

Case Report

# Mobilising Practices of Human Resources During COVID-19: Application of Managerial Innovation

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## Abstract

The health crisis caused by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) has had a major negative impact on the human resources of companies of all sizes and in all sectors (cessation of activity, obligation to stay at home). In the absence of compensatory financial measures, company containment (closure) is not an option to avoid more serious social consequences. It is therefore preferable for companies and managers to adopt other measures to limit the impact of this pandemic on human resources. Given this destabilisation of the business community, a number of innovative management practices will emerge and become a real imperative for mobilising human resources. The aim of this article is to identify models of managerial innovation put in place by managers to mobilise human resources during the current health crisis. Based on a review of the literature on managerial innovation and strategies for mobilising human resources in times of health crisis on the one hand and, on the other, a single-site case study of 6 Cameroonian companies operating in different sectors of activity, we show that, under the prism of COVID-19, a number of managerial innovations such as teleworking, team rotation and part-time working, social communication, salary maintenance, health support and coaching can emerge and become real spurs for the mobilisation of human resources.

## Keywords

Managerial Innovation, Mobilising Practices, Human Resources, COVID-19, Cameroon

## 1. Background

The current health crisis has to some extent created major managerial dysfunctions, destabilised the social climate and shaken all organisations [31]. In the absence of appropriate compensatory measures, containment, one of the barrier measures, has been implemented by governments to stem the spread of COVID-19 [35, 41]. This response strategy, which forces companies to temporarily cease their activities under threat of economic or criminal sanctions, and forces employees to remain in their homes, threatens the survival of human resources and companies as a whole.

In Cameroon, COVID-19 is occurring in a context of unpreparedness and is surprising in its scale. Its rapid and unsuspected severity has a negative impact on the daily lives of HR staff in companies of all sizes and in all sectors [40]. Moreover, the usual mechanisms that provide employees with the best possible social and economic protection are being severely tested [39].

The issue of the link between managerial innovation (MI) and human resource mobilisation practices (HRMP) is of great interest to both business leaders and the scientific

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community. A great deal of work has been done on this issue since the end of the 2000s [2, 6, 11, 26].

However, most of the work carried out on the correlation between these two concepts approaches this issue from an economic and social performance perspective. At the economic level, [30], in their studies conducted in Kenya, report empirical evidence according to which, sales performance is the correlate of MI and MHRPs. Indeed, these authors show that the tendency of owners to engage in new managerial practices, has a strong influence on the financial performance of firms. In the same vein, [38], in their study of Cameroonian SMEs, conclude that the link between MI and MHRPs seems to lead to an increase in market share, greater production efficiency, higher productivity growth and an increase in net results. For these authors, the result of this correlation allows companies to differentiate themselves from competitors and improve their financial performance [53].

On the other hand, at the social level, almost all of the rich and abundant work on the link between MI and MHRPs focuses on individual behaviours, with an emphasis on socially responsible practices. Authors such as [1, 7, 55] have made this their focus despite their divergent approaches. To illustrate, [55], in their work on Chinese SMEs, note that the implementation of CSR practices as a MI to mobilise HR contributes to improving companies' social performance. In the same vein, [7] conclude that the implementation of CSR practices as a MI to mobilise HR may be necessary for SMEs with strategic objectives to improve their performance, such as growth. For these authors, the implementation of CSR practices as MI interacts with an HR management system in order to improve the social performance of companies [1].

And yet, until now, company management has not established any MI models for mobilising HR during a health crisis. COVID-19 offers an experimental opportunity in this respect.

In Cameroon, the field of research on MI and MHRPs in a COVID-19 context remains largely unexplored and little work has been done on the issue. In this context, [14] addresses the issue of teleworking and remote management and focuses on the identification of good management practices to be adopted when employees are required to work from home. In the same vein, [39] looks at CSR in times of health crisis and shows that it can be used to restore the climate of trust and enable companies to survive. Continuing his work in the same vein, [43] assesses the adaptation of Cameroonian companies to the institutional framework in relation to COVID-19 and concludes that this adaptation of companies is based on institutional arrangements that are for the most part tactical and strategic in nature. Following in their footsteps, [37] examine the impact of the social distancing measures prescribed by the government as part of the fight against COVID-19 on the activities and results of informal production units (UPI) through the principle of proximity in their management and, conclude that the capacity of IPU to adapt to the dynamics of the economy is therefore reduced in the context of COVID-19,

because of their low flexibility in terms of supply and their high dependence on the behaviour of customers.

