

Makale Türü: Araştırma Makalesi

**An Examination of the Effect of Internal Marketing on Work Engagement:
An Empirical Evidence from Sport Organizations**

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the effect of internal marketing on work engagement by focusing on sports organizations. The data were obtained from the employees of public organizations providing sports services in the western region of Turkey. The study used the IM-11 scale developed by Yıldız and Kara (2017) to measure internal marketing and UWES-9 scale developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2006) to measure work engagement. The results of the analysis showed that internal marketing significantly and positively increased the work engagement levels of the employees ($\beta=0.552$; $p<0.01$). This result revealed that internal marketing practices in organizations are an important instrument that increases the level of work engagement of employees.

Keywords: Internal marketing, work engagement, employee, sport organizations

**İçsel Pazarlamanın İşe Cezbolma Üzerine Etkisinin İncelenmesi:
Spor Örgütlerinden Ampirik Kanıtlar**

ÖZ

Bu çalışmada spor örgütlerine odaklanılarak içsel pazarlamanın işe cezbolma üzerindeki etkisinin incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Veriler Türkiye'nin batısında bulunan spor hizmeti veren kamu kurumlarının çalışanlarından elde edilmiştir. Çalışmada içsel pazarlamayı ölçmek için Yıldız ve Kara (2017) tarafından geliştirilen IM-11 ölçeği ve işe cezbolmayı ölçmek için Schaufeli ve Bakker (2006) tarafından geliştirilen UWES-9 ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Analiz sonuçları, içsel pazarlamanın çalışanların işe cezbolma düzeylerini anlamlı ve pozitif yönde artırdığını göstermiştir ($\beta=0,552$; $p<0,01$). Bu sonuç, örgütlerde içsel pazarlama uygulamalarının çalışanların işe cezbolma düzeylerini artıran önemli bir araç olduğunu ortaya koymuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İçsel pazarlama, işe cezbolma, çalışanlar, spor örgütleri

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Introduction

Increasing competition in recent years, together with the proliferation of organizations engaged in a similar production, forces organizations in the market to ensure customer satisfaction by producing quality products (Al Karim & Chowdhury, 2014). Especially in service organizations, employees play an important role in providing quality production by responding more to consumer demands and gaining superiority over competitors by increasing market share (Alshaibani & Bakir, 2016). Therefore, obtaining high performance from employees becomes strategic for organizations in terms of its effect on providing sustainable competitive advantage.

Today, in order to obtain high performance from their employees, it has become a necessity for organizations to create a positive climate in the business environment. A positive climate in the organizations is formed by the motivation of the employees (Rusu & Avasilcai, 2014). The internal marketing (IM) approach, which has been popular in recent years, has become an important instrument in organizations in terms of providing motivation for employees (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2002). IM primarily sees employees as customers and focuses on their expectations and needs. The IM approach is based on the assumption that the employee, whose expectations and needs are met, will satisfy the customer who buys the product from the organization. Thus, the organization increases its image in the market by providing service quality and customer satisfaction through its employees.

IM is important for all sectors, but more so for the service sector (Greene, Walls, & Schrest, 1994). Because the service sector is labor-intensive, the share of employees in production is relatively higher. Therefore, organizations must first focus on the happiness and satisfaction of their employees. The literature reveals that employees whose expectations from their organizations are met have a positive effect (Bataineh, 2019). Work engagement (WE) is one of them. WE, in short, refers to the employee's identification with the organization. Organizations with high WE get more performance from their employees (Demerouti & Cropanzano, 2010).

We argue that it is important to clarify and know what the relationship between these two important issues is. Currently, there are studies in different sectors examining both issues in the literature. Apart from these, this study focused on sports sector employees for whom no study has been done before. Therefore, this study, which focuses on presenting evidence from the sports sector, aimed to examine the effect of IM on WE.

Theoretical Background

Internal Marketing

In recent years, the concept of customer has been approached differently, those who buy products from the organization are seen as external customers and employees as internal customers (Bansal, Mendelson, & Sharma, 2001; Conduit, Matanda, & Mavondo, 2014). Berry (1981) argues that in order to achieve external customer satisfaction, first of all, the expectations of the employees should be met and their satisfaction should be ensured. IM,

which is the key factor in ensuring the motivation and satisfaction of the employees, sees the employees in the organization as a customer and evaluates them as the internal market (Rafiq & Ahmed, 1993). In short, IM is seen as an organizational philosophy adopted to create value in the internal market (oriented to employee satisfaction) of the organization that wants to achieve its external marketing goals (customer satisfaction) (Lings & Greenley, 2010).

