

Exploring the Importance of Human Resources Marketing in the Context of Digital transformation. A Case Study in the Public Administration

Exploration de l'Importance du Marketing des Ressources Humaines dans le Contexte de la Transformation Digitale. Une Étude de Cas dans l'Administration Publique

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to explore the importance and role of human resources marketing in the successful digital transformation process of public organizations in Morocco. Current human resources management models, particularly in the context of digital transformation, consider the experience and satisfaction of human capital as an important criterion for excellence and value creation, hence the growing interest of organizations in HR marketing practices. In HR marketing, employer branding is one of the most important issues, as it affects employer identity and has an impact both internally with employees and externally. This exploratory study is based on a literature review highlighting the links between HR marketing and the digital transformation process, particularly in the context of public administration, as well as a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews with sixteen managers and subordinates from two pilot public departments in Morocco in the field of administrative modernization and organizational change implementation. Semi-structured interviews focus on HR marketing adoption, digital HR management implementation, employee engagement and employer branding in the age of digital transformation. The results are analyzed using thematic analysis with NVIVO content analysis software. The main conclusions are as follows: it is through the implementation of a change management and HR marketing policy, including in particular the enhancement of the employer brand, that digital transformation will be able to impact the HR function and lead to an evolution in strategic HR positioning, customer value creation and agile leadership.

Keywords: Human Resources marketing; Digital Transformation; Human Resources Management; Employer's Branding; Public Administration.

Résumé

L'objectif de cette étude est d'explorer l'importance et le rôle du marketing des ressources humaines dans la réussite du processus de transformation digitale des organisations publiques au Maroc. Les modèles actuels de gestion des ressources humaines, en particulier dans le contexte de la transformation digitale, considèrent l'expérience et la satisfaction du capital humain comme un critère important d'excellence et de création de valeur, d'où l'intérêt croissant des organisations pour les pratiques de marketing RH. Dans le domaine de marketing RH, la marque-employeur est l'une des problématiques les plus importantes, car elle affecte l'identité de l'employeur et a un impact à la fois en interne avec les collaborateurs qu'en externe. Cette étude exploratoire repose sur une revue de littérature qui met en lumière les liens entre le marketing RH et le processus de transformation digitale, notamment dans le contexte de l'administration publique ainsi qu'une étude qualitative qui s'appuie sur des entretiens semi-structurés avec seize managers et subordonnés de deux départements publics pilotes au Maroc dans le domaine de la modernisation de l'administration et de la mise en œuvre du changement organisationnel. Les entretiens semi-structurés portent sur l'adoption du marketing RH, la mise en œuvre de la gestion digitale des ressources humaines, l'engagement des employés et l'image de marque de l'employeur à l'ère de la transformation digitale. Les résultats sont analysés à l'aide d'une analyse thématique avec le logiciel d'analyse de contenu NVIVO. Les principales conclusions sont les suivantes : c'est par la mise en œuvre d'une politique de gestion du changement et de marketing RH, incluant notamment la valorisation de la marque employeur, que la transformation digitale pourra impacter la fonction RH et conduire à une évolution du positionnement stratégique RH, à la création de valeur client, au leadership agile.

Mots clés: Marketing des Ressources Humaines; Transformation Digitale; Gestion des Ressources Humaines; Marque Employeur; Administration Publique.

Introduction

In a context of adaptation to the technological revolutions disrupting the economies of the 21st century, the digital transformation opens up new economic perspectives by giving birth to new products, services, and work methods. Several countries have embarked on a process of digital transformation of their public administrations through the implementation of online services through digitalization strategies and support in order to create a digital government capable of co-creating public value.

As a result to these evolutions, new theoretical frameworks emerged in the fields of management and public governance, namely, New Public Management and Citizen Relationship Management, placing therefore emphasis on administration focused on performance and quality, an international discussion on administrative reforms, and an integrated approach to applying economic, social, and psychological models to administrative sciences (Osborne 1992 ; Kettl 1996; Lynn 1996).

Likewise, current HR management models, especially in the context of digital transformation, place the satisfaction of the human resource as a user of these tools but also as a customer, as one of the imploring criteria of excellence, which contributes to encourage organizations to turn to HR marketing practices.