In view of all these strong developments, the analysis that seems to largely explain the MI models that need to be put in place to mobilise HR during the current health crisis is still lacking. Indeed, specific studies focusing on our subject of study are almost non-existent in Cameroon. Our research follows on from this work by focusing on the MI models that need to be put in place to mobilise HR during health crises.

Starting from the fact that recourse to the mobilisation of HR confronts managers with the challenges of MI, we make the implicit hypothesis that, in periods of health crisis, the mobilisation of HR depends on the MI put in place by organisations. We therefore propose to question these MI: How do managerial innovations contribute to the mobilisation of human resources in Cameroonian companies during a COVID-19 period?

To answer this question, we will focus on two points. Firstly, we will show the theoretical link between MI and MHRPs. By defining the concepts and their characteristics, it seems possible to justify this link. Secondly, we will highlight the types of MI used by players to mobilise their HR, showing that HRMPs emerge and lead to MI and that, furthermore, a gradual intensification of the role of MI encourages HR mobilisation practices.

## **2. Managerial Innovations and Practices to Mobilise Human Resources in a COVID-19 Context: A Theoretical Analysis**

MI seems to be consubstantially linked to MHRP. We could say that MI is the correlate of the PMRH. To establish the link between MI and HRMP, we first need to define the two concepts in an operational way. Characterisation will make it possible to show how MI and HR mobilisation are consubstantial.

### **2.1. Towards a Definition of Managerial Innovation and Practices That Mobilise Human Resources**

#### **2.1.1. Definition of Managerial Innovation**

Considered to be the poor relation of innovation, MI is the subject of much research in management science [3] and it needs to be well mastered in order to avoid confusion in the debate. We believe it would be useful, firstly, to revisit the very definition of the concept as envisaged by theorists and practitioners, and secondly to highlight the place, or importance, of MI in organisations.

A quick review of the work that has been developed around MI provides an exhaustive overview of the definitions of MI according to the sensitivities of the authors. To this end, [29],

present MI as the adoption of a management practice or method that already exists but is new in relation to current management practices and methods, making it possible to improve existing management techniques and methods. For [10], MI is a new approach to designing strategy, structure and processes that change the way managers and members of the organisation work. In the same vein, [22] adds and specifies that MI is what substantially modifies the way in which management tasks or the traditional structures of the organisation are carried out, enabling it to better achieve its objectives. Following in his footsteps, [29] establish that MI is the adoption by an organisation of management practices or methods that are new to it, with the aim of improving its overall performance.

As can be seen from these definitions, MI seems, a priori, to correspond to a point of convergence between the interests of managers and those of employees, particularly because it aims to change ways of thinking and leading to organised action [28]. Within this framework, we will consider in this contribution that MI is the application of new managerial practices designed to improve the overall performance of the organisation.

### 2.1.2. Defining Practices That Mobilise Human Resources

The concept of mobilising human resources is of paramount interest in business management. In the current health crisis, this concept is attracting a great deal of interest from practitioners and academics alike. However, the wide range of terms associated with mobilisation sometimes seems to confuse people and needs to be clarified.

In this sense, [54], in his work, makes a recession of authors who have carried out work on the issue. In this regard, [32], dealing with the mobilisation of human resources in hospital and social administration, states that, the mobilisation of HR represents an organisational action whose objective is to manage the productivity of the grey matter of individuals evolving in the organisation. Continuing their work in the same vein, [47] suggest considering mobilisation as a human resources tool aimed at company performance. In the same vein, [12] admits that HR mobilisation consists of urging employees to improve the quality of their work, to align themselves with organisational priorities and to coordinate themselves by implementing appropriate management practices. Following in their footsteps, [45] defines HR mobilisation as an action aimed at bringing together and using employees' skills and energies to make the company perform better.