IM is accepted as a personnel-organization relationship that increases employee satisfaction and commitment (Bell, Mengüç, & Stefani, 2004; Narteh & Odoom, 2015). IM, which is the application of marketing techniques developed by the organization for external marketing to employees, focuses on the factors that provide employee satisfaction (Lings, 2004). In the literature, a number of studies have been conducted on the needs that provide motivation and satisfaction for employees. The most striking of these is Forman and Money's (1995) three-dimensional (development, vision, reward) IM approach. However, Yildiz and Kara (2015), who argue that these three dimensions are insufficient, expanded the basic needs of employees with a new scale they developed and summarized them in eleven items: Physical conditions, fundamental needs, strengthens employees, appropriate workload and support, vision, training/development, career advancement opportunities, equal and fair, open and transparent communication, decision making process, and rewards. In later studies, evidence has been revealed that if these needs are met, the motivation of the employees will increase, and therefore the job performance, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior of the employees will increase (Duyan, 2021; Gelen, 2021; Yildiz, 2016a; Yildiz, 2020). In summary, considering that the satisfaction of external customers leads to the formation of their loyalty, it is accepted that IM applications for employees are an important instrument in increasing the performance of organizations (Wu, Tsai, & Fu, 2012).

Work Engagement

WE refers to an employee's willingly directing all his energy to his work by fostering a positive attitude towards his organization and integrating it with his work (Bakker & Leiter, 2010). In other words, this concept emphasizes that the employee makes his presence felt psychologically by channeling his ego and personal energy to his work and that he is fully at work physically, cognitively, and emotionally (Kahn, 1992).

WE consists of three sub-dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). *Vigor* means to be energetic and mentally strong while working, to make an effort by being resistant to difficulties; *dedication*, commitment to work with enthusiasm and pride; *absorption* means doing the job with pleasure and with full focus and happily. WE is an emotional force that leads the employee to high performance by providing intense concentration to work. Engaged employees focus on their work and immerse themselves in their work and use all their mental and physical resources to get the job done (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Studies in the literature reveal that WE is an important reason for increasing the job performance of employees (Breevaart, Bakker, Demetouti, E., & Van Den Heuvel, 2015; Tisu, Lupsa, Virga, & Rusu, 2020).

Relationship between internal marketing and work engagement

Within the framework of personnel-organization relations, establishing healthy internal and external relations for organizational success is considered as two inseparable elements, and in this framework, organizations focus on internal exchange with their employees (George, 1990). Internal relations in organizations can be developed with the win-win paradigm. According to this paradigm, the organization and employees provide mutual benefits by considering each other's expectations and needs. When expectations and needs are met, there are effective and successful employees on the one hand, and a high-performance organization on the other (Yildiz, 2014). In this framework, IM and WE can each be a part of the win-win paradigm.

The relationships between IM and WE have been studied on employees of different sectors. The common conclusion of the studies is that IM has a significant and positive effect on WE. However, no study was found examining the relationship between both variables in the sports sector sample and there is a gap in this area. Therefore, in order to clarify the relationship between these variables, it is clear that there is a need for new studies on service sectors for which no studies have been conducted. Therefore, the main argument of this study is to understand the role of IM on WE by providing evidence from the sports sector. Therefore, this study, which aims to examine the effect of IM on WE, sought answers to the following hypotheses.

- H₁. Internal marketing will have a significant and positive effect on vigor.
- H₂. Internal marketing will have a significant and positive effect on dedication.
- H₃. Internal marketing will have a significant and positive effect on absorption.
- H₄. Internal marketing will have a significant and positive effect on work engagement.

Method

Research Model

The conceptual model of this study to investigate the effects of IM on WE in the context of sports organizations is shown in Figure 1. In this model, IM was determined as the independent variable, WE and its sub-dimensions (vigor, dedication, and absorption) were determined as dependent variables.

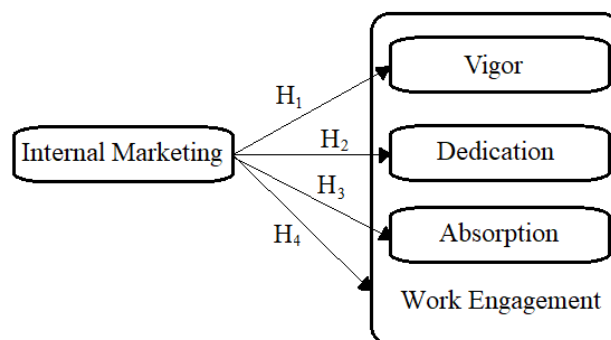


Figure 1. The effect of internal marketing on work engagement

Measurement instruments

In this study, the IM-11 scale developed by Yildiz and Kara (2017) was used to measure IM. This scale is a unidimensional and includes 11 items. Examples of statements in the scale: “This organization fulfills the fundamental needs (pay, insurance, job security) of its employees.”, “This organization provides training/development programs to improve knowledge and skills of its employees.” Each item was measured with a 5-point Likert scale (1= Strongly disagree; 5= Strongly agree).

