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IMPACT OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS PRACTICES ON EMPLOYEE RETENTION IN TELECOMMUNICATION INDUSTRY IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Employee retention is a critical issue in the highly competitive telecommunication industry, where low retention rates undermine organizational performance and sustainability. This study aimed to investigate the impact of industrial relations practices on employee retention in the telecommunication industry focusing on Airtel Kenya. The three theories that helped in guiding the study are Herzberg Two-Factor Theory, Hierarchy of Needs by Abraham Maslow and Hierarchy of Needs by Abraham Maslow. The research design used in the study was descriptive in order to thoroughly examine the present situation in the practice of industrial relations and its effect on retention of employees. The target population of 462 employees of Airtel Kenya was used in the determination of the sample size of 304 employees. Structured questionnaires, which were carried out electronically, were used to collect primary data. Data after collection were analyzed with the help of a Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) software Version 21, which was performed with the help of descriptive and inferential statistics. Data were summarized using descriptive statistics, which included means, standard deviations, percentages and frequencies. The relationship between the independent variables (industrial relations practices) and the dependent variable (employee retention) was quantified the way of multiple regression in inferential statistics. The study showed that relation between employers and employees had the most positive effect on retention (r = 0.088, b = 0.086), which is focused on communication, respect, and trust. The effects of employee involvement had weak positive relationship with employee retention (r = 0.039, b = 0.031). The effects of compensation (-0.004) and work-life balance were either insignificant or negligible, implying that while pay and flexibility are important they are not a major determining factor of employee retention. In general, the retention of employees in the telecommunication industry is more based on the relational and participatory practices than money or structural incentives.

Keywords: *Employee Compensation, Employee Retention, Employer-Employee Relations, Industrial Relations, Work-Life Balance*

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INTRODUCTION

Employee retention is critical for organizational competitive advantage and longevity because skilled employees provide unique expertise while their retention reduces turnover costs (Xuecheng et al., 2022). Effective retention strategies include extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors, compensation, organizational culture, peer support, work-life balance, employee involvement, and employer-employee relations (Arimie, 2019). Maintaining healthy employee relationships remains challenging due to increasing workforce demands (de Sousa et al., 2018; Bibi et al., 2018). Industrial relations encompass employment legislation, negotiations, collective bargaining, diversity management, equal opportunities, work-life balance, compensation, employee involvement, and employee engagement (Nwankwo et al., 2023).

Compensation and benefits demonstrate organizational value of employee time and energy, while employer-employee relations involving welfare initiatives, conflict resolution, communication, and collective bargaining are crucial for retention (Sorn et al., 2023). Work environment components include work-life balance, organizational culture, health and safety, workplace policies, and employee relations. Employee will work better if there is no tension between their personal life and work life. An organization that can support an environment that leads to an improved work-life balance leads to improved employee performance and retention (Sindhuja & Subramania, 2020). Employee involvement also drives productivity, with engaged employees showing greater creativity and innovation, enhancing organizational performance (Obiekwe et al., 2019).

Globally, employee retention is shaped by factors such as involvement, compensation, empowerment, and work-life balance. According to Khalid and Samina (2018), employee involvement impacts employee retention both directly and indirectly. Organizations suffer when highly skilled and talented employees depart, adversely affecting organizational performance. Palumbo et al. (2023) noted that employee involvement fosters commitment and psychological attachment, resulting in high employee resilience. An organization should therefore lay policies that establish a pluralist and democratic workplace, leading to highly empowered employees who attain control over their work and internalize goals that align with organizational success. Employee retention is also improved by work-life balance by reducing job burnout and enhancing overall job satisfaction (Hashim et al., 2022).

Regionally, employer-employee relations can have a positive or negative impact on organizational performance. South Africa is ranked as having the worst employer-employee relations because of its ineffective industrial relations laws, ranking position 137 out of 137 nations (Cillie, 2024). In Ghana, small and medium-sized organizations account for about 85% of manufacturing employment opportunities, yet employee retention has continued to overwhelm enterprises (Sanda & Ntsiful, 2021). More than 80% of employees voluntarily leaving an organization could be avoided if better human resource management policies were adopted. Employee engagement is therefore considered a key component that ensures the workforce is committed to their job and invested in their organization's values (Sanda & Ntsiful, 2021).