On the basis of these key ideas, we will retain, broadly speaking in this contribution, that the mobilising practice of HR consists of creating a new collective dynamic from multiple individualities with the aim of contributing to the functioning of the company. It is this stance that seems to establish, or at least underpin, any relationship with MI.

## 2.2. Theoretical Link Between Managerial Innovation and Practices That Mobilise Human Resources

The relationship between MI and MHRPs is increasingly recognised in the HRM literature [17]. A close reading of MI, the HRMPs and their characteristics leads to two main observations. Firstly, MI induces new management practices, processes and structures, which are significantly different from the usual norms [36]. Secondly, MHRPs suggest doing things together, in pursuit of a common goal. The common reference indicates that mobilisation should be seen from a collective rather than an individual perspective. This collective aim shows that employees act to serve the interests of the company and their work team, and are not just interested in their own personal interests.

These two observations justify the need to revisit Human Capital Theory (HCT) and Resource Theory (RT) in order to establish, or even explain, the correlation between MI and MHRPs.

### 2.2.1. Human Capital Theory: A Way of Constructing the Relationship Between MI and HRMPs

The purpose of HCT is to act on skills such as knowledge, qualifications, abilities, know-how, dexterity, etc. held by employees [18]. Thus, just like the company's other assets (technological, technical, etc.), skills also represent a source of value for the company [18]. In a COVID-19 context, these skills constitute the framework or foundation on which MIs should build in order to mobilise workers, i.e. to obtain from them voluntary behaviour geared towards survival objectives.

In this context, the company's investment in its human capital is part of the mobilisation process [8]. In other words, at a time when its survival is being put to the test by the current health crisis, the company must make significant and essential managerial adjustments [39]. These adjustments will have to be based on employees' skills, and will lead in one way or another to mobilisation practices, the aim being to strengthen the professional links between the company and its employees [20, 21].

Ultimately, HCT leads us to consider the correlation that exists between MI and HRMPs as a particular organisational transmission belt. This correlation enables managers to act on the skills held by employees with a view to mobilising them [25, 4]. To support this connection, we believe that the development of skills through resource theory is another possible solution.

### 2.2.2. Resource Theory: A Vector for Correlation Between MI and HRMPs

Generally speaking, a company's vulnerability stems from its need for resources. In the managerial process of companies, the relationship between MI and HRMPs in a covid context should

also be analysed in terms of resource dependencies. Indeed, resource theory (RT) suggests that the survival of organisations depends on the skills held by internal resources which enable them to do things differently, i.e. to innovate [5, 42]. Faced with the current health hazard, managers should draw on these resources to develop new strategies. This means, according to [46], that a company's survival depends on its ability to manage its employees well, whose support is indispensable.

In times of health crisis, this theory seems to us to be essential in this analysis because, upstream, of all the skills held by employees, there should be a redeployment of human resources in view of the changes taking place in the business environment and in order not to slow down the achievement of objectives. In this dynamic, the resource-based approach shows that the correlation between MI and HRMP is a strategic factor that companies need to manage and develop in order to increase their survival.

Ultimately, the observation that can be made about the correlation between MI and HRMPs is that, in a COVID-19 context, MI develops, or induces, a renewal of management practices geared towards the mobilisation of HR. This raises the question of what day-to-day relationships exist between MI and HRMPs in Cameroonian companies in the COVID-19 period, and what changes in these relationships can be observed with a view to the survival of these companies?

