

Relationship between Internal Branding and Employee Performance in Private College Central (PCC) Regions of Malaysia: A Preliminary Review

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Abstract

The idea of internal branding is becoming increasingly common for coordinating employee behaviour or performance. However, as prior studies primarily examined the relationship between internal branding practices and employee performance within other industries, there is still a dearth of study in Malaysia pertaining to private tertiary institutions. Therefore, the goal of this study was to examine the variables that affect employee performance among Malaysian employees of Peninsula College Central (PCC). This study concentrated on the relationship between internal branding strategies and employee performance, particularly as it relates to knowledge, reward, and leadership. Social Exchange Theory served as the foundation for this study. The connection between employee-employer reciprocity and this notion is well established. The population in this study was one hundred with a sample size of 80 employees of PCC. The researcher focused on the quantitative approach. Probability sampling was employed, and simple random sampling suited the probability sampling methods for a sample in PCC. Version 24 Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was applied to analyse the study. The results of this study indicated that the knowledge and reward have a significant effect on employee performance.

Keywords: Leadership, rewards, internal branding, knowledge, social exchange theory, employee performance

Introduction

The COVID-19 epidemic influenced businesses of all sizes and industries around the globe. According to Reinicke (2020), the US economy shrank by 35% in the second quarter of 2020, while the Eurozone economy shrank by 12.1 percent on average compared to the prior year during the same period. This trend can be seen in higher education as well. Working from home during the COVID-19 epidemic has been linked to lower employee performance, according to a study conducted in Malaysia by the National Population and Family Development Board in 2020. Based on the statistics, 52% of respondents are stressed out, 33% do not have a designated workspace, 35% struggle with motivation, 32% have had wage cutbacks, 30% are concerned about losing their jobs, and 52% are having troubles at home.

Since organisations require high-performing employees, one of the main challenges facing micro and small firms is business sustainability (Mendy, 2021). However, unforeseen internal circumstances could pose a threat to sustainability, endangering the health and productivity of employees. According to Carlini and Grace (2021), as a strategic organisational project, it is crucial to address internal branding issues since they have a positive impact on employee behaviour and performance. Supported by Abdullahi, Raman, and Solarin (2021), performance is the act of an individual using their behaviour to show that they have completed a task. To ensure that internal and external brand messages achieve their objectives, internal branding entails activities that assist employees in comprehending and embracing brand values and assisting them in fulfilling management-supported tasks (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018). Thus, this study presented three independent variables: knowledge (Ngo et al., 2019), rewards (Adamu, 2020), and leadership (a method used to encourage PCC employees). Knowledge refers to employees' awareness of PCC branding. Rewards

are a management tool used to motivate and impact employee behaviour (Haque, Fernando, & Caputi, 2021). Leadership refers to a strategy used to motivate PCC staff (Haque, Fernando, & Caputi, 2021).

Analysing the connection between internal branding and employee performance at Peninsula College Central (PCC), a private tertiary institution in Malaysia, was the primary goal of the research. Rewards, knowledge, and leadership were the independent variables for internal branding in this study. This study project will contribute information on how these factors impacted employee performance at the chosen educational institution.

Literature Review

Unquestionably, rapid development characterises modern globalization. According to Rasul, Rogger, and Williams (2021), this development has increased the need for qualified employees and other skills that can enhance job performance; this could cause economic instability. Due to their inability to keep up with the quick changes in technology, many employees do their jobs ineffectively. Employees are searching for opportunities for self-development that can broaden their horizons, while employers are looking for people who can conduct a variety of duties and roles. One of the top issues in the workplace right now is this (Davidescu et al., 2020). Individuals who are initiative-takers are always seeking methods to get better (Alikaj, Ning, & Wu, 2021). As a result, these individuals may perform and learn more effectively than others in the fast-paced world of today. On the other side, those who are unable to perform at a prominent level will be let go. Employee expertise and knowledge are therefore the major factors in increasing performance. The expansion of the organisation, however, can be hampered by high personnel turnover and mediocre performance.