In Kenya, low employee retention leads to higher recruitment and selection costs, causing organizations to lose billions of shillings because of reduced efficiency (Wanjiru, 2018). The key causes of low employee retention are mostly managerial controllable factors such as poor compensation and benefits packages, lack of growth and promotions, poor work environment, poor employee-employer relations, and lack of involvement in decision making (Wanjiru, 2018). Wabomba (2019) found that employee involvement positively influences organizational outcomes, including retention, by enhancing job satisfaction, motivation, and performance. Employee compensation has also

been found to have an impact on employee retention in Kenya (Kamau & Omondi, 2020).

Kenya stands as Africa's seventh-largest telecommunications market and the global leader in mobile money services, playing a crucial role in the nation's Vision 2030 strategic plan focused on developing advanced telecommunications infrastructure (Veitch, 2022). Despite this growth, employee retention rates remain alarmingly low, threatening organizational sustainability, performance, and productivity (Mwangi, 2021). While job dissatisfaction was historically viewed as the primary cause of turnover (Akter & Akter, 2019), recent studies suggest that employer-employee relations, compensation, workplace culture, work-life balance, and engagement are equally critical. Airtel's overall employee turnover rate is 32.61% (Airtel-Africa, 2023). Given this high attrition rate, there is a need to determine how the company can employ industrial relations to support employee retention. This research sought to examine the impact of industrial relations on employee retention within Kenya's telecommunication industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

The first theory relied upon was Herzberg Two-Factor Theory, which explains job satisfaction and motivation by distinguishing hygiene factors from motivator factors (Lee et al., 2022). Hygiene factors such as working conditions, company policies, supervision quality, salary and benefits, and interpersonal relationships prevent dissatisfaction, while motivator factors such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement, and the work itself directly influence satisfaction and motivation (Alrawahi et al., 2020). This theory was appropriate for the study because it connects strongly with the work environment and employee retention variables. In the context of Airtel Kenya, factors such as work-life balance policies, workplace relationships, management support, and job conditions can determine whether employees feel satisfied enough to remain in the organization. Lee et al. (2022) applied the theory to factors influencing retention, particularly the quality of the working environment, while Ihensekien and Joel (2023) note that motivation requires a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Therefore, Herzberg's theory helped explain how improving the work environment can reduce dissatisfaction, strengthen motivation, and support employee retention.

The second theory relied upon was Social Exchange Theory, which explains human interaction through reciprocity, rewards, costs, and mutual exchange (Davlembayeva & Alamanos, 2023). The theory was relevant because employee retention depends partly on the quality of exchanges between employees and employers. Employees bring talent, time, energy, and commitment to the organization in exchange for remuneration packages, employment security, recognition, promotion, job advancement, involvement, and a pleasant workplace. When employees perceive these exchanges as fair and valuable, they are more likely to develop trust, commitment, engagement, and loyalty. Ahmad et al. (2023) describe Social Exchange Theory as one of the most influential theories in understanding workplace behavior, especially exchanges and relationships. Although Cropanzano et al. (2017) criticized the theory for placing too much emphasis on rational exchange and not enough on emotional and psychological factors, the theory remains useful in explaining employer-employee relationships and employee engagement. In this study, Social Exchange Theory helped explain how employer-employee relations, communication, support, conflict resolution, and employee involvement influence retention at Airtel Kenya.

