





# THE INFLUENCE OF INTERNAL MARKETING ON JOB SATISFACTION IN THE ROMANIAN PUBLIC SECTOR AND THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMPOWERMENT

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**Abstract.** The public sector has made significant innovations in its contemporary operations. Beyond digitisation, enhancing the processes involving public servants is necessary to provide effective service to citizens. This study examines the connection between internal marketing strategies and job satisfaction among public sector employees in Romania. Through quantitative analysis and a questionnaire-based approach, the research explores various internal marketing dimensions such as communication, training, rewards, and empowerment. Using robust statistical methods, particularly partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), the study explores the complex relationships between these dimensions and job satisfaction. Aligned with the principles of new public management (NPM), this research pioneers the investigation of internal marketing in the public sector. The findings reveal nuanced dynamics, demonstrating that while internal communication indirectly influences job satisfaction by empowering employees, training has a direct impact. Additionally, fair reward systems directly contribute to satisfaction, while empowerment emerges as a significant standalone factor. The study emphasises the importance of strategic programme design in communication, training and rewards, recognizing empowerment as a key driver of job satisfaction among public sector employees.

**Keywords:** internal marketing, job satisfaction, PLS-SEM, empowerment, new public management, public sector, communication, training, rewards.

**JEL Classification:** O15, M31, M50.

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## 1. Introduction

In all countries of the world, employees represent the most valuable resource organisations have at their disposal to meet the needs of customers (Sypniewska et al., 2023). They are how organisations differentiate themselves and gain competitive advantage in an increasingly crowded marketplace. At the same time, performance and success in the medium and long term are highly dependent on employees from the lowest to the highest level.

The private environment offers opportunities for the public sector in terms of adopting some concepts that are specific to it, among which we can mention the carrying out of the activity in conditions of efficiency and effectiveness, added value, transparency, performance,

as well as the orientation of the organisation both towards its external environment and towards the internal environment (Rodrigues & Pinho, 2010).

The public sector compared to the private sector is characterised by some specificities in employee management (Johnson, 2020). Perhaps the most important of these is that if private organisations have profit as their main objective, public administration must aim to ensure and provide the best services to citizens, who are the direct beneficiaries of their services. This fundamental difference in approach makes human resource marketing tools extremely important. In this discussion, internal marketing represents an innovative matter regarding the management of relations between the organisation and employees (Thai et al., 2023). This approach plays a key role in building a professional and beneficial organisational climate for consumers because when employees are satisfied with their work, with all that it includes, they will provide quality services and bring value.

The current transformation of the central and local public administration brings to light a series of needs to improve management at these levels. In this sense, modern, flexible, and efficient public organisations should emphasise understanding and implementing the principles of internal marketing (Rodrigues & Pinho, 2012). Through the dimensions of this tool, managers can better understand the behaviours and attitudes of employees, what makes them happy or unhappy at work, and thus programmes can be implemented to increase motivation and group cohesion (Rodrigues et al., 2023). Therefore, this article will investigate how internal marketing influences job satisfaction within public administration and local communities in Romania. Furthermore, the research will represent a reference that will hopefully demonstrate the importance of implementing such programmes and strategies in organisations.

Previous research shows that the performance of an organisation depends on a certain orientation towards the market. On the one hand, the emphasis is placed on the opportunities and threats generated by the organisation's external environment. However, the exclusive focus on the external environment brings certain risks, especially in the context of the public sector, which leads to the idea of identifying a balance between the factors shaping the external environment and the elements of the internal environment. As a result, the identification and use of internal marketing is equally important because it prepares employees to face the threats of the external environment, thus leading to the achievement of the organisation's objectives (Huang, 2020).

Drawing on the principles of new public management (NPM), our aim is to test internal marketing concepts in the public sector. NPM advocates for a shift from traditional public administration to a more market-orientated approach, focussing on efficiency, economy, and effectiveness (Ferlie, 2017). Therefore, our paper takes concepts from the private sector and goes beyond testing the impact of internal marketing on organisational performance and the effectiveness of external marketing and proposes the exploration of a less discussed area, namely, the effects of internal marketing on job satisfaction in the public sector. In this way, the work remains within the scope of the internal environment and proposes the study of an area less studied in the specialised literature, especially in the context of the public sector in Romania. Although it is an understudied field in Romania, there is research that considers marketing at a general level in the public sector, but from the authors' best knowledge, this paper is the first to address internal marketing and job satisfaction in the Romanian public sector.

This research aims primarily to assess how internal marketing affects job satisfaction in Romania's public sector. Internal marketing, a multifaceted concept, will be examined through

four key dimensions: internal communication, training, reward system, and empowerment. In addition to investigating the direct effects of these dimensions on job satisfaction, this study will also investigate the mediator role of empowerment in the relationships between internal communication, training, the reward system, and job satisfaction. This study will be guided by the following research questions.

