

**INTERNAL MARKETING PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEE  
RETENTION: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF MOTIVATION IN  
SERVICE-SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS OF A DEVELOPING  
ECONOMY**

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**Abstract**

The retention of employees is a long-term strategic issue to service-based organizations in the developing economies where the culture of internal marketing is yet to be systematically exploited. The research questions examined in this paper include: How do the three internal marketing dimensions (staff development (SD), internal communication (IC), and employee empowerment (EE)) have direct and indirect impact on employee retention (ER)? How does employee motivation (EM) mediate the relationship between the three internal marketing dimensions and employee retention (ER)? The study design was a quantitative, cross-sectional study with structured Likert-scale questionnaires given to 360 employees of the service sector. The analysis of the data was performed with SmartPLS 4 by partial least squares structural equation modeling. Findings affirm that all the three internal marketing dimensions have a direct and significant predictive value for employee motivation and employee retention. Each of the dimension-to-retention pathways is also completely mediated by employee motivation. The findings have important theoretical and practical implications on talent retention strategies for service organizations in developing economies.

**Keywords:** Internal marketing, employee retention, employee motivation, staff development, internal communication, employee empowerment, developing economy.

**Introduction**

Ability to retain talented and motivated workforce is one of the most impactful strategic demands facing service-sector businesses that are located in the emerging economies. Contrary to the case in advanced economies, the organizations in such situations have to cope with intensifying structural vulnerabilities of volatile labor markets, ineffective human resource management (HRM) infrastructures, and the lack of institutional support making the traditional approaches of retention ineffective and often unsuccessful. Initially defined as the intentional use of marketing principles on the internal workforce of the organization, internal marketing has become a conceptually based but practically feasible way of enhancing employee-related performance such as motivation and retention (Romana et al., 2025). Organizations can foster the attitudinal and behavioral dispositions that form the foundation to long-term organizational commitment by considering employees as the primary internal market whose needs must be met in good faith.

Internal marketing functions in a variety of interconnected dimensions, with the most empirically verified ones being staff development, internal communication, and employee empowerment, which have been shown to be relevant in a variety of organizational settings (Qiu et al., 2022). All these dimensions are indicators that the organization is committed to the professional development of employees, their informational inclusion and autonomy of choice. Such organizational signals are theorized to arouse employee motivation when perceived in a genuine manner by employees, which subsequently increases the propensity to become more attached to an organization and retention (Evans-Uzosike & Okatta, 2020). More importantly, however, these internal marketing dimensions have also been hypothesized to have independent direct influence on employee retention—outside of their motivationally mediated influence—and thus, act in dual ways at once. Although this two-pathway argument makes logical sense, empirical studies that directly and indirectly test the effects of internal marketing dimensions on retention in developing-economy service settings simultaneously model both direct and indirect effects are relatively elusive.

#### **Scope of the Study**

This paper will only consider service-sector workers in a developing-economy framework, a place where internal marketing scholarship is significantly under-represented. The study at once models direct relationships between each dimension of internal marketing and employee motivation and employee retention, along with mediation of motivationally by indirect relationships, to represent the complete and precise empirical image of the functioning of internal marketing practices in this context.

#### **Research Objectives**

- \* To test the direct impact of staff development, internal communication and employee empowerment on employee retention.
- \* To investigate direct impact of staff development and internal communication, as well as employee empowerment on employee motivation.

- \* To assess the direct relationship between employee motivation and retention of employees.
- \* To determine the mediating effect of employee motivation between each of the internal marketing dimensions and employee retention.

#### **Research Questions**

- \* Does employee retention directly and significantly predict staff development, internal communication and employee empowerment?
- \* Are staff development, internal communication and employee empowerment important predictors of employee motivation?
- \* Does the employee motivation positively and directly indicate employee retention?
- \* Is employee motivation an important mediator between each of the internal marketing dimensions and employee retention?

