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Increasing Human Resources Loyalty through Internal Marketing in Cell Phone Companies: Perspectives from Airtel Congo in the Republic of Congo

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Abstract: Retaining human resources has become a prerequisite for HR professionals in competitive trench warfare. In light of this, the primary purpose of this study is to comprehend the critical role internal marketing plays in helping mobile phone companies in the Republic of Congo retain their human potential. We have decided to use qualitative methodology to accomplish this purpose. The researchers used a semi-structured interview guide and a sample of twenty field actors. The purposeful sampling technique was used to select the respondents in Brazzaville, the capital city of the Republic of Congo. This research confirms that human potential is retained through internal marketing through individual actions. Second, it shows that shared values form the foundation of internal marketing. Furthermore, it reveals that internal marketing uses calibration to foster loyalty. Ultimately, this research demonstrates that internal marketing manifests in the motivation to retain human resources. Marketing managers and industry players in the Democratic Republic of the Congo should consider the nation's organisational culture when making strategic decisions. This article's applicability stems from its capacity to address an exploratory study focused on calibration, an innovation in a Congolese telephone company. This answers questions for researchers and management in developing nations.

Keywords: Loyalty, human resources, internal marketing, Airtel, Congo.

Introduction

At a crossroads, in a highly competitive environment where companies seek to ensure their survival to continue to grow, managers need to rethink their human resources strategy and move towards internal marketing to attract, retain and build loyalty among the best talent. After all, employees play an essential role in achieving the company's objectives and vision. With this in mind, managers need to learn how to use marketing techniques to attract (seduce), integrate (welcome) and retain (retain) future employees in the same way as brand customers (Liger, 2016). Against this backdrop, the internal marketing approach is developing within companies, aiming to contribute to the loyalty of human resources within companies. The retention of human resources through internal marketing is developing and is the subject of growing interest from practitioners and

researchers (Nicolas and Renault, 2014). In corporate life, internal marketing is also known as HR marketing. It focuses on applying traditional marketing principles to human resources management strategies, emphasising the value of viewing employees as the company's internal customers. In this vein, Liger (2016) and Yao (2011) stipulate that organisations are increasingly drawing on marketing practices to understand their employees' expectations, satisfy them and consequently logically enhance the value of their human resources. Following this reasoning, the marriage between internal marketing and the HR function is no longer in doubt. This rapprochement is at the heart of human capital loyalty.

Similarly, a company's success depends to a large extent on the commitment and loyalty of its human factor. Loyal and committed employees are likelier to provide good service to external customers, innovate, collaborate effectively and contribute positively to the corporate culture. As a result, companies that value their internal collaborators can benefit from a better source of productivity, a friendly and positive work climate, and reduced staff turnover.

However, while literature is abundant on the link between internal marketing and HR retention within companies in northern countries (Bastida et al., 2022; Omar & Shehada, 2015; Simwanza & Mabagala, 2022), few empirical studies, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and the Congo in particular, have been developed on this vitally important issue. Yet some existing companies on the surface of the Republic of Congo consciously or unconsciously value the link between HR loyalty and internal marketing. To this end, it seems pertinent to identify the link between these two concepts to help managers in their loyalty-building process. With this in mind, our problem is as follows: how does internal marketing contribute to the retention of human resources within companies?

By adopting a holistic approach, this study grasps the complexity of exchanges between individuals, organisations, and their environment, offering valuable insights for improving human resources management and fostering organisational success.

Research Problem

From this perspective, our problem is: How does internal marketing contribute to the retention of human resources within companies? Indeed, in the Republic of Congo, we are seeing massive departures of human resources in search of a better and more fulfilling professional life. With this in mind, the analysis of this issue will contribute significantly to retaining the best talent within Congolese companies, which has been little studied until now. In addition, Carbonell et al. (2020) have demonstrated that human resources are crucial for companies' success in the African context, and they have proposed an innovation in recruitment methods. Ouédraogo et al. (2022) have demonstrated that a company's success is linked to a business management system integrating information technologies. Moloumba Mokango and Nassè (2024) pointed out that the issue of human resource retention has not been sufficiently studied in Congolese. To fill this knowledge gap, the current study sheds light on the retention of human resources in marketing management in the Republic of Congo. In this sense, the study of this question will provide answers to business practitioners who will be able to rely on it to sustain their businesses and consolidate the Congolese

economic cushion, which is considered by some researchers to be part of a rentier economy (Elenga et al., 2021). Our research question is part of an exploratory logic.