Research on employee performance in Malaysia's higher education industry has mostly focused on private and public universities; less study on private colleges has been found, according to a study of the literature (Abdullahi et al., 2021; Mohammadi & Karupiah, 2020). Employee performance studies are typically conducted in the banking, hospitality, and pharmaceutical industries (Alti & Almuhrat, 2021; Khdour, 2022; Salman & Sankar, 2021). The literature review also revealed that previous studies on employee performance had not simultaneously looked at the relationships between factors like personality and work motivation (Yumhi et al., 2021), a balanced scorecard (Camilleri et al., 2021), confidence in leaders and job satisfaction (Abdillah et al., 2021), succession planning and employee engagement (Abdullahi et al., 2021), and workload and job satisfaction (Janib et al., 2021). Therefore, this study was conducted to fill these gaps.

Method

The private tertiary institution PCC, which has been in operation for the past 24 years in Malaysia, served as the subject of this study on staff performance. The Peninsula College Northern (PCN) and the PCC, which are in Penang and Selangor, respectively, are owned by PKT Logistics Group as part of its commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR) (PKT, 2022). A variety of programmes, from certificate to postgraduate levels, are offered by PCC, which has more than 15,000 graduates throughout the years. PCC was chosen so that greater attention could be paid to the essential elements of employee performance (Peninsula College, 2022). This study employed a quantitative survey and assistance from the HR Department as COVID-19 pandemic limitations prevented the researcher from personally distributing the questionnaire, which was a requirement of the study. A Google form was used to run the online survey and gather data from each respondent. The raw data were analysed using version 24 of SPSS to derive the regression analysis, correlation analysis, and descriptive statistics on the information.

Population Size

In research, the term "population" refers to a large group of people or organisations that the researcher finds useful (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). The entirety of the research subject's population can be thought of as the population. 100 PCC employees are the study's target group, according to the HR department's headcount report. Sampling is a technique used to select several representatives or individuals from a particular population for the purpose of statistical analysis. It is crucial to decide on the population first, followed by the sample size and frame (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). The researcher focused on the quantitative approach; hence, probability sampling was used in this study. One of the suitable probability sampling methods for a

sample in PCC is simple random sampling. According to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) general rule of thumb, 80 samples are sufficient for a population of 100 people. The generalised sample size decision guideline is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. PCC sample size

PCC Department	Population (Employee)	Proportionate Random Sampling	Sample Size
Management	15	$15/100 = 0.15$	$0.15 * 80 = 12$
Academics	30	$30/100 = 0.3$	$0.3 * 80 = 24$
Academic Supports	15	$15/100 = 0.15$	$0.15 * 80 = 12$
Bursary, Finance & Registry	12	$12/100 = 0.12$	$0.12 * 80 = 9.6$
Business Development	10	$10/100 = 0.1$	$0.1 * 80 = 8$
Examination	10	$10/100 = 0.1$	$0.1 * 80 = 8$
Human Resources	3	$3/100 = 0.03$	$0.03 * 80 = 2.4$
ICT	5	$5/100 = 0.05$	$0.05 * 80 = 4$
Total	100		80

Source: PCC HR Department, 2022

Theoretical Framework

Internal branding still receives insufficient attention in the sector, despite the growth of branding studies in higher education. Internal marketing, often known as "internal branding," focuses on creating links between corporate brands and employees. It involves developing brand management human capital through dialogue, training, and seminars (Iyer, Davari, & Paswan, 2018). According to a review of the literature, there are not many studies on employee performance in the private education industry, especially in a private tertiary school in Malaysia. Prior studies on the Malaysian higher education market have focused on other aspects like green technology (Kaliappan & Hamid, 2021), the impact of remote work on employee productivity (Ibrahim, Rezali & Yunan, 2021), organisational performance (Khalid et al., 2021), and employee turnover (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021). The study of Yumhi et al. (2021), which was concerned with employee performance in Indonesian higher education institutions, solely looked at other factors like training, personality, and job motivation. Other factors were also examined in a prior study that looks at the factors that determine employee success.

The balanced scorecard was examined as an independent variable in Camilleri's (2021) study on employee performance in the educational sector. The Malaysian study on employee performance in Malaysian private universities (MPUs) by Abdullahi et al. (2021) also focused on other factors such as succession planning procedures and employee engagement. Employee performance in MPU was examined in a different study by Abdullahi et al. (2021) using predictor variables such as organisational culture and employee engagement. The only areas of emphasis in the study of Ali et al. (2021) on employee performance at an Iraqi institution are organisational culture and educational advancement. Additionally, Janib et al. (2021) looked at the determinants of workload, career commitment, and job satisfaction as a mediating impact in their study of five public institutions in Malaysia.