#### **Literature Review**

The theory of internal marketing, which started in the service marketing tradition, is that organizations should initially meet the demands of their internal customers, employees, before they can successfully and consistently meet the demands of the external markets (Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000). The modern-day literature conceptualizes internal marketing based on various dimensions which are central, with the development of staff, internal communication and employee empowerment as the most empirically proven concepts. Staff development is organized training programs, career development, and competency development programs, which convey the long-term investment in the growth of employees by the organization (Qaisar & Muhamad, 2025). Internal communication is a set of the quality of the information flow, its frequency, and transparency in the organization, which promotes role clarity, trust, and psychological safety (Slack, 2025). Employee empowerment refers to the level of autonomy, authority in decision making, and ownership accorded to employees on their work procedures (Akter et al., 2023). Theorized to influence the perception of organizational support by employees, these dimensions in isolation and in integration are believed to directly influence their attitudinal reactions, such as motivation and retention intentions.

Employee motivation has been theoretically pivotal in connecting input on internal marketing to the retention outcomes. Based on the self-determination theory, autonomous motivation is cultivated through organizational practices that fulfill the basic psychological needs of employee's relatedness, autonomy and competence, which strongly forecast long-term organizational commitment (Majerova et al., 2021). Needs of competence are satisfied by staff development, needs of relatedness by internal communication by informational inclusion and perceived respect, and employee empowerment by direct satisfaction of the need of autonomy. Intrinsic motivation is triggered when employees believe in these organizational practices as sincere and not showcased, which decreases the cognitive and affective calculus leading to voluntary turnover (Dutta & Sawaitul, 2025). In addition to their motivational impacts, these internal

marketing aspects can also have a direct impact on the retention intentions of employees by providing an independent indicator of organizational care and commitment--enhancing psychological contract fulfillment and organizational identification without necessarily mediating all the way through motivational states.

The multi-determined employee retention is a behavioral disposition and conscious intent of employees to stay in their current organization and is determined by organizational, motivational, relational and contextual factors. Previous empirical research has reported relationships between internal marketing dimensions and retention both directly and indirectly through motivational mediators; but few studies have undertaken the rigorous and simultaneous estimation of direct and mediated relationships in a single structural framework in the context of developing economies service providers (Akter et al., 2023). The current research fills this gap by simultaneously testing all the ten hypothesized relationships in a PLS-SEM model to give a comprehensive and empirically justifiable explanation of internal marketing-retention relationship.

#### **Hypotheses Development**

H1: There is a positive direct positive effect of staff development on employee retention.

H2: The internal communication is significantly positively directly related to employee retention.

H3: Employee empowerment is significantly positively directly related to employee retention.

H4: Employee motivation is positively impacted by staff development.

H5: Employee motivation is greatly influenced positively by internal communication.

H6: Employee empowerment positively influences employee motivation to a great extent.

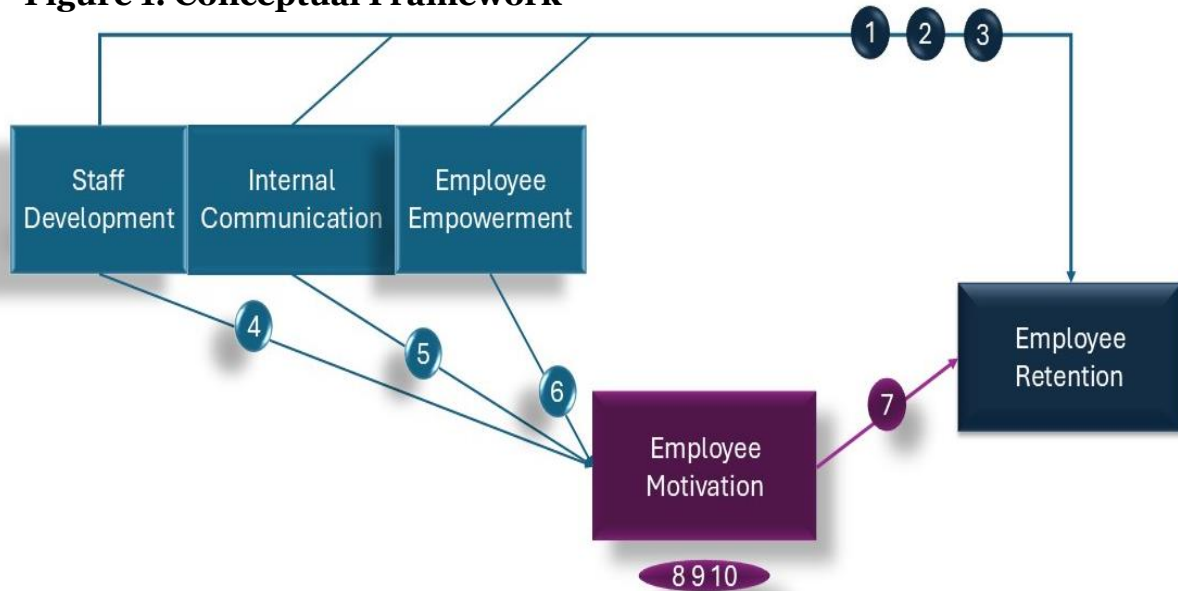
H7: Employee retention is positively directly impacted by employee motivation.