Research Focus

In this vein, this research makes it possible to combine the concepts of loyalty and internal marketing by aligning in a relationship dynamic that limits the departure of the best talent, thus weakening companies' organisational competitiveness. It is also a serious document that will inspire researchers to better understand the problem of human resources loyalty through internal marketing.

By adopting a holistic approach, this study provides an understanding of the complexity of exchanges between individuals, organisations and their environment, thus offering valuable knowledge to improve human resources management and promote organisational success.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this research is to identify the strategic approaches to internal marketing mobilised by the human resources department of Airtel Congo to retain its human potential. The first secondary objective is to clarify the concept of human resource retention. Following this reasoning, the second subsidiary objective is to understand internal marketing within companies. In a continuum alignment, the third objective aims to link internal marketing and the retention of human resources in a company.

The triptych constitutes the relevance of this research. From a marketing standpoint, this study makes it possible to better influence employee behaviour and understand their motivation and attitudes in an organisational context. In terms of human resources management, this research aims to bring HR loyalty and internal marketing into orbit and, above all, to make the link between them. From a corporate perspective, this research formalises elements capable of boosting managers' performance in the loyalty process.

To address this issue, we plan to structure our work in four parts. The first part focuses on the literature review. The second part is devoted to presenting the fieldwork. The third part deals with the research methodology. The fourth part presents the research results, followed by a discussion.

Literature Review

Anyone tackling a new topic for the first time is tempted to know its contours and determine its field of action. This reasoning leads us to clarify the key concepts that constitute the basis of our research work.

In this section, we clarify the concept of human resources loyalty in light of the theoretical debate on strategic human resources management. Next, we will address the problem of internal marketing. Finally, we will explain the link between internal marketing and the retention of human resources within companies in a racy style.

Human Resources Loyalty through Literature

In the literature, the concept of loyalty comes from the marketing field. According to Boussalem (2022), loyalty is the art of creating a lasting relationship with one's customers. It contributes to maintaining a strong bond and loyalty in corporate life. Thus, to grasp this notion in the context of human resources, several definitions have emerged in the literature (Paille, 2011). According to Peretti (1999), loyalty is the policy of maintaining employees' continuous efforts by avoiding any act likely to disrupt the functioning of one's organisation voluntarily. This retention policy is based on the organisational culture established by the top manager and accepted by all employees to ensure the company's long-term survival. To this end, each company implements norms, principles, and rules to ensure that employees live together harmoniously.

To this end, it is considered a set of management practices deployed by an organisation to establish and maintain a lasting relationship with its staff.

Human resources retention primarily aims to reduce staff turnover and improve employee commitment to the company. Turnover means moving staff in and out of an organisation at any time. Consequently, an employee's departure represents a financial loss for the company in terms of recruitment costs, training, and cash flow. Reducing staff turnover is, therefore, a key objective and a challenge for human resources retention. Against this backdrop, Chaminade (2003) argues that retention is a set of measures to reduce voluntary employee departures.

Over and above this primary objective, the company's ultimate goal is to improve the working climate and conditions to ensure that employees are properly involved and satisfied in the performance of their tasks. HR retention involves creating a favourable working environment that encourages employees to stay with the company, increasing their commitment, satisfaction, and motivation.

According to Abror et al. (2020), several elements can lead to employee loyalty in the workplace, such as employee commitment, job satisfaction, compensation, benefits or even effective internal communication strategies. With this in mind, Joung et al. (2015) find that job satisfaction and affective commitment have a significant impact on reducing turnover intentions. Involvement, on the other hand, describes employees' attitudes towards their company. In other words, how employees integrate into the group to contribute to the company's value in the expectation of a common goal.

In light of the above, human resources loyalty consists of retaining a company's employees over the long term, encouraging them to work according to the company's values, and creating the conditions for attachment to the intrinsic values of the company's positive brand (employee/company) in order to avoid the effect of turnover, whose departure generates costs for the company, and to contribute significantly to organisational sustainability. Here, *hic et nunc*, we address the issue of internal marketing within companies.