The third theory relied upon was Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which explains human motivation through physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization needs (Trivedi & Mehta, 2019). Although the theory has been criticized for its cultural bias and assumption of a

universal hierarchy (Fielding & Hallet, 2022), it remains useful in explaining how employee needs influence motivation, performance, and retention (Ihensekien & Joel, 2023). This theory was particularly relevant to the compensation variable because pay supports employees' physiological and safety needs by providing financial stability. Fair and competitive compensation can also contribute to belonging, esteem, and self-actualization when employees feel valued, respected, and able to grow within the organization. In the context of Airtel Kenya, employees who perceive that their pay is commensurate with their effort and competitive in the market are more likely to remain loyal, committed, and motivated. Conversely, low pay or perceived unfair reward practices can create dissatisfaction and high turnover. Maslow's theory therefore helped the study assess whether compensation strategies at Airtel Kenya support employee needs, organizational commitment, and long-term retention.

Empirical Review

Empirical evidence shows that employer-employee relations are central to employee retention because they shape communication, trust, job satisfaction, absenteeism, and employees' willingness to remain in an organization. Ozturk and Karatepe (2019) found that positive employee-employer relationships improve communication between employees and management, reduce absenteeism, and increase job satisfaction in supportive workplace environments. Employees are more likely to feel valued when they can communicate with management and workplace peers, receive recognition, and work in a relaxed and positive culture. Similarly, Mahesh and Saravanakumar (2020) found that employee relationship management improves employee performance and organizational productivity by creating trust and understanding between managers and employees. Good relations between employees and employers improve employee well-being and performance, which can extend employee tenure. In contrast, Oruh et al. (2020) found that managerialist employment relations and non-participatory workplace cultures in Nigerian public hospitals increased doctors' intention to leave due to stress, burnout, dissatisfaction, and alienation. In Kenya, Muma et al. (2021) found that employee relations strategies significantly influenced employee retention in accredited universities, explaining 67.2% of the variation in retention. These studies collectively indicate that strong employer-employee relations support retention by improving communication, participation, trust, and workplace belonging.

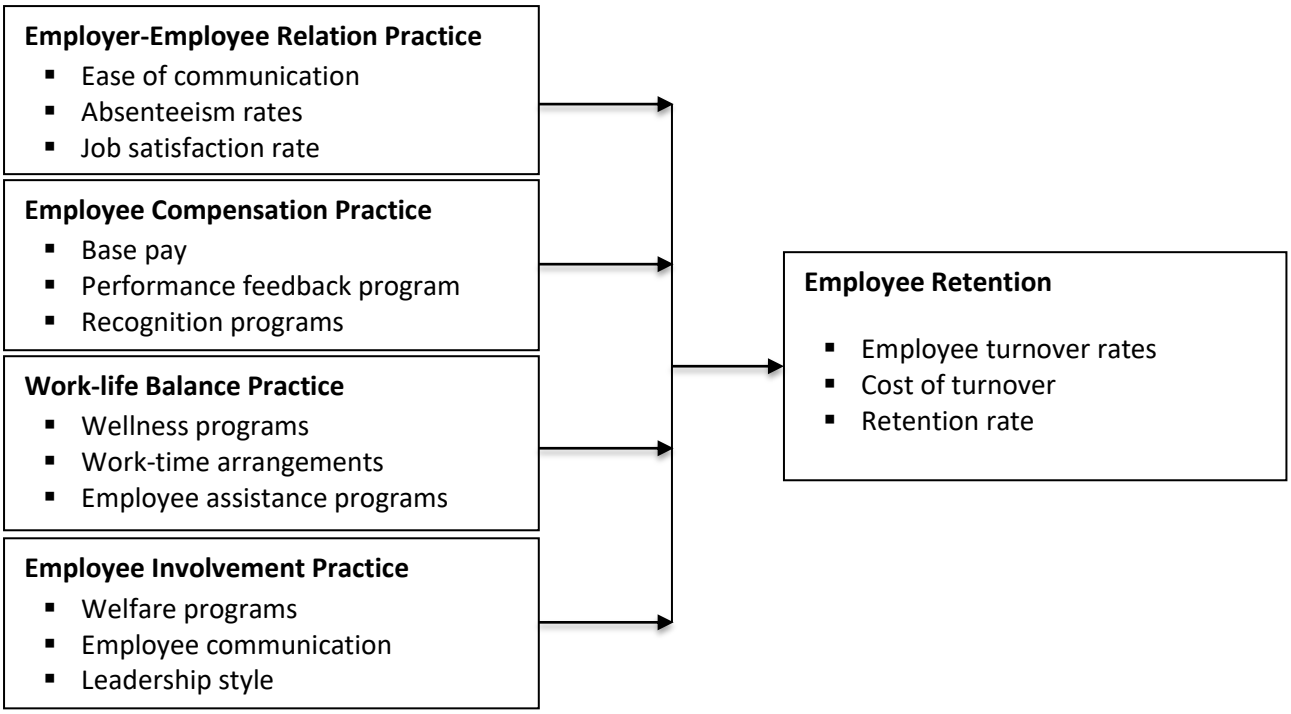
Compensation practices also emerge as a major predictor of retention, although empirical evidence shows that pay alone is not sufficient to secure long-term loyalty. Sorn et al. (2023) argue that competitive compensation improves retention by showing that the organization values employees, but organizational loyalty also depends on job satisfaction, work-life balance, career advancement, engagement, recognition, communication, leadership, and organizational culture. This is supported by Rachman and Hamzah (2023), who found that compensation and career development jointly influence retention. Fair and competitive pay strengthens loyalty and commitment, while career development provides opportunities for growth, advancement, and professional fulfilment. Hanai (2021), in a study of 370 employees in eleven Tanzanian banking institutions, similarly found that fair compensation significantly influenced retention by improving job satisfaction and employee commitment. However, the study also emphasized that banks should combine equitable pay with career development, recognition, work-life balance, and a positive work environment. Together, these studies show that compensation is a foundational retention strategy, but it becomes more effective when integrated with broader human resource practices that address both financial and non-financial employee needs.