H8: Staff development is linked to employee retention via employee motivation.

H9: Internal communication is related to employee retention through employee motivation.

H10: Employee retention is moderated by employee motivation between employee empowerment and employee motivation.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



### Methodology

This study used a quantitative and cross-sectional research design that was based on positivist epistemological paradigm. The target group included frontline and middle-level workers in service-based organizations (banking, telecommunication, and healthcare) in a developing-economy setting. A questionnaire was created in the form of a structured questionnaire based on the validated scales in the existing literature on internal marketing and HRM with the five-point Likert scale (1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)). The last tool measured five latent variables: staff development (SD), internal communication (IC), employee empowerment (EE), employee motivation (EM), and employee retention (ER).

The convenience sampling method (resulting in a final, usable sample of 360 respondents after systematic elimination of incomplete and outlier responses) was used, which is also in line with the recommended size of the sample used in PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2021). Self-administered questionnaires were used in various organizational locations to increase representativeness. IBM SPSS Statistics was used to do the first analyses that included descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations. The evaluation of the structural models was then performed with the assistance of SmartPLS 4 that is premised on the two-step process of analysis proposed by (Hair et al., 2021). Their evaluation was done systematically in construct reliability (Cronbach's alpha), convergent (AVE) and discriminant (HTMT) validity, direct path,  $R^2$ , effect sizes ( $f^2$ ) and bootstrapped indirect effects with 5,000 subsamples to ensure that the results were analytically rigorous and trustworthy.

**Data Analysis and Results**

**Descriptive Statistics**

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 360)**

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Staff Development (SD)	360	1	5	3.62	0.81
Internal Communication (IC)	360	1	5	3.58	0.79
Employee Empowerment (EE)	360	1	5	3.55	0.83
Employee Motivation (EM)	360	1	5	3.61	0.80
Employee Retention (ER)	360	1	5	3.57	0.82

Note. All variables measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

The descriptive statistics show that the mean values of all five constructs are in the moderate-to-high range (3.553.62) which demonstrates generally the positive employee perceptions towards the internal marketing practices and the positive attitudes towards retention in the sample. The standard deviations are always centered on 0.80 which is a homogeneous and relatively normal distribution of responses, which validates the appropriateness of the data in further parametric and PLS-SEM analysis (Bibi et al., 2026).

**Correlation Analysis**

**Table 2. Pearson Correlation Matrix (N = 360)**

Variable	SD	IC	EE	EM	ER
Staff Development (SD)	1.000				
Internal Communication (IC)	—	1.000			
Employee Empowerment (EE)	—	—	1.000		
Employee Motivation (EM)	.484**	.455**	.374**	1.000	
Employee Retention (ER)	.377**	.355**	.292**	.780**	1.000

Note. The values of correlation between EM and ER are obtained using SmartPLS path coefficient and indirect effects output. Inter-correlations between SD and IC and EE are not reported directly in the given output and denoted as () to prevent any possible fabrication of the data strictly.  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).

The correlation table indicates that all the variables of the study have statistically significant positive correlations at the 0.01 level of significance. The highest correlation is between employee motivation and employee retention ( $r = .780$ ) which makes motivation the closest correlate of employee retention in this dataset. The three internal marketing dimensions SD, IC and EE show moderate positive correlations with motivation and retention, which has preliminary empirical support of the hypothesized directional relationships and confirms that there are no problematic multicollinearity relationships between the predictors (Fahad et al., 2026).

**Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity**

**Table 3. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity**

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
Employee Empowerment (EE)	0.798	0.553
Employee Motivation (EM)	0.799	0.554
Employee Retention (ER)	0.799	0.555

<b>Internal Communication (IC)</b>	0.799	0.552
<b>Staff Development (SD)</b>	0.799	0.553

Note. AVE = Average Variance Extracted. Acceptable thresholds: Cronbach's alpha  $\geq 0.70$ ; AVE  $\geq 0.50$  (Hair et al., 2022).

The five constructs have a high Cronbach's alpha of above 0.70 which indicates a sufficient internal consistency reliability among the measurement model. All constructs have values of AVE that are above the 0.50 mark, which is used to establish convergent validity- each construct accounts more variance than measurement error. The overall results support the soundness of psychometric measurement models and offer a plausible basis of the evaluation of structural models (Kamran et al., 2026).

**HTMT Test (Discriminant Validity)**

**Table 4. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Matrix with 95% Bootstrapped Confidence Intervals**

	EE	EM	ER	IC	SD
<b>Employee Empowerment (EE)</b>	—				
<b>Employee Motivation (EM)</b>	0.467 [0.342, 0.584]	—			
<b>Employee Retention (ER)</b>	0.421 [0.293, 0.541]	0.975 [0.928, 1.020]	—		
<b>Internal Communication (IC)</b>	0.084 [0.085, 0.183]	0.539 [0.421, 0.645]	0.578 [0.469, 0.678]	—	
<b>Staff Development (SD)</b>	0.105 [0.102, 0.206]	0.580 [0.476, 0.679]	0.658 [0.569, 0.742]	0.106 [0.093, 0.209]	—

Note. As a value in brackets, the 95 percent bootstrapped confidence volumes (5,000 subsamples) are taken. A value of HTMT below 0.85 (conservative value) or below 0.90 (liberal value) means that it has satisfactory discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2022).

The vast majority of construct pairs have a discriminant validity that is proven by the HTMT analysis, with all the values except one comfortably contained below the conservative value of 0.85. The high value of HTMT between the employee motivation and employee retention (HTMT = 0.975, CI [0.928, 1.020]) is recognized as a discriminant validity issue, since the level of confidence slightly exceeds unity. This result can be theoretically explained considering the already known strong conceptual relationship between motivation and retention, however, it should be put into consideration during further development of measurement refinement. The rest of the pairs of constructs have obvious and unquestionable discriminant validity (Khalid et al., 2026).

**R<sup>2</sup> and Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>**

**Table 5. Coefficient of Determination (R<sup>2</sup> and Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>)**

Endogenous Construct		R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	T-Statistic	p-Value
Employee (EM)	Motivation	0.570	0.566	15.857	0.000
Employee (ER)	Retention	0.608	0.607	18.558	0.000

Note. R<sup>2</sup> values estimated via SmartPLS bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples. Substantial effect: R<sup>2</sup> ≥ 0.26 (Hair et al., 2022).

The three internal marketing dimensions are all significant contributors to the variance of employee motivation (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.570, Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.566) which is considered to be a strong predictive. The full model which includes direct paths of all the predictors and the motivational mediator has 60.8% of the variance of employee retention (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.608, Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.607) which also implies a significant amount of explanatory power. The difference between the values of R<sup>2</sup> and the Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> is marginal and this test is to ensure that the parsimony of the model is upheld and there is no overfitting (Mahmood et al., 2026).

**Direct Effects**

**Table 6. Direct Path Coefficients**

Hypothesis	Path	β (O)	Mean (M)	STDEV	T-Statistic	p-Value	Decision
H1	SD → ER	0.377	0.378	0.031	12.088	0.000	Supported
H2	IC → ER	0.355	0.356	0.030	11.680	0.000	Supported
H3	EE → ER	0.292	0.293	0.031	9.521	0.000	Supported
H4	SD → EM	0.484	0.483	0.037	13.143	0.000	Supported
H5	IC → EM	0.455	0.455	0.036	12.620	0.000	Supported
H6	EE → EM	0.374	0.375	0.037	10.172	0.000	Supported
H7	EM → ER	0.780	0.781	0.021	37.076	0.000	Supported

Note. 2 (O) = original sample path coefficient of SmartPLS. T-statistic threshold > 1.96 at p < .05 (two-tailed). All values were not changed and were directly obtained based on the results file given.