Internal Marketing for Competitive Companies

Just as traditional marketing aims to win over and satisfy the external customer by offering a quality product or service, internal marketing is a new technique described by Berry (1981). By this marketing neologism, the author means a process in which the employee functions as an internal customer who performs work that he describes as a product. With this new technique, companies understand that focusing on, motivating, and valuing employees is vital. The underlying argument is that the company must adopt a "market" orientation towards its employees, just as it does with its external customers. Only then will it be able to respond optimally to the needs of its human capital, a key factor in its performance and competitiveness? This implies that the employee becomes a market that the company must conquer. To achieve this, companies need to use marketing techniques to seek out the needs of their employees and try to satisfy them (Al-Hawary et al., 2013). This will enable them to play an essential role in achieving the company's objectives and vision.

According to Kanyurhi and Bugandwa Mungu Akonkwa (2016), internal marketing consists of the organisation's practices and efforts to train and motivate its employees to deliver service well. By investing in internal marketing, a company can create a positive work environment, foster employee engagement and strengthen its competitive position in the market. The company will gain a competitive advantage and a sustainable competitive position in its field. In the literature, we find abundant scientific contributions of internal marketing that agree that employees are considered internal customers and that it is essential to satisfy them to ensure the company's sustainability. Alshurideh et al. (2015) state that internal marketing is an approach that views employees as the organisation's most valuable asset. It contributes to satisfying the needs of internal customers and improves the organisation's position to offer services to increasingly demanding customers.

According to De Bruin-Reynolds et al. (2015), internal marketing is seen as a strategy and mechanism that establishes a set of organisational policies that view the organisation's staff as customers to be cared for and their needs diagnosed, thus providing them with a range of programs aimed at professional and career development. For authors Barzoki and Ghujali (2013), internal marketing applies a marketing approach to managing all interactive activities within the organisation to strengthen employees' customer orientation and create a more effective internal environment.

In the life of companies seeking competitiveness, because they operate in a highly turbulent environment, internal marketing appears as a sustainable management philosophy aimed at selling and promoting the company's values, visions, mission and objectives to its internal customers, using the application of marketing techniques and human resource management (HRM) principles to enhance the internal market in which employees benefit from their professional experience (Bohnenberger et al., 2019; Omogbehin, 2014). Following this, Bennett & Barkensjo (2005) argue that the term internal marketing describes a set of human resource management procedures and policies that treat employees as members of an internal market who need to be informed, trained, developed and motivated to serve customers more effectively. This vision seems more interesting to us because, from this definition, we can retain the techniques used in internal marketing: internal communication, training and motivation.

These arguments suggest several dimensions characterise the concept of internal marketing in the marketing literature. Existing empirical studies identify standard dimensions and marketing techniques developed within the framework of internal marketing. They explain that training, development, internal communication, employee motivation, orientation, customer satisfaction, cross-functional cooperation, coordination, integration and management support are all marketing techniques that are mobilised for human capital loyalty within companies (Al-Hawary et al., 2013; Gounaris, 2008; Huang and Rundle-Thiele, 2014; Shahzad and Naeem, 2013). These empirical studies also argue that adopting internal marketing through these techniques can positively impact employee job satisfaction. As a result, companies that invest more in their employees through specific practices (training, internal communication) have employees with higher levels of job satisfaction. These employees are more cooperative, helpful, and attentive to their colleagues and customers (Wilson & Frimpong, 2004).

All in all, internal marketing has become an indispensable tool in real-life human resources practices within companies. It motivates employees, improves performance, boosts productivity, consolidates fraternal bonds and builds long-term loyalty.

We now turn to the link between internal marketing and the retention of human resources within companies.

Internal Marketing and Customer Loyalty

The relationship between internal marketing and HR retention has been examined in numerous studies in various sectors, such as banking, hospitality, nursing, and other service industries. The results of such studies have shown that managers who integrate internal marketing practices into their organisation successfully sell the company internally and gain the commitment and loyalty of their employees. Similarly, Bastida et al. (2022) and Simwanza and Mabagala (2022) find that employees are more motivated and committed in organizations that engage in internal marketing activities using marketing and human resources management approaches, leading to better service for external customers. Thus, internal marketing appears as a way for marketing managers to integrate human resources issues into a marketing plan and to incorporate marketing practices into a human resources plan (Sanchez-Hernandez and Miranda, 2011).

Moreover, employee loyalty is easier to build when employees feel empowered and valued by the company. Internal marketing, focusing on employee development and engagement, creates the right conditions for better long-term employee retention. When employees feel empowered and valued through internal marketing initiatives, they are naturally more inclined to remain committed and loyal to the company.