Being proactive, knowing how to arouse the interest of employees to adopt the change, are all factors that define the concretization and success of the digital transformation project. Among these success factors, we find change management and HR marketing (Liger, 2004); (Panczuk and Point, 2008); (La Pinta and Berthelot, 2015); (Brillet and Gavaille, 2017); (Cazottes, 2019).

However, the interface between marketing and HR management seems to be relatively undeveloped. Although recent publications have helped to lay the foundations, knowledge on these topics is still limited. The tools used by the different actors in this field are still based on the traditional communication-centric approach, and the research field should adopt a more global and horizontal perspective. Therefore, it seems reasonable to re-examine the possible relationship between marketing and HR Management. Therefore, from the point of view of theory and management, it is important today to explore these issues related to HR marketing and its challenges.

In this study we will try to answer the following question: What is the role of human resources marketing and employer branding in the implementation of digital human resources management in public organisations?

To answer this question, we will first review the main concepts related to HR marketing and employer's branding. We will then explain our research methodology before presenting and discussing our main findings.

1. Literature review

2.1. Context of the study

In Morocco, the government, and more specifically, the public administration, plays a key role in the creation of citizen values and the development of different economic and social sectors. However, the recurrent economic and social crises of recent decades and the low productivity of the public administration have forced a rethinking of governance models (Frederickson and Smith 2003). All these elements have challenged the reform of public administration. To this end, the Internet is now seen as an essential factor in strengthening the performance of public services (Fountain, 2001).

The advent of e-government in the 1990s has given a new lease of life to New Public Management (West, 2005), considering it as a powerful trigger improving public services and delivery (Spahni 2001). Information and communication technologies make it possible to set up «*virtual governance*» (Fountain 2001), thus eliminating any temporal, spatial or hierarchical limits of public services.

By the same token, the digital transformation of the human resources function (HRF) is first of all about the digitalization of the HRF itself. This transformation process includes the following aspects: recruitment, training, administrative management and forecasting... Indeed, the integration of virtual simulation in particular in recruitment and training in this case offers more services, to enhance the employer's brand, and even to transform the relationship with the worker and the organizational culture.

Thus, the managerial practices of the public administration are to be reconfigured to be customer or user-centered, in order to ensure the necessary monitoring of the public interest and to offer quality services to its users.

2.2. Towards a Human Resources Marketing Definition

In general, Marketing relates to the concept of market and studies the way to conduct a behavioral management of business (Arnaud S., Frimouss S., Peretti JM (2009).

However, regarding the exponential development of digital organizational activities, the differences between disciplines are blurring. While the main objective of human resources management is to recruit, develop and retain the human capital for an optimal organizational performance (peretti, 2009), human resource marketing refers to treating current, past, and future

employees as the ultimate customers of human resource development and must sell services to them (Panczuck (2008).

Applying marketing to Human Resources Management, which is also called “*Internal Marketing*” enables a “*customer-oriented*” framework, which means that they need appropriate managerial practices in order to promote services and develop plans to optimize the selection and retention of employees.

According to Liger (2007), Human resources marketing is based on the integration of techniques deployed in marketing such as segmentation and targeting to attract candidates, ensure their integration and retention in the longer term.

All these definitions tend to have one thing in common, that the HR function needs to take customer-oriented actions so that value can be created and communicated for current and/or future employees in order to manage the relationship with them that is right for the organization and the employees (Colle, 2007).

Within this scope, the employee stands for the roles of both a supplier and a customer for the organization and the work climate is made of a succession of transactions between customers and suppliers (Rafiq & Ahmed, 1993). In the same way, the internal products refer to the activities that they perform, which must match their needs and desires (Mainardes & Cerqueira, 2015).