RQ1. What is the impact of internal communication on job satisfaction in the public sector?

RQ2. Does training influence job satisfaction among public sector employees?

RQ3. What is the effect of the reward system on job satisfaction in the public sector?

RQ4. How does empowerment relate to job satisfaction among employees in the public sector?

RQ5. Does empowerment mediate the relationships between internal communication, training, the reward system, and job satisfaction in the public sector?

The next section of the paper provides an overview of the literature on the dimensions of internal marketing and the factors that influence job satisfaction, leading to a conceptual framework and hypotheses. The research methodology, including the use of PLS-SEM with SmartPLS software, is then detailed. The results section assesses the statistical model and verifies the hypotheses. Subsequently, the theoretical and practical implications are discussed, particularly the role of internal marketing dimensions and empowerment in job satisfaction. The paper concludes by summarising the key findings, acknowledging limitations, and suggesting directions for future research.

## 2. Review of the literature

### 2.1. Internal marketing: internal communication, training, reward system, empowerment

In general, the literature classifies marketing into two broad categories: internal marketing and external marketing. The category of interest for us is that of internal marketing. The concept of internal marketing was initially introduced in the specialised literature in the second half of the 1970s, in the service sector, as a desire for those companies that aimed to offer a more competitive service to their users (Berry et al., 1976). External customers who receive high-quality service will be more satisfied, and consequently, will repeat their purchase.

The main idea of internal marketing highlights the fact that human resources are the first market of an organisation, internal customers who must be satisfied to provide good service to external customers. Therefore, the purpose of internal marketing is to cultivate employees who are both motivated and attuned to customer needs (Grönroos, 1981). In our research, we will consider and expand on this organisational goal. Therefore, its operationalisation will consider the following constructs: internal communication (IC); training (TR); reward system (RS); empowerment (EMP). Other studies have proven that internal marketing implies being an active participant in training, empowering, motivating, and rewarding employees to act and think for the benefit of the customer/citizen (Crick, 2021).

*Internal communication* serves as a conduit for the organisation to gather information regarding the internal market, on the needs, expectations, and satisfaction levels of internal customers, namely employees (Yu et al., 2022). Addressing employees' needs and desires fosters a sense of value and support, ultimately enhancing their identification with the organisation (Bolfek et al., 2017).

Efficiently managing internal communication processes ensures that employees receive clear information on organisational objectives, feedback mechanisms, freedom of expression, and clear evaluation criteria. This clarity not only helps employees achieve organisational goals, but also improves productivity and relationships among organisation members (Qin & Men, 2023).

Personalised *training* and development programmes contribute to improving employee learning experiences. These programmes are most effective when the characteristics of the learner are assessed repeatedly throughout the learning process, and the data utilized to tailor instruction accordingly and systematically (Tetzlaff et al., 2021). Furthermore, research shows that training significantly contributes to improving employee performance by addressing skill gaps, fostering continuous learning, and promoting professional development (Profiroiu et al., 2021; Raiu & Mina-Raiu, 2022). Therefore, one can assume that when employees are adequately trained, they possess the knowledge and tools to perform their tasks effectively, reducing errors, and increasing productivity.

Furthermore, research demonstrates that diversity training is a key and commonly implemented aspect of organisational diversity management strategies (Roberson et al., 2012). It is intended to increase awareness of diversity in individuals, promote positive intergroup attitudes, and motivate positive behaviours among organisational members (Kuknor & Kumar, 2024). Therefore, effective diversity training can lead to important firm outcomes.

Implementing a fair *reward and recognition system* is another core aspect of internal marketing. Additionally, pay transparency can benefit employees, but it also has potential downsides. Wage stagnation and persistent underpayment of certain groups have increased calls for pay transparency (Perez-Truglia, 2020). From another perspective, White (2017) shows that almost half of all employees (47%) of its sample state that verbal praise as their main form of recognition.

As shown in previous research, a fair and effective reward system is a cornerstone of internal marketing and employee engagement. Secure salary payment is a fundamental aspect of this and research indicating that pay transparency can have significant benefits, despite potential downsides.

Most definitions indicate that *empowerment* means giving employees the autonomy to make decisions about routine work activities. Within internal marketing, empowerment is defined as the process of enabling and authorising individuals to think, act, and make decisions independently while managing their work. According to Rafiq and Ahmed (1998), empowered employees solve customer problems faster because they can act directly on customer complaints without asking higher-level managers. Through empowerment, employees demonstrate commitment to both their roles and the organisation. Employees are also informed, trusted, and encouraged to be creative, innovative, and take risks. Furthermore, incorporating the empowerment variable is of importance for effectively operationalising the concept of internal marketing.