Studies by Omar and Shehada (2015) and Ahmad and Sheeraz (2012) have demonstrated that if internal marketing is implemented in a company, employee loyalty can be positively impacted. Building on the same argument, Turkyilmaz et al. (2011) stipulate that internal marketing can lead to high employee loyalty. This suggests that companies that invest in a robust approach to internal

marketing can strengthen the attachment and loyalty of their staff over the long term. Internal marketing, therefore, appears to be a strategic lever for fostering employee retention.

In addition, internal marketing practices also reduce employee turnover. According to Poor et al. (2013), internal marketing practices avoid employee turnover, strengthen organisational commitment and improve financial results across the service-benefit chain. This underscores the critical benefits of internal marketing for companies, particularly regarding employee retention, organisational commitment and economic performance. This vision highlights the strategic role that internal marketing can play in the overall success of a resource department within an organisation. Among these internal marketing practices is, without a doubt, performance appraisal, which essentially aims to improve employee skills in the productivity of quality goods and services. In this respect, the work of authors Elenga et al. (2021) affirm the fundamental need to mobilise objective assessments within companies to bolster employees' performance. From this point of view, evaluation for performance becomes an internal marketing practice to boost employee productivity within companies. When carried out by established standards and principles, this evaluation can become one of the determining factors in building loyalty within companies. Supporting this reasoning in other ways, the work of DeNisi and Murphy (2017) stipulates that appraisals based on objective and fair criteria contribute significantly to improving skills and boosting employee confidence in the organisation. Through this method of providing employees with objective and accurate feedback, performance appraisals help identify employees' strengths and weaknesses and improve weak points to encourage them to focus on their personal development. In this sense, performance appraisal is an internal marketing strategy that leads to employee loyalty.

What's more, implementing internal marketing through training is linked to overall job satisfaction. When companies invest in skills development and pay particular attention to the ongoing training of their staff, they send out strong signals capable of enhancing the value of human capital and setting employees on a path to loyalty. In this way, integrating training into internal marketing practices is essential for improving overall employee satisfaction. This underlines the strategic importance of internal marketing in managing a company's human capital.

In short, building employee loyalty through internal marketing is essential to maintaining a qualified, motivated and committed human resource. It fosters productivity, customer satisfaction, corporate image and capacity for innovation. Sound internal marketing strategies can bring significant financial benefits and contribute to the company's long-term success.

Field Presentation: Airtel Congo, our Area of Operation

Airtel Congo was chosen to operationalise our scientific research. The choice of this company, which operates in the mobile telephony sector, can be explained by the fact that it has existed for over two decades and remains one of the leaders in the Congolese market. The company can be presented as follows:

Table 1*Presentation of Airtel Congo*

Sections	Elements
Creation	1998
Field of activity	Mobile telephony
Number of employees	90 employees
Positioning	Leader

Source: Authors' construct (2024).

Table 1 summarises the Airtel Congo company. It presents the variables that justify its choice to conduct a scientific study of human resources loyalty within a company. Indeed, in an environment undergoing profound change, characterised by risks and uncertainties of all kinds, Airtel Congo has weathered the competitive swells while offering its customers services whose perceived value is sustainably superior to that of the competition. To this end, we interviewed twenty (20) key players, divided into two samples. The first sample group is made up of eleven leading players presented in Table 2:

Table 2*Key Players*

First names of main actors	Position held	Professional experience	University level
Phina	Recruitment Manager	17 years old	Master
Fleur	Personnel administration manager	10 years	Master
Enstache	Accountant	8 years old	Master
Armel	Collections manager	16 years old	License
Nicolas	Customer client	12 years	Master
Jean Rock	Distribution Manager	19 years old	BTS
Nisa	Sales Manager	13 years old	License
Kyesse	Regulatory Manager	9 years old	Master
Thanks	Legal manager	17 years old	Master
Séraphin	Audit and Compliance Manager	15 years	License
Joël	Ritel Manager	16 years old	Master

Source: Authors' construct (2024).

Table 2 shows the eleven (11) key players we interviewed during our semi-structured interviews. They were selected based on two criteria: their position held and cumulative experience within Airtel Congo. The university level clearly explains that the company's managers have, on average, a bachelor's degree.

To these eleven (11) leading players, we have added nine (9) complementary players of team leaders and collaborators, for an overall total of twenty.

Materials and Methods

This section includes the following sections:

Research Approach

This is an exploratory qualitative study among employees of a cell phone company.