Work-life balance practices are increasingly recognized as important retention mechanisms

because they reduce stress, support employee well-being, and improve job satisfaction. Sindhuja and Subramania (2020) identify work-life balance as a critical organizational strategy for supporting holistic employee wellness and productivity. Bouzikos et al. (2022) further show that employee assistance programs provide important support through counselling, financial advice, legal consultation, and mental health resources, demonstrating that organizations care about employees beyond their immediate work contribution. Empirical studies also confirm the retention effect of work-life balance. Kalev and Dobbin (2022), using data from 829 United States companies over 30 years, found that work-life balance policies such as flextime, parental leave, and childcare support reduced turnover, improved employee well-being, and supported diversity in management. Zainal et al. (2022), in a Malaysian service industry study involving 400 participants, found that work environment and work-life balance had a significant and positive impact on employee retention, although compensation and rewards had a stronger effect. Panda and Sahoo (2021) also found a statistically significant relationship between work-life balance and retention in software companies, with workplace flexibility, financial and non-financial rewards, teamwork, and family support contributing to improved retention. The study further found that psychological empowerment partially mediated the work-life balance and retention relationship. These findings indicate that work-life balance strengthens retention by reducing burnout, improving satisfaction, and helping employees manage professional and personal responsibilities.

Employee involvement is another important practice influencing retention because it promotes participation, commitment, motivation, and organizational belonging. Millah and Omuya (2024) describe employee involvement as a strategic human resource practice that allows employees to communicate, share concerns, participate in decision-making, and contribute to organizational improvement. Communication and supportive leadership are central because they create transparent channels for feedback, reduce hierarchical barriers, and build trust. Kossyva et al. (2021) found that employee involvement and engagement help retain talent by strengthening employees' cognitive, emotional, and behavioural attachment to the organization. Employees who feel valued, involved, and able to develop their skills are less likely to seek alternative employment. Sharina et al. (2023), using data from 345 participants in universities and colleges in NCR and Delhi, found that employee engagement positively affects both retention and performance. In Kenya, Millah and Omuya (2024) found a strong positive correlation between performance management and employee retention in state corporations, with correlation results showing r = 0.725 and ANOVA results indicating a highly significant relationship. Overall, the empirical evidence shows that employer-employee relations, compensation, work-life balance, and employee involvement jointly shape employee retention by improving satisfaction, commitment, motivation, and organizational attachment.