Empowerment can cultivate an innovative culture on the workplace. An environment that promotes workplace innovation can enhance employee innovation and job performance (Khan et al., 2022). Furthermore, workplace transformations resulting from globalisation and digitalisation establish workplace innovation as a critical factor for organisations to maintain competitiveness (Weerakoon & McMurray, 2021).

The four dimensions of internal marketing, internal communication, training, reward system, and empowerment are key to understanding its practice and impact on job satisfaction. Although their significant impact on job satisfaction in the private sector is well documented (Mainardes et al., 2019), their application in the public sector is less explored.

## 2.2. Job satisfaction: relationship with co-workers, relationship with superiors, work environment

Concerning job satisfaction, it can be regarded as the totality of thoughts, attitudes, emotions, and perceptions that employees have about their work. There are numerous definitions of job satisfaction in the literature. For instance, Hulin and Judge (2003, p. 255) defined job satisfaction as “a multidimensional psychological response to one’s job”. It is certain that workplace experiences and routines affect people’s emotional state, and thus satisfaction plays a key role in ensuring balance to achieve individual and organisational success. For our research, we will consider three components of job satisfaction, which will be explained further, namely the *relationship with colleagues*, the *relationship with superiors*, and the *work environment*.

Research shows that positive *co-worker relationships* can enhance employee motivation and retention intentions (Basford & Offermann, 2012). This suggests that good collegial relationships, the support in the resolution of tasks, and the appreciation of ideas in the organisation can significantly improve the working experience of employees. A study (Seppälä & McNichols, 2022) found that employees in both low- and high-status positions report increased motivation when co-worker relationships are positive. Similarly, Eldor (2018) examined how compassion impacts the public service workplace and found that the compassion delivered by management had significant effects on the results of employees, public service organisations, and the customers they serve.

In addition, trust in superiors is a critical component of an effective workplace. It has been found to influence job performance and satisfaction (Cho & Park, 2011). The appreciation of superiors, the resolution of conflicts at work, and the support provided by superiors are all important aspects of this relationship.

In terms of appreciation from superiors, Podsakoff et al. (2006) found that positive feedback, such as praise from high-status individuals, is particularly impactful and holds significant importance. Resolution of work is another important aspect of the relationship with superiors. A review of conflict management in the workplace highlighted the importance of various resolution strategies, particularly negotiation and mediation, that cover supervisor intervention (Elgoibar et al., 2022).

Lastly, the support provided by the superiors is a key factor in job satisfaction. A study found that institutional and social support increased adaptation, which, in turn, increased performance (Martirosyan et al., 2019). Another study found that a supportive work environment, including support from superiors, shows a strong and meaningful correlation with employee satisfaction (Goris et al., 2003).

The *workplace environment*, including work schedule, work conditions, and emotional balance at work, serves as a key factor in job satisfaction. A study (Aczel et al., 2021) of academics conducting research remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic found that the merits and challenges of working from home significantly impacted job satisfaction. Additionally, a supportive work environment has been found to have a strong and significant impact on employee retention. In particular, organisational commitment and person–organization fit served as mediators in the relationship between a supportive work environment and employee retention (Naz et al., 2020).

Additionally, a study on leading change in a complex public sector environment highlighted the importance of various factors, including the work environment, in managing change in public organisations (Kjeldsen & Van der Voet, 2021). This suggests that the workplace can significantly impact job satisfaction and overall effectiveness of public sector organisations.

### 2.3. The link between internal marketing and job satisfaction

The relationship between internal marketing and job satisfaction has been studied over the years. Furthermore, some studies have suggested that a way to improve employee satisfaction at work is through internal marketing. A study carried out in the Saudi Arabian banking sector during the Covid-19 pandemic revealed that internal marketing practices, including supportive and participative leadership, training and development, effective communication, and strategic selection and appointment, had significant and positive effects on employee job satisfaction (Almaslukh et al., 2022).

Studies have shown that internal marketing positively impacts job satisfaction (Iliopoulos & Priporas, 2011). If internal marketing is successfully implemented, it can positively and significantly influence employees' perspectives on their work. When it comes to the specific relationship between internal marketing practices and job satisfaction, a study (Shiu & Yu, 2010) concluded that organisations exhibit stronger internal marketing when they possess a highly customer-orientated culture. In addition, internal marketing positively influences job satisfaction and organisational performance.

According to the study by Iliopoulos and Priporas (2011), factors such as internal communication, training and skill development, the reward system, motivation, and empowerment increase the impact of internal marketing practices on job satisfaction. Therefore, by promoting these factors, organisations can realise the importance of internal marketing and the role of job satisfaction in influencing the achievement of their goals efficiently and effectively.

