branding and psychological contract, we performed univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA). Due to the fact that we had relatively few participants (N=61) and to the significant difference between the effectiveness of men (N=39; 64%) and women (N= 22; 36%) in our sample, we can not mention with accuracy to significant effects but we may consider the tendencies found: men, more than women, consider to have information about the company and its activities, and think that the company concerns with employees; men also consider, more than women, that the company tries to fulfill its obligations toward the employees. We also determined the correlations between the dimensions of internal branding and psychological contract, verifying that, in fact, has expected, an intrinsic bond between the psychological contract and internal branding (Terglav et al., 2016). The strongest correlation is between the compliance of the company obligations and the company objectives; it is considered that the more the company meet the obligations that is has, namely with the employees, more the company objectives may be achieved (cf. Table 5).

**Table 5:** Correlations between internal branding and psychological contract

Dimensions		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Internal branding	1. Company information												
	2. Working conditions of the company	.12											
	3. Company responsibility	.10	.29*										
	4. Company objectives	.16	.45***	.36**									
	5. Company's concerns with employees	.25	.36**	.09	.20								
Psychological contract	6. Belief in the company obligations	.21	.36**	-.07	.33**	.27*							
	7. Compliance of the company obligations	.32*	.22	.31*	.61**	.31*	.30*						
	8. Belief in the employee obligations	-.31*	-.12	-.29*	-.18	-.15	.25*	.00					
	9. Employee extra function fulfillment	-.05	.17	.07	.02	.01	-.03	-.10	.16				
	10. Company compliance on the employment relationship	.21	.01	.05	.13	-.05	.23	.06	-.10	.30*			
	11. Company knowledge of the employee's life	.15	.42**	.31*	.39**	.22	.39**	.46**	-.02	.11	.20		
	12. Compliance with obligations to the company	-.13	.25	-.09	.37**	.37**	.21	.38**	.14	.32*	.12	.30*	

Note: \*  $p < 0.050$  ; \*\*  $p < 0.010$

Source:Own

We admit the more employees feel identified with the company and think the company nurtures them, the more they are committed to meet the company expectations and goals.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The compliance of the company (considering the employment relationship) with the employees, is clearly the most appreciated characteristic by the employees, and our participants. After this characteristic, the objectives of the company seem to be the most valued by the employees, which reveal concern to comply with their obligations to the company, along with their belief in the fulfillment of the employment relationship by the organization. This leads us to admit that there is a greater belief of the employees in the fulfillment of the physical contract than in the fulfillment of the psychological contract. On the opposite, the most negative aspect highlighted in the company is the concern with its employees, that is, the employees think that the company does not care as much about them as they would like, or how they think that the company should be concerned, what causes a low satisfaction among employees.

Findings also indicate that both the company's interest in knowing the life of the employee and the fulfillment of the financial obligations of the company, have a low impact on the employees, not causing a considerable impression. The company's weak concern with its human resources proves the weak internal branding of the organization. We observed that male employees are more interested in company information, and show higher relative satisfaction with it, than female employees. Men also show a greater belief in the company's compliance with the employment bond than women, but women tend to emphasize the company's responsibility at all levels, more than men. Although the level of employees' satisfaction, both with the psychological contract and with internal branding, is relatively low, our results lead us to consider that there is greater satisfaction with the psychological contract than with internal branding. Therefore, they are more satisfied with the promises implied, which are the promises that are not verbalised in a formal contract, than with the brand communication within the organization. This indicates that the company is playing a better role in fulfilling the expectations of its employees than in selling itself to its human resources, i.e., in transmitting in a clear, effective and efficient way the concept of the company brand, its image, mission, values and goals. Anyway, this communication is the main vehicle of the brand, to the company's human resources (Blumenthal, 2001). However, we may say that internal branding is closely linked to the psychological contract, since the strongest correlation we found amid the dimensions of these concepts is between the fulfillment of the company's obligations and its own objectives.

Hence, we conclude that human resources expect the company fulfills its obligations, as they consider that the company's objectives are being achieved due to their commitment. This is a very common scenario in most companies, and an organization often justifies itself that failed to meet its objectives, in order to avoid fulfilling its obligations toward employees. Another fact that aroused our attention was that the lowest significant correlation is the contribution to the improvement of the company. Failure to comply with the obligations of the company, causes the employee to disregard the employer, that is, who does not contribute to the improvement of the company does not feel obliged to comply with their obligations to the employer. This is in line with Rousseau's assertion that one of the positive effects of the psychological contract is the willingness of employees to comply with their obligations to the employer (Rousseau, 1989), thus reinforcing our opinion on the current low levels of the psychological contract in the target company of this study.

It was difficult establishing a direct link between internal branding, psychological contract and employee turnover, as the company did not provide us the data needed to ascertain this association. However, the observed results allow us to admit that both internal branding and the psychological contract influence the turnover of the company. The greatest factor of retention of human resources is the fulfillment of the organization's employment relationship (associated with job security), not pride in representing the company, or even recognition of the work performed by the organization's human resources – findings that were previously verified (Stanier, 2001) – thus the relatively low values for the company's internal branding. Regarding the psychological contract, although it is a little more positive than internal branding, it also does not justify the maintenance of employees in the company. However, as we predicted, the higher the levels of internal branding and psychological contract, the higher is the employee retention rate (Ewing et al., 2002). Topics such as internal branding and psychological contract continue to arouse the greatest interest, at

various levels, and deserve to be a focus of attention in future studies. Their exploration and progressive understanding may help people to feel better at the work they do, and also with themselves, to the benefit of all, employees and companies. This will also deepen the science of work in the 21st century.

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