Based on the empirical review the study developed the conceptual framework in Figure 1. The dependent variable in the study was employee retention. The independent variables in the study included employee-employer relation, employee compensation, work-life balance, and employee involvement. Therefore, the conceptual framework explored the relationship between the variables in the study (Luft et al., 2022). It explained how the independent variable interacts with the dependent variable.



Independent Variables **Dependent Variable**

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

For this research, a survey research design was used in that it targeted all the employees of Airtel Kenya, including those in different departments and hierarchical levels. The target population consisted of 462 employees at Airtel Kenya, including middle management, lower management, and subordinate staff. A sample of 304 employees was selected from different levels across the company's organizational structure using stratified proportionate sampling. Primary data was collected using a Google while secondary data was collected from company records. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied in the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The focus of this section was to outline and present the analysis of the data and information collected from the 256 responses obtained and deemed satisfactory. The analysis and interpretation of the data collected have been provided using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Descriptive Results

This section presents the findings related to the study variables. In line with the study's objectives, it provides descriptive data on each variable.

Table 1: Descriptive Results of Employer-Employee Relation Practice on Employee Retention

Item	SD%	D %	N %	A %	SA%	M	SD
There is lack of proper communication of the company objectives and goals to the employees in the organization	20	48	24	6	2	3.78	0.69
I am not an employee that is valued and respected by the organization.	17	47	26	7	17	3.68	0.71
Being an employee, one will hardly suggest my organization to other people as a good place to work based on the experience.	43	28	15	10	4	3.55	0.74
The organization has an adequate appreciation of employee input	5	11	30	39	15	3.48	0.77
Employees are not given the right to make decisions that will affect my work in the organization.	42	32	15	3	8	3.58	0.72
Employees are committed staying with the organization as an employee for the foreseeable future	2	5	27	48	18	3.77	0.68
Addressing the concerns of the employees is a priority.	3	7	29	45	16	3.63	0.70
I report to work on a regular basis as a result of good relations with my employer.	4	8	31	42	15	3.56	0.74
Opportunities to grow and develop careers are provided by the organization	3	6	27	46	18	3.70	0.69
The company appreciates the idea of the work-life balance and well-being of employees.	2	6	25	48	19	3.76	0.70
Overall						**3.57**	**0.73**

Quite a number of the respondents were dissatisfied with communication in the organization. In particular, 20 percent strongly disagreed and 48 percent disagreed with a mean of 3.78 and standard deviation of 0.69. The standard deviation is rather moderate, which indicates that, although there are differences in perceptions, the majority of employees always feel that there is a lack of communication. This aligns with what Tsipurksy (2023) observe that poor communication can create a lot of uncertainty, demoralization and disconnect with organizational priorities. The reinforcement of communication channels can then be used to improve clarity and employee interaction.

In the same vein, there were worrying perceptions of respect and value. 17 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed and 47 disagreed that the organization values and respects them as employees (mean = 3.68, SD = 0.71). Even though a low percentage (17) was strongly in agreement, the general feelings are towards moderate lack of recognition. According to the research conducted by Ho and Shin (2025), job satisfaction, retention, and commitment are closely related to perceived respect and recognition. Consequently, the enhancement of recognition practices and inclusive leadership may have a beneficial effect on the welfare of employees. The bad perceptions were spread to the propensity of employees to recommend the organization as a good place to work in. Most of them 43 percent strongly disagreed while 28 percent disagreed that they would recommend the organization to other people (mean = 3.55, SD = 0.74).

Autonomy related responses were also significant with 42 percent strongly disagreeing and 32 percent disagreeing. This is equivalent to two-thirds of employees and believed that they were not given autonomy in decision-making (mean = 3.58, SD = 0.72). This aligns with Ye et al. (2025) who determined that limited autonomy reduces motivation and may impede innovation. Poor decision-making power can also lead to a slowness

of workflow and a lack of accountability in work. Employee loyalty indicators were better on the positive side. Almost two-thirds affirmed that the employees were determined to remain with the organization in the predictable future.48 percent agreed while 18 percent strongly agreed (mean = 3.77, SD = 0.68). This implies that, even with the communication and recognition issues employees can still get something about the work environment that supports or makes it consistent to affect retention. This is in line with the findings of Iqbal et al. (2017) who reported that job security, regular salaries and positive peer relations to retain even imperfect organizational culture.