Therefore, four major dimensions can be highlighted that influence the connection between internal marketing and job satisfaction: internal communication, training, reward system, respectively, empowerment. Based on those dimensions and those considered for job satisfaction, we hypothesise:

*Hypothesis 1 (H1): Internal communication is positively associated with employee job satisfaction.*

*Hypothesis 2 (H2): Employee training is positively associated with employee job satisfaction.*

*Hypothesis 3 (H3): Employee satisfaction with the reward system is positively associated with employee satisfaction with work.*

*Hypothesis 4 (H4): The sense of empowerment is positively associated with job satisfaction.*

### 2.4. Empowerment and its mediating role

Research shows that analysing the mediating effect of empowerment on the relationship between internal marketing dimensions (internal communication, training, and reward system) and job satisfaction provides a more nuanced understanding of these relationships. Empowerment, as a dimension of internal marketing, involves allowing employees to make decisions regarding their work, which can improve their job satisfaction (Nguyen & Ha, 2023).

Studies suggest that empowerment can play a significant mediating role in the link between internal marketing and job satisfaction. In particular, within the public sector, a study by Salamoura et al. (2020) found that internal marketing practices, including empowerment, had a significant positive effect on job satisfaction among police officers. Another study (Salem, 2013) identified a positive correlation between internal marketing orientation, including empowerment, and job satisfaction in the public sector. These studies add to the potential value of examining the mediating role of empowerment in the public sector context.

In this research, we view empowerment as both a dimension of internal marketing (direct effect) and a mediator of the relationship between other dimensions of internal marketing (internal communication, training, and the reward system) and job satisfaction. This approach will allow us to examine both the direct effects of empowerment on job satisfaction and the indirect effects through its mediating role; therefore, we hypothesise:

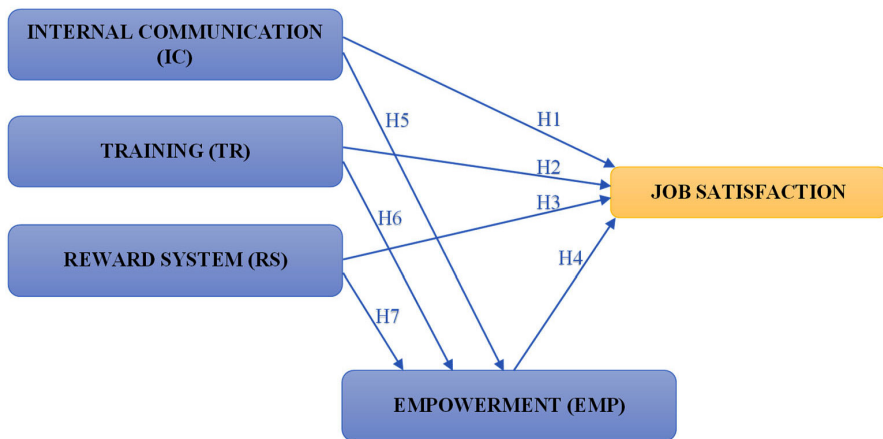
*Hypothesis 5 (H5): Empowerment mediates the relationship between internal communication and job satisfaction.*

*Hypothesis 6 (H6): Empowerment mediates the relationship between employee training and job satisfaction.*

*Hypothesis 7 (H7): Empowerment mediates the relationship between employee satisfaction with the reward system and job satisfaction.*

## 2.5. Conceptual framework of the study

Based on the study hypotheses and by reviewing the literature on internal marketing and job satisfaction, we came up with the theoretical framework proposed in Figure 1. The framework shows the relationships between the exogenous latent variables and the endogenous latent variable. Additionally, the framework proposes exploring the mediation effect of empowerment in the relationship.



**Figure 1.** Research conceptual framework

## 3. Research methodology

### 3.1. The purpose and objectives of the research

The main purpose of this research is to determine the impact of internal marketing on job satisfaction in the public sector. The concept of internal marketing was measured in four dimensions: internal communication, training, reward system, and empowerment. Furthermore, we will test the mediation effect of empowerment on the relationship between internal communication, training, rewards systems, and job satisfaction.

Specific objectives of this research include determining the impact of internal communication on job satisfaction, analysing the influence of training and development on job satisfaction, investigating the effect of the reward system on job satisfaction, examining the relationship between empowerment and job satisfaction, and assessing the mediator role of empowerment in the relationships between internal communication, training, reward system and job satisfaction.

### 3.2. Measures and research variables

A quantitative research approach was used to investigate the correlation between internal marketing elements and employee satisfaction. The instrument of choice for collecting data was a survey, which was considered an effective way to accumulate a substantial amount of data in a restricted time frame.

The semi-structured questionnaire, in nature, consisted of 18 questions and was administered through the Google Forms platform. The surveys were distributed to employees of various public institutions in Romania via Gmail and WhatsApp. The data collection process, conducted exclusively in a digital format, spanned September through November 2023.