The short version (UWES-9) of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2006) was used to measure WE. This scale consists of three dimensions (vigor, dedication, and absorption) and each dimension contains 3 items. Examples of statements in the scale: “At my work, I feel bursting with energy.”, “Time flies when I am working.” Each item was measured with a 5-point Likert scale (1= Strongly disagree; 5= Strongly agree).

Sample size and procedure

Employees of five public organizations providing sports services in the western region of Turkey participated in this study, in which the convenience sampling method was used. Electronic communication tools were used in communication and data collection. First, 224 employees were invited to participate in the study through an informational message stating the purpose of the study. Later, it was determined that 183 employees voluntarily participated in the study.

Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics were used for the data used in this study, the correlation was used to determine the relationships between the variables, and hierarchical regression analysis was used to determine the effects of the independent variables on the dependent variables.

Analysis and Results

Sample characteristics

The majority of the participants are male (75.4%) and aged 31 to 45 years (79.8%). More than half of the participants are permanent staff (57.4%) and have an undergraduate degree (62.3%). 79 (43.2%) respondents have 6–10 years of employment in their current organization (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics

Variables		f	%
Gender	Male	138	75.4
	Female	45	24.6
Age	30 and less	19	10.4
	31–45	146	79.8
	46–50	15	8.2
	51-55	3	1.6
Employment status	Fixed-term contract	78	42.6
	Permanent staff	105	57.4
Education	Secondary	3	1.6
	Lycée	30	16.4
	Undergraduate	114	62.3
	Master’s	34	18.6
	Doctorate	2	1.1
Length of working life in current organization (years)	1–5	54	29.5
	6–10	79	43.2
	11–15	26	14.2
	16–20	13	7.1
	21–25	6	3.3
	26–30	4	2.2
	Over 31	1	0.5

Test for validity and reliability

Exploratory factor analysis results showed that factor loads of IM varied between 0.554 and 0.847, and WE ranged between 0.609 and 0.909. The factor loads of both scales are higher than the lower limit of 0.400 (Hair et al., 1995). On the other hand, reliability analysis (Cronbach’s alpha) results indicated that the reliability coefficients of both scales were excellent ($\alpha= 0.901$ for IM, $\alpha= 0.904$ for WE), (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Correlation analysis

Table 2 shows the results of the correlation analysis. Analysis results indicate that there is a significant and positive relationship between IM and WE ($r=0.549$; $p<0.01$). Similarly, IM is significantly and positively associated with all sub-dimensions of WE. The highest correlation is between IM and vigor ($r=0.544$; $p<0.01$). According to these values, as IM applications increase, the employees’ WE also increases. Among the demographic variables, only “dedication” and “length of working life in the current organization” have a significant and positive relationship ($r=0.146$; $p<0.05$).

Table 2. Results of correlation analysis

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Gender	1				
2. Age	-.063	1			
3. Employment status	.030	.041	1		
4. Educational degree	.216**	-.113	-.035	1	
5. Length of working life in current institution	-.106	.330**	.327**	-.036	1
6. Internal marketing	.002	-.121	.167*	.023	.124
7. Vigor	-.070	-.106	.024	.069	.050
8. Dedication	-.119	-.007	.110	-.073	.146*
9. Absorption	-.060	-.022	.030	-.095	.120
10. Work engagement	-.085	-.050	.053	-.033	.109

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 2. Results of correlation analysis (continued)

Variables	M	6	7	8	9
1. Gender ^a	-				
2. Age ^b	-				
3. Employment status ^c	-				
4. Educational degree ^d	-				
5. Length of working life in current institution ^e	-				
6. Internal marketing	3.44	1			
7. Vigor	3.80	.544**	1		
8. Dedication	4.19	.494**	.769**	1	
9. Absorption	4.10	.510**	.837**	.885**	1
10. Work engagement	4.03	.549**	.929**	.930**	.966**

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Key. ^aGender: 1=male, 2=female. ^bAge was measured in 4-year intervals, coded as 1=less than 30 to more than 51. ^cEmployment status: 1=fixed-term contract, 2=permanent staff. ^dEducational degree: 1=secondary 2=lycée, 3=undergraduate, 4=master's, 5=doctorate. ^eLength of working life in current institution was measured in 7-year intervals, coded as 1=less than 5 years to 7=more than 31.