Resolutely qualitative, this research aims to better understand the phenomenon of human resource retention through internal marketing within a company (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The qualitative methodology is explained by the fact that we are following the logic of experimental ecology, where the research takes place in an unfamiliar environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Qualitative methodology is well-suited to this theme because we are taking an exploratory approach (Dumez, 2011; Nassè, 2018), and our research question begins with how. It has been shown that research questions that start with how often they move towards qualitative methodology (Yin, 2011).

Instrument and Data Collection Procedure

With this methodology in mind, we designed an interview guide comprising four (04) parts on company presentation, internal marketing, building HR loyalty through internal marketing and the link between internal marketing and building HR loyalty within a company. Qualitative data collection involved twenty semi-structured interviews with managers, team leaders and employees conducted at Airtel Congo's premises in April 2024. These interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour per interviewee. The choice of these actors is made by using purposeful sampling, which aligns with the research topic and aims to understand the retention of human resources within an organization through internal marketing.

Data Transcription, Data Coding and Data Analysis

Given our sample, we processed our qualitative data by hand, using thematic content analysis (Nassè et al., 2022). To this end, we first recorded our data using a tape recorder and then transcribed the discourse of each interviewee into our research notebook. This exercise enabled us to make a floating reading of each interview. We then carried out a conceptualised coding based on the themes of our interview guide. This coding also led us to a process of categorisation. Finally, we compared the results, enabling us to create a provisional grid. In practical terms, our data analysis can be presented in Table 3:

Table 3

Conceptualized Coding

Main categories	Subcategories	Final elements
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Internal marketing	Strategic process Membership in human resources Upgrading device Retention policy Organisational culture	Individualised actions to retain human potential
Human resources loyalty	Health and safety conditions Motivation mechanism Actions for better living together Employee development Conviviality	Shared values are at the heart of customer loyalty.
Internal marketing and human resources loyalty report	Customised facilities Step-by-step assessment Reducing departures Family spirit Employee commitment	Calibration as a specificity of allegiance.
Difficulties encountered	Need for recognition Speed in problem-solving Work intensity Variety of motivations Lack of consensus on loyalty initiatives	Motivation is based on employee performance.

Source: Authors' construct (2024).

Ethical Considerations

The researchers collected the data by requesting the respondents' consent. The respondents' identities are kept confidential, and the collected data is used for the purpose of this research only (Nassè, 2021).

Results

This part of the research presents the results obtained through fieldwork and thematic content analysis.

Individual Actions to Retain Human Potential

Our fieldwork and qualitative data processing have given rise to the idea that building human resources loyalty through internal marketing requires individualised actions. Setting up an internal customer satisfaction process, also known as human resources, consists of implementing individualised actions for each employee, considering their idiosyncrasy, ability to produce services on time, and ability to make services efficiently as an individual consciousness. There's no question of implementing a neutral motivation policy aimed at satisfying the hot, the lukewarm and the cold in the same way. Each employee is individually motivated to stimulate their desire and productivity further, thereby contributing to the long-term future of Airtel Congo, which operates in a highly competitive environment. This is how, within this mobile telephony company, we are building the furrows that lead, with flexibility and agility, towards taking into account the individual needs of each

employee to satisfy them even more. Actor Nisa rightly asserts, *"Solving individual problems allows agents to excel, feel secure and stay instead of going elsewhere"*.

In its applicability, the marketing policy oriented towards individual actions has been punctuated and consolidated by contributions from the human resources department, whose aim is to treat Airtel Congo's human potential like the customers who buy the company's products. With this in mind, participant Jean Rock maintains,

"We have more than 15% of agents who have been with Airtel Congo for more than ten years. This results from an individual approach we put in place for our agents regarding a professional or family situation."

Shared Values at the Heart of Customer Loyalty

In today's changing markets, underpinned by competitive trench warfare, Airtel Congo has made shared values a singular feature of human resources loyalty. Therefore, many values are promoted to support the spirit of familiarity and consolidate the dominant position of better living together within the company. With this in mind, Airtel Congo has set up conviviality areas, a platform for exchanges between agents, rest areas on company premises and a gratitude wall. While the social spaces enable employees to share happy moments, such as birthdays, the birth of a child or the wedding celebration, the wall of gratitude is unique to Airtel Congo. This wall is a form of encouragement box where each agent can write the sweet phrase of the day to motivate a colleague, congratulate an agent in writing for having achieved their objective, or say thank you for an act that has been done. It is the perfect place to recognise work accomplished and motivate agents to consider Airtel Congo as a life within a life.