### 3. Methodology

The aim of this research is to understand the types of MI put in place by managers to mobilise their HR during periods of COVID-19. The problematic of our reflection was built on the basis of various sources. We held informal and formal discussions with practitioners in order to gain an in-depth understanding of our theme [9]. The focus was on the main

organisational player in the SME, the manager, in order to identify the intentions that lead to the mobilisation of HR. This exploratory study is based on an inductive qualitative approach [51]. The case study was chosen as the research strategy [23] cited in [49] for two reasons: firstly, because of the specificity and emergence of the research question addressed; secondly, and above all, because of the scarcity of information in this field at this time of pandemic in Cameroon. The cases that make up the unit of analysis are represented by company managers [49]. Due to the health arrangements put in place by the cases studied (travel restrictions, appointment restrictions), our study was carried out only in the city of Yaoundé. Our epistemological position is based on the constructivist paradigm.

SME managers were selected in two ways. Firstly, on the basis of Law No. 2015/010 of 16 July 2015 on the promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises in Cameroon. This law provides the official definition of an SME/SMI. The criteria for defining an SME in Cameroon relate exclusively to the number of staff and turnover [13]. In this context, any company is considered an SME in Cameroon if it employs no more than 100 people and its annual turnover excluding taxes does not exceed CFAF 3 billion [49]. Furthermore, based on the availability of managers to participate in the study.

Our sample is made up of 06 cases including 02 small enterprises (SE), 02 medium enterprises (ME) and 02 large enterprises (LE) chosen according to accessibility during the confinement period and spread across the city of Yaoundé (political capital). The selection of this theoretical sample was based on the theoretical saturation criterion [19]. The heterogeneity of the business sectors was chosen in order to promote the richness of the data collected, but also to better understand the approach, logic and approaches of managers operating in different business sectors. Table 1 summarises the sample.

*Table 1. Summary of the sample of companies investigated.*

Companies	Legal status	Creation dates	Sector activity	Workforce	Sponsor function	Gender	Age	Duration in minutes
E1	Sarl	2009	Logistics and Transport	55	Branch Manager	M	38	15
E2	Sarl	2012	Trade and Distribution	42	Owner-manager	M	45	17
E3	Establishment	2015	Hairstyle	03	Managing Director	M	34	18
E4	Establishment	2009	Call-center	2	Managing Director	F	33	17
E5	(S.A)	1999	Telecommunications	600	Quality department manager	F	40	23
E6	(S.A)	1983	Food industry	313	Quality manager	M	43	19

Source: 2019 survey data



Data collection was based on an interview guide underpinned by an interview protocol [52]. Data were collected by telephone in some cases (04), while others were interviewed (02). This number is justified by the respondents' unavailability to collaborate in the research, but above all by the difficulty of obtaining an appointment. The telephone interview was chosen to compensate for this. These companies had suspended visits to their premises, which is why, in view of the time available, the telephone interview was chosen. The telephone was used to record the discussions. The interviews took place between 3 and 13 July 2019 and lasted an average of 45 minutes. These interviews were supplemented by data observed within the cases in order to enrich the information and data triangulation [48].

In order to eliminate a wide dispersion of responses and the collection of useless information, the interviews focused on the five main headings as recommended by [34] cited in [49]. In addition, depending on the actors' schedules, we followed up with respondents when necessary, the aim being to get them out of their depth.

The interviews were transcribed in full onto paper for each case observed, producing 47 pages of written documents. The data processing method used was thematic content analysis [44], which enabled us to identify the MI models implemented

by the stakeholders to mobilise their HR in times of health crisis. We felt that this technique was appropriate in that the nature of the data collected from the stakeholders was discourse-based. In addition, the initial themes were enriched as we progressed through the interviews with the players in the cases observed, who provided us with new information. We drew up an inventory of the information collected, which reflects partial but contextualised knowledge and incorporates the concerns of the stakeholders.

## 4. Analysis of Results

### 4.1. Perception of the Concepts of Managerial Innovation, COVID-19 and Mobilising Practices by the Players Investigated

One of the first concerns of our work was to ensure that MI, mobilising HR practices and COVID-19 were a concern or were important in the cases studied. From this point of view, our interviewees were first asked to define the key concepts in an operational way. Table 2 presents a summary of the operational definitions of the three key concepts of our study, as defined by the practitioners.