Source. Yildiz, 2022

Hierarchical regression analysis

Table 3 shows the results of hierarchical regression analysis in which IM and demographic characteristics are considered as independent variables and WE and its sub-dimensions are considered as dependent variables. According to the analysis results, IM has a significant and positive effect on WE ($\beta=0.552$; $p<0.01$). Similarly, IM has a significant and positive effect on all sub-dimensions of WE. The highest effect of IM is on vigor ($\beta=0.548$; $p<0.01$). All these values reveal that IM significantly increases the WE levels of the employees.

Table 3. Hierarchical regression analysis among independent and dependent variables

Independent variables	Dependent variables								
	Vigor		Dedication		Absorption		Work Engagement		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	
	β	β	β	β	β	β	β	β	
1. Gender ^a	-.086	-.086	-.101	-.100	-.029	-.028	-.073	-.073	
2. Age ^b	-.131	-.037	-.066	.018	-.082	.007	-.100	-.006	
3. Employment status ^c	.007	-.063	.070	.007	-.017	-.084	.017	-.054	
4. Educational degree ^d	.076	.069	-.051	-.058	-.093	-.100	-.023	-.030	
5. Length of working life in current institution ^e	.084	.008	.132	.065	.147	.075	.128	.052	
6. Internal marketing	-	.548**	-	.488**	-	.518**	-	.552**	
	<i>F</i>	1.074	13.292	1.600	10.702	1.076	11.516	.977	13.384
	<i>R</i> ²	.029	.312	.043	.016	.029	.282	.027	.313
	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.002	.288	.267	.242	.002	.257	.000	.290

Note. Standardized beta values were used, ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Key. ^aGender: 1=male, 2=female. ^bAge was measured in 4-year intervals, coded as 1=less than 30 to more than 51. ^cEmployment status: 1=fixed-term contract, 2=permanent staff. ^dEducational degree: 1=secondary 2=lycée, 3=undergraduate, 4=master's, 5=doctorate. ^eLength of working life in current institution was measured in 7-year intervals, coded as 1=less than 5 years to 7=more than 31.

Source. Yildiz, 2022

Discussion and Conclusion

This study was carried out to examine the effect of IM on the WE of the employees by focusing on the employees in sports organizations. There are studies examining the relationships between both variables in various sectors. However, this study provides evidence for the first time from the sports sector. Therefore, the results of this study will contribute to the management literature in terms of clarifying the relationships between the two variables.

The findings of our study showed that IM had a significant and positive effect on WE. When the studies conducted in various sectors are examined, it is seen that similar findings are obtained with our study. Al-Weshah (2019) found significant and positive effects on hospital workers (physicians, nurses, pharmacists, technicians, and administrative staff) in the health sector. Similarly, WE were significantly and positively affected by the sub-dimensions of IM (employees' empowerment, $\beta=0.257$, $p<0.05$; employees' motivation, $\beta=0.291$, $p<0.05$; information sharing, $\beta=0.192$, $p<0.05$; work environment, $\beta=0.181$, $p<0.05$). Ragab and Saleh (2020) also found a significant and positive relationship between IM and WE in their study on nurses ($\beta=0.538$; $p<0.01$). Yildiz (2016b), in his study on academics in the higher education sector, found that IM had a significant and positive effect on WE ($\beta=0.610$; $p<0.01$). Similar to our study, the author found the same effect in sub-dimensions of WE.

In the correlation analysis, there was a significant and positive relationship between the demographic variables "dedication" and "length of working life in the current organization". Accordingly, even without IM applications, as the working time of the employees increases, they attach more importance to their work. When the IM variable was added to the hierarchical regression analysis, the relationship between "dedication" and "length of working life in the current institution" disappeared. However, the effect of IM on dedication was positive and significant at the $p<0.01$ level.

As a result, this study conducted on employees in the sports sector showed that IM had a significant and positive effect on WE, similar to other sectors. Employees with a high WE level are energetic and mentally stronger, they are more resistant to difficulties, they are attached to their work with enthusiasm and pride, and they focus happily on their work. Considering that high job satisfaction (Ali & Anwar, 2021) and high productivity (Ratnaningtyas, Handaru, & Eryanto, 2021) occur in employees with increased WE, it is clear that managers should give importance to IM practices in their organizations. WE can be created more strongly through IM, which is the core tool of motivation in organizations (Czaplewski, Ferguson, & Milliman, 2001).

Limitations and Future Research

This study was carried out on a sample of public employees in the sports sector. Given the limited sample size, the results of this study cannot be generalized to the entire sports sector. Therefore, more studies are needed in different sample groups. Considering that the sports sector has public and private organizations, studies to be carried out in different organizations will contribute to the clarification of the subject. By using the methods and measurement

instruments in this study, it can be suggested to conduct similar studies in different sample groups in the future.

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