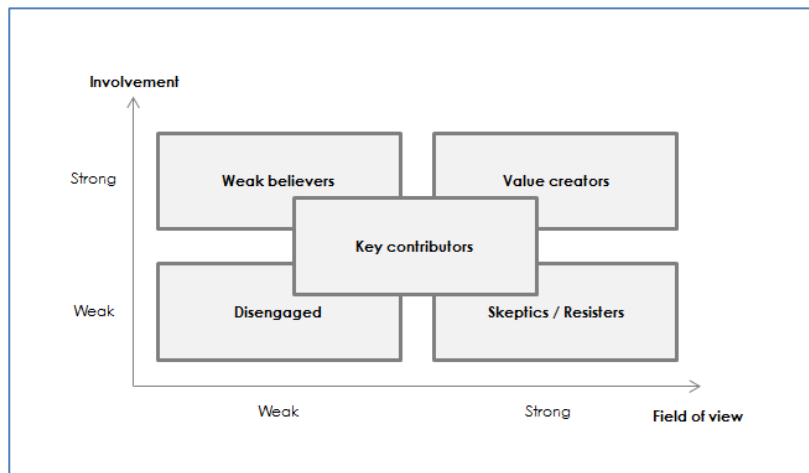
Therefore, employees represent a primary internal market for the organization, where the competitive advantage is gone to the organizations that are able the most to provide the most accurate service to their internal and external customers (Hales, 1994). On the other hand, the external customers design the potential employees and whose satisfaction is optimally positive for the company, it can thus be said

that the attraction and retention of employees generates a competitive advantage.

Therefore, like marketing to customers, the goal of human resources marketing is for the employee work experience to be positive so that they are satisfied and loyal to the organization. The main difference between "traditional" marketing and human resources marketing is its specific focus on work. Indeed, it can be considered to have a high degree of employee engagement.

This is why, for integration reasons, we distinguish marketing topics that belong to the human resources field in human resources marketing, such as internal marketing, Employer's branding, corporate/industry/professional image, or the application of management to the customer relationship of the human resources management office, and customer relationships that belong to the human resources management field in marketing, such as corporate human resources management.

Fig1: Segmentation of the Human Capital according to the level of engagement



Source : Watson Wyatt, 2007

Based on this assumption, we argue that HR marketing combines all the internal and external activities of the organization to attract talent and values its employees as customers. This goes through promoting their employer’s brand and ensuring customer orientation.

2.3. Employer's Branding

In human resources marketing, employer’s branding is one of the most important themes in marketing and organizations today, as it affects its identity. Becoming the employer's "first choice" has become a fundamental issue. The development of new careers around employer’s brands, the rise of marketing techniques that are specifically mobilized for employee’s recruitment or even labels related to quality of life and work prove this. In the context of the increasingly strategic importance of sourcing and retaining talent, the relationship between marketing and human resources management has become one of the most central issues for the organization.

Actually, employer’s branding can be used to ensure that it is marketed both internally with employees and externally (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018). However, the organization must therefore put into place a real marketing method to promote the employer’s brand.

Employer’s brand managers need to work with marketing managers to better understand the content provided by the organization and the various means available to make a discernible, realistic and attractive promise. In order to help the HR function better understand and use marketing tools, and to encourage the marketing function to be responsible for HRM issues, more and more researchers are focusing on these issues.

Employer's branding is thus positioned as a tool that allows employees to adopt the organization's values (ConferenceBoard, 2001), but also to involve and engage them in the organization's

strategies (Kunerth & Mosley, 2011). It also positions the organization as the best employer, facilitates recruitment, retention, and engagement, controls reputation development, and attracts future talents.

Indeed, employer's branding generates three effects:

1-Promoting the willingness of potential candidates to apply (Collins and Stevens, 2002), the identification of potential talents both inside and outside the organization.

2-Bringing motivation and satisfaction. Berthon et al (2005) show that the perception of the employer's brand by the organization's stakeholders is important for increasing employee's motivation and organizational commitment, which is defined by Herrbach et al. (2009) as a psychological state of attachment to the organization or employer.

3- Creating financial value for the company and its shareholders by helping support organizational growth and performance. Actually, recruiting and retaining talents in the organization is an important element of growth and maintaining a competitive advantage (Hanumantha, 2012). Besides, by attracting the best talents to join the labor market, it also creates shareholder value. It thus participates in improving the organization's performance, which in turn has a positive impact on shareholder value (Mandhanya, 2010).

This being said, the interface between marketing and HR management still seems to be relatively undeveloped. Although recent publications have helped to lay the groundwork, knowledge on these topics is still limited.

2. Methodology

Given the complex nature of the managerial phenomenon under study, namely exploring the importance of human resources marketing in the context of digital transformation, more particularly in the context of the Moroccan public administration, we have chosen to conduct a qualitative method for it enables more profound analysis to understand our problematic. The qualitative method is widely opted for conducting management studies (e.g. Shanmugam et al, 2015) as it guarantees optimal flexibility as well as specificity of the results (Marshall and Rossman, 2006).