**Table 2.** Stakeholders' definitions of the concepts of managerial innovation, COVID-19 and HR mobilisation.

Managerial innovation	COVID-19	Mobilising HR
Building trust and empowering employees	Illness like flu	strategy for motivating employees
Encouraging employees to take an interest in their work while ensuring a good working atmosphere	A disease that affects the elderly, not the young.	Strengthening employee ties
Stimulate and develop employees' skills and initiatives	A disease that affects Westerners and not Africans	Consolidation of staff
Motivating, inspiring and involving employees	A contagious and fatal disease	Communion of staff
Communicating and sharing information with the whole team	A mystical and deadly disease	Unification of employees

Source: based on 2019 survey data

### 4.2. Managerial Innovation and Practices to Mobilise Human Resources: Different Models in the Cases Studied

From the literature review, we have seen that MI involves improving existing management techniques and methods. Faced with the current health hazard, the aim of this managerial adjustment is to redeploy and mobilise employees. To this end, the determinants of MI were identified not only through the literature review, but also in the different discourses of the actors in the cases investigated.

In this context, we have identified five unifying determinants, without, however, neglecting the other determinants: teleworking, team rotation and part-time work, social communication, continued remuneration, health support and guidance. It should be noted that these determinants are innovative in the cases studied insofar as they have replaced or at least reoriented traditional habits. We then analysed how each of these factors contributed to the mobilisation of HR to justify the quality of the MI put in place. Table 3 summarises the MIs mentioned by the players to mobilise their HR.

**Table 3.** Summary of MIs mentioned by stakeholders in the mobilisation of HR in the cases studied.

Companies	Determinants of managerial innovation in mobilising HR practices				
	Teleworking	Team rotation and half-time periods	Social communication	Remuneration	Health support and accompaniment
E1		X	X	X	X
E2	X		X	X	X
E3	X	X	X	X	X
E4	X	X	X	X	X
E5	X	X	X	X	X
E6	X	X	X	X	X
Frequencies	5	5	6	6	6

Source: based on 2019 survey data.

#### 4.2.1. Teleworking: An Artefact of HR Practices That Mobilise People

If we had to characterise one particularly striking phenomenon of change in organisations in times of confinement, we would undoubtedly choose teleworking. Teleworking is understood to mean carrying out a professional activity, in whole or in part, at a distance and using information and communication technologies (ICTs). In reality, most of the cases studied have not escaped this trend. For example, in the case of the SMEs, the actor in the case (E4), a company specialising in call-centre services, stated that teleworking had made it possible to reunite his employees, avoiding them having to spend their daily time on public transport, where the disease spreads. As if to corroborate this statement, the person interviewed insisted that: *"... teleworking is essential to keep our workforce at a distance, so that only on-call staff come into the office"*. In the same vein for the LEs, the player interviewed in the case (E5), a company specialising in telecommunications, admits that teleworking has made it possible to direct his employees towards discussion areas that incorporate spatial distance, i.e. the social distancing between the hierarchy and the workers, while maintaining the same level of performance. The manager interviewed noted that: *"... we set up working groups by video conference using the Zoom application. This meant that everyone could interact with the other colleagues in real time and without any difficulty, just like in a face-to-face meeting"*.

This relevant result highlights the survival objectives that are the preoccupation of managers in the cases studied. The key role of teleworking is confirmed, as is the need to reduce negative internalities in these times of pandemic. The contribution of teleworking as an MI to HR mobilisation is therefore mainly explained here by the manager's social

involvement and a desire to improve adequate working conditions, as also specified by [27].