**Table 1.** Research constructs and items

Concept	Constructs	Indicator	Item
Internal marketing	Internal Communication (IC)	Clarity of objectives	IC1
		Feedback from employees	IC2
		Freedom of expression	IC3
		Clarity on the evaluation criteria	IC4
	Training (TR)	Personalised training and development program	TR1
		The relevance of training on individual performance	TR2
		Mentoring in the organization	TR3
		Diversity of training and development programs	TR4
	Reward system (RS)	Secure salary payment	RS1
		Satisfaction with the benefits received	RS2
		Correct awarding of rewards	RS3
		Verbal appreciation of employees	RS4
	Empowerment (EMP)	Autonomy of solving tasks	EMP1
		Trust received from superiors	EMP2
		Correlation of personal strengths - tasks received	EMP3
		Encouraging innovation at work	EMP4
Job satisfaction	Relationship with co-workers (RC)	Good collegial relations	JS1
		Colleague support in solving tasks	JS2
		Valuing ideas in the organization	JS3
	Relationship with superiors (RSP)	Appreciation from the superiors	JS4
		Conflict resolution at work	JS5
		Support provided by superiors	JS6
	Work Environment (WE)	Work schedule	JS7
		Working conditions	JS8
		Emotional balance at work	JS9



We consider it important to note that the use of a single method (in this case, a questionnaire) to collect data on both predictor and criterion variables can potentially introduce common-method bias. However, several steps were taken to mitigate this risk. First, the questionnaire was carefully designed to ensure clarity and simplicity, reducing the likelihood of response bias. Second, the inclusion of the option “I don’t know / I don’t answer” allowed respondents to opt out of answering any question, reducing the pressure to provide responses that may not accurately reflect their views or experiences. Finally, responses that contained this option were excluded from the analysis, ensuring that the data used in the analysis accurately reflected the views and experiences of the respondents.

From the previous review of the literature, we have derived variables in Table 1 to examine the link between internal marketing and job satisfaction.

### 3.3. Sample selection method and respondent profile

The research was specifically designed to study a group of public sector employees, particularly those in execution and managerial positions. The selection of participants was made randomly and voluntarily, using a nonprobability sampling method. The primary method used was convenience sampling. Furthermore, the study also used a technique known as “snowball” sampling, as described by Huck (2011), in which the initial respondents distributed the questionnaire to acquaintances or colleagues who met the criteria of the target group.

This method resulted in a total of 106 valid responses from public sector employees. Hair et al. (2021) recommend that the minimum sample size be at least 10 times the maximum number of paths pointing to any construct in the model. In our study, the maximum number of paths to the job satisfaction construct is 7, making 106 a suitable sample size that exceeds the minimum requirement. To maintain ethical standards in research, the identities of all participants were kept anonymous throughout the study. Sample demographics are summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Summary of demographic profiles of respondents

Demographic Variables	Categories	Percentages (%)
Gender	Female	71.6%
	Male	28.4%
Age range	18–25 years	13.1%
	26–34 years	33.8%
	35–45 years	36.5%
	46–65 years	16.6%
Level of education	High school	12.7%
	Bachelor	54.9%
	Master	29.4%
	PhD	1.4%
	MBA	0%
	Others	1.6%
Seniority in the current position	Under 1 year	8.3%
	1–5 years	19.5%

End of Table 2

Demographic Variables	Categories	Percentages (%)
	5–10 years	30.9%
	10–15 years	34.3%
	Over 15 years	7%
Position in the organization	Execution function	86.8%
	Management position	13.2%
Income of the respondents	Under 2500 RON	10.7%
	2500–3500 RON	29.2%
	3500–5500 RON	50.4%
	5500–7000 RON	5.4%
	Over 7000 RON	4.3%

### 3.4. PLS-SEM analysis using SmartPLS

In this study, we used the latest version of SmartPLS (version 4.0.9.9) to validate the proposed hypotheses (Ringle et al., 2022). The choice of SmartPLS is motivated by its ability to handle complex model structures and small to medium size samples (Hair et al., 2021), which makes it suitable for our research. Our study examines multiple interrelated constructs – including internal communication, training, reward systems, and empowerment – and their direct and mediating effects on job satisfaction in the Romanian public sector. The exploratory nature of this research makes PLS-SEM a suitable method, as it focusses on predicting relationships rather than confirming established theories. Additionally, PLS-SEM is well suited for our dataset, which may not meet the normality assumptions required by other methods like CB-SEM.