However, the research by Abbas et al. (2020), which looked at the influence of leadership on employee performance, revealed that leadership has an impact on employee performance at a university in Indonesia. Additionally, the impact of knowledge on employee performance in different industries was investigated in studies by Carlini and Grace (2021), Sa'adah and Rijanti (2022), and Syarifuddin et al. (2021). They claimed that knowledge has a major influence on employee performance. Previous studies on rewards have discovered a strong relationship between rewards and employee performance (Alansari and Javed, 2021; Goh, 2021; Polgasdeniya & Gamage, 2021).

Therefore, there is a dearth of research specifically in Malaysia's education sector that analytically examines the relationship between internal branding practises and employee performance. Additionally, past studies did not simultaneously evaluate the connection between internal branding (rewards, knowledge, and

leadership) and employee performance. Additionally, the results of the earlier investigations for the independent variable and the dependent variable are in conflict. The current study revisits all these characteristics in Malaysia's higher education sector, specifically PCC. For example, knowledge, reward, and leadership have been established as determinants of employee success in various industrial contexts by prior studies.

Results and Discussion

Participation and Response rate

The data collection for this study was carried out over four days, from February 21 until February 24, 2022, via a Google form. Approximately eighty samples were approached and agreed to answer the questionnaire. At the end of the data collection period, only forty-four questionnaires were collected and usable for the data analysis. According to Nulty (2008), an online survey with a response rate of 50% or higher is appropriate. As a result, this study has an adequate response rate of 55%, as mentioned in Table 2.

Table 2: Response Rate of the Survey

Response	Frequency/Rate
Number of questionnaires distributed.	80
Returned questionnaires.	44
Questionnaires eliminated.	0
Valid Questionnaires	44
Valid Response rate	55%

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The outcomes for the gender of respondents are shown in Table 3. According to the results, 15 or 34.1% of respondents are male, while 29 or 65.9% of respondents are female. Therefore, most of the respondents from PCC who participated in this study are female.

Table 3: Gender of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	15	34.1
Female	29	65.9
Total	44	100

Department

These departments are shown in Table 4 below for the responders. 16 respondents, or 36.4% of those who responded to the research, were from the academic department. Business development came in second with seven respondents (15.9%), while academic support came in third with six (13.6%). Registry, bursary, finance, and examination each had five replies (11.4%), while HR had three respondents (6.8%), and ICT and management each had one responder (2.3%).

Table 4: Department of respondents

Department	Frequency	Percent
Management	1	2.3%
Academic	16	36.4%
Academic Support	6	13.6%
Registry/ Bursary/ Finance	5	11.4%
Examination	5	11.4%
Business Development	7	15.9%
Human Resource	3	6.8%
ICT	1	2.3%
Total	44	100

Correlation Analysis

There was a link between knowledge and employee performance at a significant level of 0.05. The Pearson Correlation Score of 0.633 indicated that the strength of the link between knowledge and employee performance was modest. The finding enlarges the body of knowledge since most studies on knowledge and employee performance were conducted in western and other Asian countries. Furthermore, because the research was done at a private Malaysian tertiary institution, the study of knowledge and employee performance adds to the body of knowledge on the practical side. The PCC management has also provided employee training software systems in PCC, such as human resource software, namely iWoWSOFT, which stands for innovative way of working software, which has eased all the HR operations in managing employee information systems, attendance, leave, expenses, training, and performance appraisal modules. Vialing software is used by the registry, bursary, and academic support departments. This system has ensured that all the students' databases, financial records, and more are kept track of. Elsewhere, the academic department has been trained to use Office 365, which features Teams, SharePoint, OneDrive, and MS Office, other than ProQuest, Sky Vialing, and Turnitin. All the software trainings have been a plus for the PCC employees in raising the quality and standard of their work, and consequently, this has increased employee performance in PCC.

Based on the significant level of 0.05, there is a link between rewards and employee performance. The positive Pearson Correlation score demonstrates a moderate association between reward and employee performance, with $r = 0.552$. The finding is in line with the assumption of SET, which suggests that the respondents' performance might reflect their gratitude for the perceived fair compensation they received from the organization. In PCC, rewards are found to be significantly associated with employee performance because PCC provides rewards to appreciate their employees. For example, PCC management always recognises the performance of their employees by appraising them annually. During the pandemic, it has been a tough time for all businesses. Many companies implemented pay cuts and retrenchments due to financial constraints. However, despite all of that, PCC management came up with a contingency plan on how to retain the employees during this tough time. Instead of going for pay cuts, the chief executive designed a cost reduction plan. As a result, the employees were able to reap the benefits of a small raise. Aside from that, PCC administration has provided scholarships to academic and non-academic staff to help them further their education and advance their careers. As a result, it can be concluded that reward is a motivational factor that can increase employee performance in PCC.