In the same sense, this methodological protocol was supported by the integration of digital tools in order to guarantee optimal reliability and to eliminate any risk of subjectivity. These tools include Zotero for bibliographic management, NVIVO for content analysis during our exploratory qualitative research.

2.1. Population Sampling

Our population sample includes employees of two pilot public departments in Morocco in the field of modernizing administration. Due to privacy issues regarding participants who work for government institutions, we omit citing both the names of participants and departments.

Our population is composed of 16 participants of all socio-professional categories (managers and subordinates). The average working experiences of the employees in the public departments goes from 5 years to 20 years in human resources management.

2.2. Method

We opted for semi-structured interview during the study. These interviews were administrated through an interview guide designed with a list of 'themes' and questions to be covered (Yi, 2015). The rationale behind using semi-structured interview relies in the flexibility they offer as well as the depth of the results (Saunders et al., 2011), especially that it concerns a relatively new problematic in the public administration. Indeed, the order of the questions administrated depended on the flow of the conversation. Actually, the face-to-face or personal interviews were relatively long and took average duration of 40 minutes. In some cases, additional questions were used to explore research questions, given the nature of activities that have taken place in the organization. The analysis of the interviews was made through NVIVO software for content analysis.

2.3. Hypotheses

In the light of the review of literature exposed above and taking into consideration the specificities of the research field, namely, the public administration in morocco, the hypothesis of our present research work come as follows:

Hypothesis 1: The adoption of a human resources marketing strategy contributes positively to the implementation of digital human resources management.

Hypothesis 2: The employee's experience is considered and involved in the process of digital transformation.

Hypothesis 3: The employer's branding impacts positively employees commitment to the process of digital transformation.

3. Findings and discussion

Based on a rigorous analysis of the data collected through our qualitative research, this section will expose different results through the analysis of the content of the semi-directed interviews. The analysis of the meaning of these interviews will allow us to deduce explanations likely to shed light on the problematic of the importance of integrating HR marketing in the digitalization of human resources function, namely in the context of public administration in Morocco. The table

below shows the items and dimensions explored in the qualitative research as well as the corresponding number of respondents for each item and aggregate dimension.

Table1. Items and dimensions explored in the qualitative research

Items	Aggregate dimension	Number of respondents
Involving the employee in the process of digital transformation as a customer	User-centered approach	10
Creating digital mindset	Employer’s branding	12
Creating specific communication and marketing plans using segmentation and targeting processes	Adopting marketing plans	15
Analyzing HR capital specificities through HR analytics	User-centered approach	8
Searching for employees with specific characteristics and design them as ‘change ambassadors’	Employer’s branding	8
Creating new communication channels	Adopting marketing plans	10
Searching for internal and external digital talents	Employer’s branding	10
Creating a shared vision about the digital transformation	Adopting marketing plans	14

Source: Elaborated in the context of the current study

3.1. The adoption of a human resources marketing strategy contributes positively to the implementation of digital human resources management

76% of the population interviewed agreed on the importance of a marketing strategy in the process implementation of digital human resources management. According to this population, the creation of an employee-customer value remains intimately linked to a proactive management planning capable of determining the needs and expectations of its employees. This knowledge enables their department to segment its services for better efficiency. An HR marketing plan is therefore essential.

“Our employees are considered as partners in this process of digitalization as they are both are the users and suppliers...the first concern was to create digital solutions that meet employees aspirations in order to gain an optimal adoption of these solutions...”

An HR marketing plan is therefore designed to ensure the buy-in management of HR digitalization projects, to ensure the necessary communication and awareness and consequently to get employees involved.

We argued that digital transformation would affect the role of the HR function in the Moroccan public administration. Objectively, we need to shed light on how HR managers can control and anticipate these changes. Measuring this impact also remains an equation with variables depending on the perception of each manager/employee and the strategic position of each organization.

The creation of employee-customer value is one of the major contributions of digital transformation management. Indeed, human resources management integrates experiential marketing with the "user-centric" approach (W. Batat & I. Frochot, 2014). The creation of employee-customer value also borrows the notions of Collaborative Marketing, which refers to the participation of the customer in the creation of organizational value. Such an objective can be achieved through proactive management planning capable of determining the needs and expectations of its employees. This knowledge will allow the HR department to segment its services for better efficiency.