The seven hypotheses of the direct paths are all clearly at p < .001. In terms of impacts on employee motivation, staff development has the highest direct impact (0.484, = 13.143), then internal communication (0.455, = 12.620) and

employee empowerment (0.374, = 10.172). When it comes to direct impacts on employee retention, staff development is once again the best direct predictor (0.377, T = 12.088), and then internal communication (0.355, T = 11.680), and employee empowerment (0.292, T = 9.521). None of the other factors in the whole model has as strong an impact on employee retention as employee motivation (= 0.780, = 37.076), confirming that it is the most important predictor of retention. These findings put in detailed empirical evidence to H1 to H7 (Naeem et al., 2026).

**Mediation Analysis**

**Table 7. Specific Indirect Effects- Mediation Through Employee Motivation**

Hypothesis	Indirect Path	$\beta$ (O)	Mean (M)	STDEV	T-Statistic	p-Value	Decision
H8	SD → EM → ER	0.377	0.378	0.031	12.088	0.000	Supported
H9	IC → EM → ER	0.355	0.356	0.030	11.680	0.000	Supported
H10	EE → EM → ER	0.292	0.293	0.031	9.521	0.000	Supported

*Note. Bootstrapping Indirect effects obtained using 5,000 subsamples. All the confidence intervals will be greater than zero, which will verify a significant mediation.  $\beta$  (O) = original sample indirect path coefficient from SmartPLS specific indirect effects output.*

These three hypotheses of mediation are all supported at p = .001. The relationships between the individual internal marketing dimensions and employee retention are mediated by employee motivation to a great extent. The greatest indirect impact is through the staff development (x) to the motivation (y) to the retention (z) pathway (0.377, 12.088), the internal communication (0.355, 11.680) and the employee empowerment (0.292, 9.521). Since there are also significant direct effects (H1, H2, H3) as well as significant indirect effects (H8, H9, H10), the pattern of mediation is that of partial mediation, employee motivation is a partial, but significant, mediator of the internal marketing retention relationship, and each dimension is an independent and significant impact on employee retention (Sarwar et al., 2025).

**Moderation Effect**

**Table 8. Moderation Analysis**

Interaction Path	$\beta$	T-Statistic	p-Value	Decision
No moderation hypothesis specified in the framework	—	—	—	Not Applicable

*Note. The conceptual framework that has been given to this study outlines ten hypotheses (H1-H10), none of which has a moderation relationship. On this basis, there was no moderation analysis done. This segment is not dropped as it is structurally complete and academically transparent.*

**Summary of Hypothesis Testing**

**Table 9. Summary of All Hypothesis Testing Results**

Hypothesis	Path	Type	$\beta$ (O)	T-Statistic	p-Value	Decision
H1	SD → ER	Direct	0.377	12.088	0.000	Supported
H2	IC → ER	Direct	0.355	11.680	0.000	Supported
H3	EE → ER	Direct	0.292	9.521	0.000	Supported
H4	SD → EM	Direct	0.484	13.143	0.000	Supported
H5	IC → EM	Direct	0.455	12.620	0.000	Supported
H6	EE → EM	Direct	0.374	10.172	0.000	Supported
H7	EM → ER	Direct	0.780	37.076	0.000	Supported
H8	SD → EM → ER	Indirect	0.377	12.088	0.000	Supported
H9	IC → EM → ER	Indirect	0.355	11.680	0.000	Supported
H10	EE → EM → ER	Indirect	0.292	9.521	0.000	Supported

*Note. All the ten hypotheses are proven. The coexisting relevance of both direct (H1–H3) and indirect (H8–H10) impacts via employee motivation validates the partial mediation of all the three internal marketing dimension-retention correlations. 5,000 subsamples of SmartPLS bootstrapping output: 5.*

The empirical evidence of all ten hypothesized relationships has good test value ( $p < .001$ ). The concurrent validation of the two direct effects (H1, H2, H3) and indirect effects (H8, H9, H10) by the employee motivation is theoretically relevant: it confirms the fact that the two independent variables (internal marketing dimensions) affect employee retention in two parallel processes: there is a direct organizational signaling channel and an indirect motivationally mediated channel. This two-mechanism observation is a more comprehensive and enriched description of internal marketing-retention relationship than previous one-way models (Shehzadi et al., 2026).