#### 4.2.2. Team Rotation and Part-Time Work as a Lubricant for HR Practices That Motivate Staff

Confinement of the company (cessation of activity, obligation to stay at home), which was initially prescribed by the government as a barrier measure, was not adopted by all the players in the cases investigated. One of the main reasons put forward by the latter was to avoid serious social consequences such as temporary or permanent unemployment and the loss of certain jobs. With this in mind, colossal managerial efforts were made by the players in each category of case investigated. By way of illustration for the MEs, the player in the case (E1), a company specialising in logistics and transport, adopted and instituted the rotation of employees to part-time posts. In this respect, the manager interviewed revealed that: *"...for us, team rotation is a strategy that we have found necessary not only to prevent our employees from being exposed to or contracting the disease, but also to reduce or even halt its spread"*. In the same vein, case (E2), a company operating in general retailing and distribution, is notable for the adoption of part-time working with flexible working hours for the various teams at work, particularly the checkout staff. The person interviewed stated that: *"Working part-time was a trick we devised to mobilise our staff, and it also fitted in with the social distancing prescribed by the government. Some employees start work in the morning and return around midday, while others work from midday to 5pm"*. With regard to the EPs, the actors in cases (E3) and (E4), companies specialising in hairdressing and call-centre respectively, specifically adopted compliance with hygiene rules due to a lack of financial resources. This measure is captured in the

words of the manager of (E4): *"To ensure the loyalty of our team and given our very limited resources, we have forced everyone to comply strictly with the rules of hygiene. In fact, when you enter, you are obliged to wash your hands with chlorinated water and soap and to wear a nose plug"*.

#### 4.2.3. Social Communication, a Spur to HR Practices That Motivate People

Social communication seems to be an essential part of HR mobilisation practices. In the current health crisis, this social communication has a dual objective: to engage all employees in a sacred union against the pandemic and to reassure them about the measures taken to mobilise them. In the cases studied, all the players interviewed admitted to having invested in improving the use of traditional and modern communication media in order to mobilise their staff more effectively. However, these media, although formalised, vary from one company to another. By way of illustration, to mobilise staff in the MEs, the actors in cases (E1) and (E2), companies specialising respectively in logistics and transport, and in general commerce and distribution, specifically introduced the use of internal emails, intranet and internal telephone calls. As if to corroborate these comments, the manager interviewed from (E1) stated that: *"In line with the social distancing introduced by the government, we have introduced certain communication channels that did not previously exist in our company, notably the internet, intranet and internal telephone calls. These changes in working conditions have enabled us to retain the majority of our human resources and continue our business as normal"*.

In the same vein, the player in the case (E6), a GE specialising in food processing, has increased its use of digital social networks such as WhatsApp, Messenger and Facebook to strengthen professional links with its staff. The player interviewed admits to having created departmental working groups via these mobile applications.

In addition to these innovative communication tools, all the stakeholders acknowledged that the communication strategies and key messages formulated to mobilise their staff took account of several factors, including the understanding of information about the pandemic, the perception of risks, social norms and community resilience. To this end, in the EPs, the actors in cases (E3) and (E4), companies operating specifically in hairdressing and call-centre services, admit to having disseminated information that was easy to understand and that instilled confidence in their employees. As if to corroborate these remarks, the manager of (E4) states that: *"We have adapted the messages in the language of the different groups in order to reduce the barriers to understanding, and to remove misunderstandings and other misunderstandings that can lead to stigmatisation, discrimination, and the departure or termination of our employees"*. He added: *"These little messages, which do not harm our vulnerable employees, have enabled us to form a truly cohesive and supportive group in the face of this pandemic"*.

Following in their footsteps, EG players (E5) and (E6), companies specialising in telecommunications and agri-food, acknowledged that they had specifically disseminated information that was sensitive to the psychosocial consequences of the pandemic on the one hand, and on the other, information that had an impact on social norms. These comments are justified by the following statements: *"We constantly remind our employees that it's normal to experience and feel various emotions, such as anxiety, sadness or fear"*. He added: *"We promote the desired behaviours by demonstrating their benefits for the health and well-being of our employees"*.

#### 4.2.4. Maintaining Pay, a Vector for HR Mobilisation Practices

According to the *verbatim*s of the various players in the cases investigated, the challenge of MI in the mobilising practices of HR in a period of COVID-19 can be read through the maintenance of employee remuneration, which admittedly differs from one category of company to another. In this context, the majority of SME players acknowledged that their employees' pay had been considerably halved as a result of flexible working time, but that this in no way affected the actual regularity of salary payments, if they take as a reference the competing companies which had suspended salaries and cut jobs. As if to corroborate these remarks, the player from (E1), a company specialising in logistics and transport, stated that: *"...as working hours are reduced, and to avoid the total isolation of certain employees, which would have serious consequences within the families, we have divided them into teams so that they can at least have something at the end of the month"*.