To test the hypotheses, we constructed a reflective measurement model for each construct based on the survey items and then specified the structural model based on the hypothesised relationships (Hair et al., 2021). The evaluation process followed a two-step approach, starting with the assessment of the measurement model, including checks for internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Once the measurement model was validated, we proceeded to evaluate the structural model to test the hypothesised relationships. We used the SmartPLS bootstrapping procedure, set with 5,000 resamples, to assess the significance of the path coefficients, which represent the hypothesised relationships. Specific software settings included choosing the “Bias-Corrected and Accelerated (BCa) Bootstrap” method to obtain confidence intervals for the path coefficients.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Evaluation of the statistical model

Table 3 confirms the reliability and validity of the constructs of our study. All metrics, including Cronbach’s Alpha ( $\alpha$ ),  $\rho_{a_a}$ , and  $\rho_{c_c}$ , meet the 0.7 benchmark, indicating robust reliability (Sarstedt et al., 2021; Hair et al., 2024). Furthermore, the table confirms that all constructs surpass the AVE benchmark of 0.5, indicating robust convergent validity and model reliability (Hair et al., 2021). Furthermore, VIF values between 1.158 and 2.871, below the threshold of 5, reinforce the reliability of the indicators (Hair et al., 2024).

**Table 3.** Construct reliability and indicator analysis

Indicators	Construct	Loadings	VIF
IC1	Internal communication (IC) ( $\alpha = 0.791$ ; $\rho_a = 0.794$ ; $\rho_c = 0.864$ ; AVE = 0.615)	0.757	1.488
IC2		0.801	1.821
IC3		0.791	1.740
IC4		0.787	1.509
TR1	Training (TR) ( $\alpha = 0.830$ ; $\rho_a = 0.839$ ; $\rho_c = 0.888$ ; AVE = 0.665)	0.839	2.165
TR2		0.895	2.583
TR3		0.793	1.757
TR4		0.727	1.582
RS1	Reward system (RS) ( $\alpha = 0.765$ ; $\rho_a = 0.785$ ; $\rho_c = 0.801$ ; AVE = 0.508)	0.719	1.158
RS2		0.799	1.694
RS3		0.725	1.627
RS4		0.774	1.328
EMP1	Empowerment (EMP) ( $\alpha = 0.755$ ; $\rho_a = 0.791$ ; $\rho_c = 0.848$ ; AVE = 0.590)	0.734	2.010
EMP2		0.902	2.788
EMP3		0.833	1.996
EMP4		0.759	1.366
JS1	Job satisfaction (JS) ( $\alpha = 0.894$ ; $\rho_a = 0.900$ ; $\rho_c = 0.914$ ; AVE = 0.544)	0.767	2.285
JS2		0.730	2.062
JS3		0.780	1.713
JS4		0.735	1.784
JS5		0.800	2.669
JS6		0.765	2.205
JS7		0.835	2.871
JS8		0.720	1.958
JS9		0.782	1.672

Note:  $\alpha$  – Cronbach Alpha; AVE – Average variance extracted; VIF – Variance inflation factor.

Table 4 evaluates the discriminant validity of our research constructs using the HTMT ratio and the Fornell-Larcker criterion. All HTMT values are below the 0.85 cutoff, indicating strong discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2021). The Fornell-Larcker criterion also confirms robust discriminant validity, as the square root of the AVE of each construct consistently exceeds its correlations with other constructs (Henseler et al., 2015).

**Table 4.** Evaluation of discriminant validity

Constructs	HTMT Ratio				
	EMP	IC	JS	RS	TR
EMP					
IC	0.824				
JS	0.811	0.713			
RS	0.816	0.808	0.744		
TR	0.691	0.754	0.760	0.819	

End of Table 4

Constructs	Fornell-Larcker criterion				
	EMP	IC	JS	RS	TR
EMP	0.768				
IC	0.711	0.784			
JS	0.717	0.772	0.737		
RS	0.575	0.658	0.726	0.713	
TR	0.545	0.620	0.659	0.621	0.816

Furthermore, note that the coefficients of R-square show that all predictors of JS, namely IC, TR, RS, and EMP, contribute with 78.7% of its variance (R-square = 0.787; p-value <0.001). The Q-square was also assessed, resulting in a value of 0.675, indicating strong predictive power.

## 4.2. Analysis and verification of hypotheses

In the study, four hypotheses were proposed to examine direct effects on the satisfaction of the job of the employee, and the results of their evaluation are presented in Table 5. H1, linking internal communication and job satisfaction, was not supported ( $\beta = 0.120$ , effect size = 0.021). H2 and H3, associating job satisfaction with employee training ( $\beta = 0.150$ , effect size = 0.056) and satisfaction with the reward system ( $\beta = 0.276$ , effect size = 0.174), were supported. H4, which relates empowerment and job satisfaction, was strongly supported ( $\beta = 0.484$ , effect size = 0.418).

**Table 5.** Analysis of direct influences

Hypotheses	Relationships	Beta Coef.	SD	Effect size	Decision
H1	IC -> JS	0.120	0.090	0.021 (small)	Not supported
H2	TR -> JS	0.150*	0.075	0.056 (small)	Supported
H3	RS -> JS	0.276**	0.075	0.174 (medium)	Supported
H4	EMP -> JS	0.484**	0.086	0.418 (large)	Supported

Note: \*\* p < 0.01; \* p < 0.05; SD - standard deviation.