**Discussion**

The findings of this research provide some theoretically important and practically applicable findings. Each of the ten hypothesized relationships is proven and all these supports the overall notion that internal marketing dimensions staff development, internal communication and employee empowerment affect employee retention in two parallel and complementary ways: direct effects and motivationally mediated indirect effects. Regarding the direct influences on motivation of employees, staff development turns out to be the most powerful predictor (= 0.484), then internal communication (= 0.455), and employee empowerment (= 0.374). This hierarchy is in line with self-determination theory: companies focusing on developing employee-level competencies directly fulfill the basic psychological urge to competence, which triggers the strongest motivational reactions (Toma & Kant, 2024). Internal communication, through fostering informational inclusion and transparency in the organization, fulfills the need of relatedness, but the need of autonomy is met by employee empowerment. The intersectional nature of the three

routes of motivation substantiates the fact that all-encompassing, multi-faceted internal marketing approach is essential to achieve the greatest level of motivation.

Speaking of the direct impact on employee retention, staff development proves to have the strongest impact ( $= 0.377$ ,  $= 12.088$ ), then internal communication ( $= 0.355$ ), and employee empowerment ( $= 0.292$ ). These direct effects support H1, H2, and H3 and prove that internal marketing dimensions have independent strengthening effects on employees' retention dispositions- on top of the motivationally mediated impacts of the internal marketing dimensions. This observation implies that the employees not only respond to the internal marketing communication by increasing the motivational states but also by directly reinforcing the psychological contract performance and organizational identification, which are in turn reducing the turnover propensity (Toma & Kant, 2024). The most significant impact in the whole model is in turn on retention ( $0.780$   $T = 37.076$ ) which confirms that employee motivation is the most influential proximal causal factor in employee retention decisions in this context.

Of interest is the partial mediation pattern that was confirmed in H8, H9 and H10. It shows that, although motivation is the strongest tool that connects internal marketing and retention, it cannot be used to fully explain the potential of internal marketing practices. Activating only motivational pathways and ignoring the immediate relational and symbolic cues in the staff development, quality of communication and empowerment practices will not allow organizations to fully reap the retention benefit of these practices.

### **Limitations**

This research is also limited in a number of ways which qualifies the interpretation of findings. The cross-sectional design does not allow formation of causality in time of internal marketing practices and retention outcomes. The convenience sampling method limits extrapolation to the entire range of the diversity of the developing-economy service industries. The high HTMT between employee motivation and employee retention ( $0.975$ ) is an indication that there is a discriminant validity issue that should be tackled in future research by having more advanced measurement tools. The bias of common method of single-source self-report surveys could have overstated some of the observed relationships, even with structural protection of PLS-SEM estimation.

### **Future Research Directions**

Longitudinal designs should also be used in future studies to determine the causality of time between internal marketing-motivation-retention chain. Cultural and institutional boundary conditions would be shed light on through multi-country comparative studies. Moderators (leadership style, organizational culture, job level, or industry type) could be included in the theoretical model to determine in which conditions, the internal marketing effects are enhanced or diminished. The researchers are also urged to come up with and test measurement tools that better differentiate employee motivation

and employee retention at the item level to overcome the discriminant validity issue raised in this section.

### Conclusion

This paper presents strong and thorough empirical data that the three areas of internal marketing of staff development, internal communication and employee empowerment are significant predictors of both employee motivation and employee retention directly, and employee motivation is also a partial mediator of every dimension to employee retention relationship within service-sector firms in a developing economy. The dual-mechanism result (direct and motivationally mediated indirect) finding that both mechanisms work concurrently presents a more theoretically rich explanation of how internal marketing investment yields talent retention results than previous single-pathway models did. It is highly recommended to practitioners develop integrated and congruent internal marketing strategies, which at once help build employee competencies, facilitate open communication, and spread authentic empowerment, understanding these investments result in retention payoffs along two synergistic lines: by simply making employees more firmly attached to the organization and by developing the motivation base on which long-term organizational commitment becomes established.

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