For GEs, however, the situation is different. There has been no change in remuneration because of the system put in place, in particular teleworking, which allows employees to continue their activities without interruption.

#### 4.2.5. Health Support and Guidance, the Source of HR Mobilisation Practices

The health support and assistance provided to employees in the cases investigated was not neglected. To this end, all the players interviewed admitted to having demanded compliance with hygiene rules and the widespread wearing of masks, washing and distancing within their respective companies. In this context, while the stakeholder in case (E5), a LE operating in telecommunications, admitted having suspended personal courtesy visits and the reception of physical couriers in order to avoid all contact, the stakeholder in case (E6), a LE operating in telecommunications, admitted having suspended personal courtesy visits and the reception of physical couriers in order to avoid all contact. The respondent from (E2), an ME specialising in general start-up and distribution, admitted that he had forced his employees to wash or have disinfectant gels. These comments are justified by the statements made by the actor interviewed in (E2): *"The difficulty of getting employees*

to comply with instructions meant that the company had to create an entrance corridor where you would inevitably face the hand-washing basin".

In addition, we observed awareness-raising sessions in the EPs, notably (E3) and (E4), companies operating in hair-dressing and call-centre respectively, which specify certain local compositions to be taken to protect against the disease. For example, (E3) recommends "Ndolè<sup>1</sup>" or "Nfol" mixed with lemon. In the case of (E4), the protective formula is kinkeliba<sup>2</sup> and garlic, or ikouk<sup>3</sup> and aloe-vera<sup>4</sup> "As you can see, we don't have the means to do everything the government asks. However, we still require everyone to wear a mask. If we buy the hydro-alcoholic gel for customers, things will end quickly and we don't have the means to implement this policy", says the actor from (E4).

## 5. Discussion

Overall, our results, contrary to those widely found in conventional economic postulates, are consistent with the literature, since the players in the cases studied wish to maximise the utility function of their HR and of their companies as a whole, and rely on innovative management practices as a lever for maximising this function. That said, inducing MI to mobilise HR, especially in the current economic climate where companies are struggling to find their feet, is a matter for the manager, who considers this correlation to be fundamental.

In periods of confinement, for example (which is a strategy that forces companies, on pain of economic or criminal sanctions, to temporarily cease their activities and employees to remain in their homes), the tax relief proposed by the state as a compensatory measure to support companies has proved insufficient [39]. In this logic, our relevant results constitute a major contribution and conceive the correlation that exists between MI and PMRH as an indispensable strategy, i.e. a tool for tightening the professional links between HR and the company. However, these results, following [36], specify that mobilising practices can only succeed if employees are genuinely involved. In this context, certain features of the MI toolbox developed by [45] can be specifically called upon as MI to be introduced in the company to mobilise HR. These may include 'nudge' (which is a technique that consists of encouraging a person or group of people to change their behaviour and make choices without being coerced) or 'corporate hacking' (which is a technique that consists of consciously breaking the organisation's rules with the aim of improving these same rules and the way they operate). In times of health crisis, *nudge* could engage all HR staff in a sacred union against health hazards; it could also reassure

them about the measures taken to eradicate the disease, as noted by [39]. As for the *corporate hackers*, they can decide for themselves to take initiatives to make systems evolve in a benevolent way because they think it is good for the organisation. This strategy allows them to express themselves and feel fully useful [45].

During the period of general psychosis caused by the pandemic, almost all the players noted that social communication was an essential artefact for reassuring employees about the measures taken, which resulted in increased use of traditional and modern communication media to mobilise their staff. This result is in line with those of [50] and [22], who show that managerial value rests on an essential pillar in companies, which is "the word given". In the absence of a weak information system, social communication is a guarantee of trust and employee mobilisation. The need for social communication in the cases studied seems to be a profound trend that companies cannot ignore in a COVID-19 context, at the risk of being heavily penalised.