In this respect, Nicolas confirms that

"Airtel Congo provides its agents with what they need for their development. This enables them to observe the principles of shared values factually. It can be a message of commitment or a word of recognition for work appreciated by the hierarchy."

Participant Armel supports this concept by admitting,

"I was very moved to see my name on the gratitude wall on my birthday, even though I had already received a happy birthday message on the exchange platform from the human resources department. It is very touching and endearing."

Calibration as a Specific Feature of Loyalty

Calibration is not only a value-creating force, a lever for consolidating cooperation between management and employees, but also a determining factor in the loyalty of Airtel Congo's agents. Far from being an obstacle, calibration remains a mode of governance that builds loyalty among the company's employees. It consists of assessing employees in stages at the end of the year to minimise corporatist uncertainties, combating subjective assessments, fighting individual score-settling and

reinforcing an objective assessment based on objective criteria set beforehand at the beginning of the year. This reasoning is strongly supported by the following comments:

"Employee satisfaction, which leads to employee loyalty, is based on calibration. We evaluate our employees in stages. Their line manager does the first. The immediate manager does the second. Finally, the third is done by the college of managers gathered together, who check whether the appraisal corresponds to the production of services by the appraised agent" (Fleur).

This type of step-by-step appraisal carried out at Airtel Congo is thoroughly contextualised, year by year. Then, it reveals its considerable impact, which aims to retain human resources within Airtel Congo. Calibration plays a decisive role in the decision-making process of agents looking to leave and prompts employees to think long and hard about the benefits it brings to all staff, without exception. Our fieldwork shows that calibration positively affects agent retention at Airtel Congo. It shows how, at the antipodes of departure and loyalty, human resources opt for an assumed loyalty, objective assurance and genuine loyalty that leads to altitude sanctioned by promotions within the company. As Kyesse rightly points out:

"Our internal marketing strategy for building loyalty in human resources involves calibration. As an individual, when I know that I've achieved my objectives, even if I know that things aren't going well with my line manager, I know that he can't hinder my career progression. That's not how it works in every company in the Congo."

Motivation Based on Employee Performance

Motivation based on employee performance plays a vital role in internal marketing strategies aimed at building human capital loyalty at Airtel Congo. Detailed, well-founded studies carried out among those working in the field at the Airtel Congo mobile telephony company highlight with increasing precision the role of individual performance in motivating human resources. The exercise consists of moving beyond the stage of collective capacity towards collective competence, which essentially aims to reward each employee by taking account of their output. Employees who produce quality goods and services on time are encouraged and motivated individually, thanks to the motivational devices in the company's habits and customs. This personal motivation, the fruit of tireless, painstaking effort on the employee's part, guarantees stability, security and loyalty for those who subscribe to the logic of individual employee performance. As tasks within the company are carried out by human resources, clientelism, nepotism, and tribalism dissipate in favour of merit. In this way, the best are congratulated, and the less good are encouraged by the experiences of others, creating a form of fair competition authorised by the hierarchy to position the company in a different way in the closed concert of leaders in its field of activity. Airtel Congo's quest for legitimacy, recognition, and desire to position itself in the hierarchical chessboard are underpinned and driven by performance motivation. It's a unique strategy that has a remarkable effect on the lives of the company's employees. Without overshadowing the other strategic approaches mobilised by internal marketing, the option of motivation through individual employee performance is obvious.

"I prefer to stay with Airtel Congo because my existence within this company depends solely on my intellectual abilities. I came here on my own and met people from different backgrounds, but if I am still here, it's because I'm committed to performance."

In the same vein, actor Philippe maintains that

"here, what counts is the performance of each employee. We strive to be true to ourselves by respecting performance motivation because it takes us away from subjectivity."

Discussion

After processing the qualitative data made available to us, four results were identified: individual actions to retain human potential, shared values at the heart of retention, calibration as a specific feature of retention, and motivation based on employee performance. These results differ from other scholars' findings in the same context. For instance, Moloumba Mokango and Nassè (2024) discovered that businesses should design internal systems to improve organisational sustainability and anticipate difficulties.