Table 6 presents the evaluation of three hypotheses on indirect effects on job satisfaction, mediated by empowerment. H5, suggesting that empowerment mediates internal communication and job satisfaction, was supported (indirect effect = 0.330, p < 0.001), indicating complete mediation. However, H6 and H7, proposing that empowerment mediates the relationships between job satisfaction and satisfaction with both employee training and the reward system, were not supported, implying that these factors influence job satisfaction independently of empowerment.

To verify the robustness of our results, we performed a sensitivity analysis by varying key model parameters. Specifically, we increased the number of bootstrap samples from 5,000 to 10,000 and observed the effects on the t-values and p-values. The results remained consistent, with t values increasing and p-values decreasing, reinforcing the significance of the relationships.

**Table 6.** Analysis of indirect influences

Hypotheses	Relationships	Beta Coef.	SD	BCCI		V-squared	Decision	Type of Mediation
				Lower	Upper			
H5	IC -> JS (de)	0.120	0.090	-0.007	0.198	82.901	Supported	Full mediation
	IC -> EMP -> JS (ie)	0.330***	0.074					
H6	TR -> JS (de)	0.150*	0.075	-0.048	0.142	3.070	Not supported	No mediation
	TR -> EMP -> JS (ie)	0.034	0.049					
H7	RS -> JS (de)	0.276**	0.075	-0.050	0.137	25.604	Not supported	No mediation
	RS -> EMP -> JS (ie)	0.040	0.048					

Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ ; de – direct effect, that is, indirect effect; SD – standard deviation; BCCI – bias corrected confidence interval.

## 5. Discussions

The study addressed several research questions related to employee job satisfaction in the public sector. Despite the anticipation that internal communication positively influences job satisfaction, our findings indicate a nonsignificant direct effect. Our findings on internal communication, while not aligning with expectations, resonate with studies such as those of Ahmed and Rafiq (2013), emphasising the nuanced role of communication in fostering empowerment and satisfaction among employees. Interestingly, empowerment emerges as a complete mediator, suggesting that the impact of internal communication on job satisfaction is channelled through its influence on empowerment. Based on this finding, and in line with the predictive human resource development perspective (Legate et al., 2023), managers can leverage internal communication to predict and shape subordinate behaviours by emphasising empowerment messages that encourage autonomy, decision making, and engagement. For example, managers might focus on messaging that empowers employees by clearly communicating goals, providing regular feedback, and involving employees in organisational decisions. This can help create a sense of ownership and commitment among employees, leading to better behavioural results.

Employee training significantly and directly contributes to job satisfaction, aligning with existing literature. However, contrary to expectations, empowerment does not act as a mediator in this connection. The direct influence of training on work satisfaction indicates its immediate influence, highlighting the importance of customised and continuous learning experiences for employee satisfaction. The significant and direct contribution of employee training to job satisfaction is aligned with the existing literature, supporting the findings of Schmidt (2007) and Hanaysha and Tahir (2016). Moreover, the non-mediation by empowerment in this relationship is suggesting that the immediate impact of training on satisfaction might be independent of the empowerment process. From a strategic perspective, managers should focus on maximising the direct impact of training by designing programmes that address specific skills and competencies that improve job performance and satisfaction. This includes using training as a tool not only for skill development but also for reinforcing desired behaviours and aligning individual goals with organisational objectives.

Affirming our hypothesis, a positive and significant direct effect underscores the importance of an effective reward system in improving job satisfaction. In particular, empowerment does not mediate this relationship, suggesting that employees derive satisfaction directly

from the perceived fairness and adequacy of their rewards, which aligns with the research by Chapman and White (2019), demonstrating that employee satisfaction with rewards can have a direct and independent impact. The strategic use of rewards should be carefully aligned with employee expectations and contributions. Managers should design reward systems that recognise both individual and team achievements, incorporating a mix of financial and non-financial incentives that cater to different motivational needs. This approach will maximise the positive impact of rewards on job satisfaction, while also promoting a culture of fairness and equity within the organisation.

Undoubtedly, empowerment emerges as a powerful driver of job satisfaction, with a substantial direct effect. This reinforces the importance of autonomy, decision-making authority, and creativity in shaping employee satisfaction, as previously shown by other researchers (Salamoura et al., 2020; Salem, 2013). Empowerment messages in internal branding communication campaigns should vary according to the audience. For managers, the focus should be on encouraging transparency, promoting leadership behaviours that empower subordinates, and fostering an inclusive decision-making environment. For subordinates, the message should emphasise their role in contributing to organisational success, highlight opportunities for personal and professional growth, and recognise their contributions to team achievements.