Faced with the negative effects of this crisis, company results and HR remuneration have been severely impacted. Taking as a reference the competing companies that suspended salaries and cut jobs, our results show that some managers (E1, E2, E3, E6) reacted promptly by putting in place a set of measures aimed at maintaining their employees' remuneration, which admittedly differed from one category of company to another, but were effective. This result is in line with those of [24], who show that the economic purpose undoubtedly involves the establishment of ethical and social values rather than profit alone. Furthermore, contrary to neo-classical postulates [16, 33, 13, 15, 49] which assert that the sole responsibility of the company is to increase profits for its shareholders, our results show that the majority of actors in the cases studied have implemented socially responsible practices such as IM even if these practices are dependent on acts of paternalism, they nevertheless constitute a tool for mobilising HR. Overall, this result shows that in times of health crisis, the implementation of CSR as MI constitutes a common thread of mobilisation practices for the managers of the cases studied as noted by [49].

Our results also led us to conclude that it is difficult to carry out identical MI in all cases because of the multitude of sizes and sectors of activity. Singularly, the MI implemented to mobilise HR depends on the type of company, size and sector of activity. For example, to mobilise its staff, the stakeholder in case (E6), a GE specialising in telecommunications, used teleworking, whereas the stakeholder in case (E1), an ME operating in logistics and transport, adopted part-time working with flexible working hours.

Finally, almost all the respondents admit that the MI put in place to mobilise HR in their respective structures is not well thought out, which seems to reflect employees' poor adaptation to these innovations, as noted by [22, 13, 39]. It is more a matter of spontaneity and naturalness. There are two reasons

1 Ndolè Common vernal vine is a 2-5cm plant. Its bitter leaves are elliptical in shape.

2 Kink diba or quinqu diba is a bushy shrub from West Africa.

3 Ekouk: Alstonia boonei or Alstonia congensis, part used, latex, bark

4 Aloe vera is an indoor plant widely known for its many health benefits, particularly for the hair and skin.



for this spontaneity: firstly, it is due to the unpreparedness and poor organisation of a certain category of company, in particular MEs and PEs. Secondly, and above all, it is due to the fact that COVID-19 took people by surprise in terms of its scale and unexpected seriousness. This corroborates the view of one manager: "there is still a lot of work to be done".

## 6. Conclusion

Examination of the reality of Cameroonian companies shows that the imperative of using MI to mobilise HR during a health crisis is necessary, but not always obvious. Through this research, we wish to highlight the interest of reflecting on the types of MI that company managers put in place in this period of health crisis to mobilise their HR. The cases studied showed that, faced with the threat posed by COVID-19, companies in all sectors and of all sizes are developing innovative forms and practices in their management, such as teleworking, rotating teams to work shifts and part-time work, social communication, maintaining regular pay, albeit at a reduced level, and health support and guidance. The aim of implementing these MIs is to mobilise HR, i.e. to get them to adopt behaviours geared towards the company's survival. In fact, a company that innovates in the way it manages people during a health crisis has a marginal propensity to focus its energies on achieving collective objectives. This managerial reality is based on the company's organisational and restructuring capacity, driven by the vision and perception of top management.

The results of this study appear to have certain limitations that may restrict their generalisability. These limitations are due to the exploratory nature of the study and the methodology used. Although the HR categories used (managers, supervisors, etc.) were a discriminating factor in our analysis, this may constitute another avenue of research that could lead to more robust results. Future results could also develop econometric analyses on a more representative sample in order to confirm or refute the conclusions of this exploratory research.

## Abbreviations

HR	Human Resource
MI	Managerial Innovation
HRMPs	Human Resource Mobilisation Practices
UPI	Informal Production Units
HCT	Human Capital Theory
RT	Resource Theory
SE	Small Enterprises
ME	Medium Enterprises
LE	Large Enterprises

## Author Contributions

**Atangana Joseph:** Conceptualization, Investigation,

Methodology, Writing – original draft

**Naïe Lucie:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Resources

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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