Concerning individual actions to build customer loyalty through internal marketing, it is relevant to say that internal marketing involves personalised actions. This is because Airtel Congo has implemented processes to address staff concerns, considering each employee's temperament, strengths and weaknesses. This view is strongly supported by the work of Bennett & Barkensjo (2005), who argue that internal marketing describes a set of policies to build customer loyalty through specific, targeted actions. Thus, in a constantly changing environment, Airtel Congo's managers build loyalty among their employees through particular training, special incentives and unique support. The result of this loyalty is the deprogramming and reprogramming of employees' mental software to value their individual needs and significantly impact meeting the needs of external customers. At Airtel Congo, training is offered on an à la carte basis; the particular output of each employee strongly supports motivation and personalised coaching is provided to help them achieve their objectives.

Our results also show that human resources loyalty at Airtel Congo is based on shared values. This reasoning is explained by the fact that this company uses human mechanisms to limit staff turnover. In this respect, shared values are key in limiting departures and building employee loyalty. This argument is supported by the publications of Peretti (1999), who argues vehemently that the loyalty policy is a means of maintaining employees' efforts. Indeed, this policy, which has its roots in the company's organisational culture, reduces acts likely to disrupt employee well-being. It limits early departures and, de facto, builds loyalty among employees, who see Airtel as a haven of professional peace and tranquillity where individual talents can express themselves with complete peace of mind. In practice, this policy of shared values is characterised by a spirit of familiarity, convivial spaces, platforms for exchange and a wall of gratitude. Through these practices, Airtel Congo is becoming a pioneer in a crocodile environment where differentiation remains a key success factor for organisational sustainability. As a logical consequence of our data processing, it is clear that employee loyalty through internal marketing at Airtel Congo finds its true expression in

calibration. Indeed, calibration as a specificity of loyalty plays a crucial role in the objective retention of internal customers at Airtel Congo. This is because it contributes to individual performance, reinforces employee commitment and helps limit turnover, which can destabilise organisational functioning. This idea is also supported by Elenga et al. (2021), who believe that a step-by-step employee appraisal, with different levels of management, builds employees' confidence, strengthens their commitment, consolidates their determination and creates the conditions for genuine loyalty. Going in the same direction, authors DeNisi and Murphy (2017) argue that individual performance appraisal is a decisive act of internal customer loyalty when done objectively and in stages to reassure employees better, stimulate their desire to stay with the company and thus contribute to organisational sustainability. At Airtel Congo, performance appraisals are carried out in several stages. The immediate line manager carries out the first. The senior manager conducts the second, and the college of managers conducts the third. This calibration aims to reduce uncertainty regarding appraisal, reassure employees, and ultimately build loyalty through a traditional approach based on objectivity.

Conclusion

Our article focused on the retention of human resources through internal marketing in a cell phone company: the case of Airtel Congo. This article aimed to identify the traditional links between strategic approaches to internal marketing and the retention of human resources within a cell phone company. To clarify this link, a qualitative methodology was used, and semi-directive interviews were conducted with a target population of twenty field players working for Airtel Congo.

After processing the data using thematic content analysis and conceptualised coding, it becomes clear that the link between human resources loyalty and internal marketing involves individualised actions, shared values, calibration and performance motivation. These elements link the two concepts, namely loyalty and internal marketing. These results expressed in the literature and confirmed in the field, within the framework of the abductive method, rightly prove the interest of this scientific research, which will undeniably contribute to strengthening the literature on strategic human resources management in the Congo. This is a relevant study whose added value is the radical change in company human resources management. In a spirit of continuity, this research will bolster internal marketing strategies within companies to increase the loyalty of human capital, which is becoming just as demanding as external customers.

Managerial Implications: Marketing managers in the Republic of Congo should consider the nation's organisational culture when making management and strategic choices.

Theoretical implications: Because of cultural differences, management theories from Western countries should be adapted to the African context (Nassè, 2019), particularly in the Republic of Congo.

Limitations and Future Perspectives

Our article was operationalised within Airtel Congo, a cell phone company in the Republic of Congo. As such, our present findings cannot be generalised. It is a position for which we refuse to assume all responsibility. With this in mind, we would very much like to see certain studies carried out in southern and northern countries to support the results of our research.

This research used a qualitative approach to address the topic in the Republic of Congo. Thus, the researchers could conduct confirmatory quantitative research within the same context to determine whether the results are the same. This research has been undertaken only in the Republic of Congo. It can be extended to other African contexts to compare the present results with those obtained in these contexts.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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