Our research findings suggest future research opportunities to develop predictive behavioural models for HR that explore how different internal marketing strategies can influence specific employee behaviours and outcomes. By focussing on predictive modelling, researchers can identify which factors most effectively drive desired behaviours, such as engagement, retention, and performance, under varying organisational conditions.

### 5.1. Implications for theory

Although our findings did not support the anticipated direct effect of internal communication on job satisfaction, full mediation observed through empowerment adds a layer of complexity to the relationship. Therefore, our study contributes to the theoretical understanding of the role of internal communication by highlighting its indirect but significant impact on job satisfaction in the public sector.

Furthermore, the direct and significant contribution of employee training to job satisfaction, independent of empowerment mediation, reinforces the findings of the existing literature. The lack of mediation suggests that the impact of training on satisfaction could be immediate and not based on the empowerment process. This insight challenges the prevailing assumptions and helps to better understanding of the link between training and work satisfaction in the public sector.

Our study also confirms that a fair and effective reward system positively influences job satisfaction. The non-mediation by empowerment in this relationship challenges the assumption that empowerment is a necessary mediator for all dimensions, providing a unique perspective on the direct impact of reward systems on job satisfaction. These findings open new avenues for future research in predictive behavioural models for HR, as suggested by Legate et al. (2023). Future studies should explore how various internal marketing strategies predict and shape specific employee behaviours and outcomes, offering insight into designing more effective HR interventions.

## 5.2. Implications for practice

Organisations should recognise that internal communication, although not directly impacting job satisfaction, plays an important role in empowering employees, as revealed by full mediation through empowerment. Managers should strategically design communication strategies that foster empowerment, acknowledging the indirect but influential role they play in improving job satisfaction among public sector employees. In addition, organisations should provide a range of avenues for communication, not just to inform staff members of their rules but also to invite them to express their thoughts and concerns. To achieve this, managers should use messages that emphasise transparency in decision-making processes, encourage open dialogue, recognise and celebrate employee contributions, and provide constructive feedback. For example, communication should include regular updates on organisational goals and changes, opportunities for employees to participate in decision-making, and messages that reinforce their value to the organisation, which will facilitate an environment where employees feel more empowered and engaged, ultimately contributing to higher job satisfaction.

Given the immediate impact of training on job satisfaction without the need for empowerment mediation, managers should focus on customised and continuous learning experiences. Training programmes should be created with the unique requirements of public sector workers in mind, highlighting their direct contribution to job satisfaction and overall organisational performance.

The findings emphasise the direct impact of a fair and effective reward system on job satisfaction. Managers should prioritise the design and implementation of reward systems that are perceived by employees as fair and adequate. This direct relationship underscores the importance of aligning reward structures with employee expectations and contributions.

Managers should recognise empowerment as a cornerstone to improve job satisfaction in the public sector. The substantial direct effect underscores the importance of autonomy, decision-making authority, and creativity in shaping employee contentment. Although empowerment does not mediate all relationships, its standalone impact highlights its critical role in fostering job satisfaction among public sector employees. Furthermore, the practice of empowerment can help the decision-making process, especially those conducted routinely without major consequences. In fact, this small participation may have very satisfactory results on the part of the employees towards their jobs, and they offer, implicitly, better services to external customers.

## 6. Conclusions

The primary goal was to look at the connection between job satisfaction and internal marketing aspects of public sector employees in Romania. Internal marketing, as a strategic management approach, unfolds critical dimensions within organisational dynamics. Internal communication indirectly influences job satisfaction through empowerment. Employee training directly contributes to job satisfaction, independent of empowerment. A fair and effective reward system directly impacts job satisfaction, while empowerment emerges as a potent driver of job satisfaction, independent of other dimensions.

All these findings capitalise on and promote the idea that Romanian public officials should develop modern internal marketing strategies to motivate staff and improve services. This includes improving internal communication, clarifying training and development prospects, adapting the reward system to contemporary realities, and customising extra-salary benefits

at an individual level. Our study aligns with NPM, focussing on strategic practices in the public sector. It contributes to the discourse by revealing relationships between internal marketing and job satisfaction, filling literature gaps in the public sector. The findings advocate for a strategic approach to internal marketing, acknowledging the unique drivers of employee satisfaction in this context.

This research has limitations. Despite efforts to reduce response bias, socially desirable responses or question avoidance cannot be fully eliminated. The data collection period may not reflect temporal variations in internal marketing and job satisfaction. Future studies could use a longitudinal design and explore other dimensions such as leadership or vision. Including organisations from different areas and EU states could provide an international perspective. This research paves the way for further exploration of internal marketing in the public sector, with qualitative or mixed methods studies needed to understand its implementation and role in job satisfaction.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare that they have no financial, professional, or personal interests or benefits to disclose arising from the direct applications of their research.

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