A Digital Transformation Strategy has been designed and piloted by the HR Department through training and HR marketing plans. The objective is to adapt the whole human resources management processes to digitalization and to ensure that employees adapt to these new forms of services.

In other words, it is through a process of change management and HR marketing that the digital transformation will impact the HR function and will lead to an evolution of the HR strategic positioning, the creation of the customer-employee value, agile leadership and data-based management.

3.2. The employee is considered and involved in the process of digital transformation

Regarding managers perceptions of the human capital, 83% of this population, especially at the central level, consider employees as partners but also as customers of HR services.

"I consider human capital as a partner but also as an internal customer given that they are the end user of our digital solutions as well as all services."

"Faced with new employee's expectations, which are the result of the evolution of society on the one hand and its digitalization on the other, I still see that many organizations have doubts about the impact of their vision on employee perception."

Regarding the role of the HRD in the Department's digital transformation process, managers responded unanimously that the HRD plays a central role in preparing the ground, supporting and reinventing its processes.

To this end, the top management of the HRD has expressed the need to adopt a digitalization strategy in order to reinvent itself while ensuring the support of employees on cultural, technical and managerial levels. To this end, a specific training plan for digital skills has been set up as well as marketing and buying management campaigns to unite employees around this new "Digital" culture.

3.3. Employer's branding

64⁵% of the managers interviewed agreed that employer's branding contributes positively to the e-reputation of the administration not only for internal but for the external ones as well. Indeed, employer's branding enables facing transverse HR problematic such as recruiting, integration and retention of the talents.

" Creating a digital culture promoting new ways of working, new work environment and new ways of interacting was helpful not only to attract new talents but also to challenge current employees...The department is actively present on social media".

"Being able to attract the best digital-related skills is one of the most defying challenges of this process of digital transformation"

To this end, one of the two HRD intervened designed a Digital Communication unit that ensures the presence and promotion of the Department's brand image. This cell serves as Community Manager for the management of social pages.

Conclusion

Regarding the exponential development of digital organizational activities, the differences between disciplines are blurring. The common goal of marketing and Human Resource Management is ultimately to build a community around the organization's brand to establish interactivity between the organization and its customers-employees (Liger, Colle,2007). The definition of human resource marketing, written by human resource management practitioners or researchers, related to this topic, has more or less simplified the concept to provide human resources to customers, employees or internal or external candidates / talents (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018; Igalens, 2019).

The public administration in Morocco, namely through the Human resources is aware of the importance of HR Marketing in improving the quality of their services, motivating the human capital for embracing the change brought by the digital transformation. Indeed, human resources Marketing enables not only to attract the best potential candidates but also retains its internal clients and promotes organizational performance (Kunerth & Mosley, 2011)..

Hence, the Human Resources Department in the public sector is permanently investing on new ways of promoting change. In addition to training, andragogical work is necessary to make employees aware of the new challenges of their missions and the organizational values they convey.

The empirical part of this research demonstrates that the implementation of a change management and HR marketing policy, including in particular the enhancement of the employer's brand, will be able to impact the HR function and lead to an evolution of the HR strategic positioning, creation of customer value, agile leadership and data-driven management.

However, the interface between marketing and HR management seems to be relatively undeveloped. Although recent publications have helped to lay the foundations, knowledge on these topics is still limited. Therefore, from the point of view of theory and management, it is important today to explore more deeply these issues related to HR marketing and its challenges.

Many governmental administrations, particularly in Morocco are focusing on automating internal processes as part of their risk management and capacity-building efforts to achieve internal efficiencies. However, one of the managerial implications from the results is the need of a contingent digitalization strategy focused on the human capital as both client and partner in the implementation of digital transformation through staff mobilization in the framework of digital ambassadorship, e-reputation monitoring and benchmarking with competitors, and the promotion and dissemination of the employer brand via digital social network networks. Hence, The key success factors for such a project are based on contingency theory, according to which effective, proactive management and the commitment of employees are key to the successful implementation and adoption of change.

Accordingly, in further future works, we intend to broaden our field of exploration, focusing on the key factors that enable success of the digital transformation process namely the role of customer experience, and its impact on organisational performance.

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