At a level of 0.05, there is no meaningful relationship between leadership and employee performance. The positive value of the Pearson correlation reveals the weak relationship between leadership and employee performance, which is $r = 0.286$. The outcomes of this study are in line with studies carried out in Indonesia (Pio, 2022) among nurses and Ghana (Donkor et al., 2022) among enterprise companies. Both studies identified that leadership does not have an important relationship with employee performance, and one of the plausible causes could be the lack of socialisation initiation by department heads for their subordinates, which led to an inability to internalise leadership values and positively affect employee performance. In the present study, there were insignificant results between leadership and employee performance due to probable miscommunications between leaders and subordinates as the mode of communication shifted to a virtual platform due to the pandemic. During the unrecorded meeting with the HR Department, it was revealed that it was often impossible to discern people's emotions, causing misunderstandings and miscommunication between leaders and subordinates. Additionally, there were instances where some staff were absent, particularly class coordinators who were tasked to help lecturers during online lectures, resulting in a lack of assistance.

Table 5: Correlation between independent variables and dependent variables

Variable	Pearson Correlation (R)	Significant (P)	Result
Knowledge	0.633	0.001	Significant
Reward	0.552	0.001	Significant
Leadership	0.286	0.74	Not Significant

Regression Analysis

The independent and dependent variables were analysed using regression analysis. Table 6 demonstrated that knowledge has a greater influence on employee performance in PCC, with a t-value of 6.024. Other independent variables, like rewards, show a moderate influence on employee performance, with the t-value equal to 3.999. Meanwhile, the leadership did not meet the standards to be considered the variable that affects employee performance in PCC, where the t-value is -1.380. The result suggested that the more knowledge offered by PCC management to their staff, the better their performance. Knowledge will help workers to know and comprehend their management's expectations, allowing them to seek and align their actions with the organization's values and expectations. Other independent variables, which are rewards, have a moderate influence on employee performance in PCC. Meanwhile, leadership did not meet the standards to be considered a variable that affects employee performance. Therefore, PCC management should use the results of this study to improve employee performance and productivity.

By using this sample, knowledge alone is insufficient to influence employees' performance in PCC. The existence of reward support, especially yearly bonuses and increments would also stimulate employees' performance among PCC employees. Based on the regression results, rewards also moderate the influence on employees' performance in PCC. Leadership has no influence on employee performance in PCC. Hence, it is concluded that both knowledge and reward were crucial in stimulating employees' performance in PCC.

Table 6: Regression for Independent and Dependent Variables

Variables	T	Significant Value
Knowledge	6.024	0.001
Reward	3.999	0.001
Leadership	-1.380	0.176

Conclusions

The framework for this investigation is the social exchange theory (SET). In general, the study's findings are consistent with the SET hypothesis, which states that happy employees who experience internal branding are more likely to show high performance (Blau, 1964). According to the theory, providing employees with the necessary training, leadership, and rewards will increase their desire to participate in high-performing activities. In other words, if employees feel that their employer has given them the necessary training, compensation, and leadership style, they may feel under pressure to do well on the job. The study has expanded our understanding by providing concrete evidence of how internal branding practises affect employee performance at a Malaysian private higher education institution.

Additionally, by examining the elements of internal branding and employee performance in the context of a private institution in Malaysia, this study has added to the growing body of literature. This study differs from previous ones in that it simultaneously looked at the relationship between employee performance in Malaysia's education sector and internal branding practises like knowledge, reward, and leadership. This study fills in those gaps. By demonstrating the strength of the link between knowledge and reward for employee success, this study also advances our understanding of internal brand management.

List of abbreviations

- Corporate Service Responsibility (CSR)
- Peninsula College Central (PCC)
- Peninsula College Northern (PCN)
- Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)
- Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Conflicts of Interest

- no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Authors' contributions

- Author have been personally and actively involved in substantial work leading to the paper.

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