Acknowledgment practices were not very convincing but moderate with that 39 percent agreeing and 15 strongly agreeing. Almost half of the respondents confirmed that employee contributions get good recognition (mean = 3.48, SD = 0.77). The higher standard deviation shows a wide variation of experience, which may be due to inconsistency in the various departments or bosses. Moderate support was also demonstrated in terms of addressing the concerns of employees.45 percent of the respondents agreed while 16 percent strongly agreed (mean = 3.63, SD = 0.70) that the organization is concerned with their concerns. The results on professional development were better. Two-thirds of the respondents (46 percent agreed while 18 percent strongly agreed) indicated that the organization offers opportunities in career development (mean = 3.70, SD = 0.69). Equally, three-quarters (48 percent agreed while 19 percent strongly agreed) accepted work-life balance and well-being was important to the organization (mean = 3.76, SD = 0.70). These results imply that not all the structural and cultural problems can be eradicated, but the organization is devoted to supporting employees in the long term and integrating their well-being.

The study investigated employee perceptions on issues that relate to compensation practices, recognition programs, and the performance feedback in the organization. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive Results of Employee Compensation Practice

Item	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	M	SD
My salary does not align to my efforts in the organization	6	36	30	12	16	3.44	0.75
The minimum salary is competitive to such position within the industry	7	13	31	34	15	3.37	0.77
The organization fails to perform feedback on performance on a regular basis	5	11	32	36	16	3.46	0.71
Recognition programs help me to develop a feeling of belonging within the organization.	8	14	30	32	16	3.34	0.76
Recognition programs enhance my sense of belonging at the organization	6	12	29	35	18	3.47	0.70
The organization does not regularly conduct performance feedback sessions	30	34	7	13	16	3.39	0.72
Being an employee, the individual will be less likely to refer others to the organization on the basis of its compensation policy.	33	12	31	16	8	3.37	0.74
The company has good compensation practices which show that it appreciates its employees.	9	14	30	32	15	3.29	0.78
The company lacks non-financial incentives to its staff	35	33	15	11	6	3.42	0.70
Employees feel valued due to their contribution and not based on monetary benefit.	7	12	31	33	17	3.41	0.72
Overall						**3.42**	**0.71**

Base pay perceptions were also found to be quite mixed. The proportion of 6 percent strongly disagreed while 36 percent of respondents disagreed and therefore concurred that their base pay is inconsistent with their contributions (mean = 3.44, SD = 0.75). The moderate standard deviation shows a certain degree of variability in the responses which implies that experiences can vary among job positions or departments. This is in line with what Chen et al. (2023) have noted, which perceived pay inequity could lead to lower motivation and commitment towards an organization, especially where workloads are high, and expectations are high.

Likewise, at the assessment of competitiveness base pay, 34 percent agreed while 15 strongly agreed stating harmonization with industry salaries (mean = 3.37, SD = 0.77). Even though the pay structure is rated as fair in the market compared to the slight majority, there is redistribution of the responses and a relatively large standard deviation indicating that pay could be competitive in one job and not competitive in another. Iqbal et al. (2017) supported this trend by stating that organizations that show an uneven pay satisfaction amongst employees tend to have variable market positioning.

Financial compensation was not viewed as highly as recognition of other contribution form. 36 percent agreed while 16 percent strongly agreed affirming that employees are valued in the sense that non-monetary means (mean = 3.46, SD = 0.71). The standard deviation is considered to be quite low, which implies moderate consistency of responses. This implies that even when the issue of financial compensation is raised, the organization can be doing more to promote a supportive or appreciative culture. 32 percent of employees agreed while 16 percent strongly agreed also indicating a positively rated recognition programs (mean = 3.34, SD = 0.76) as being effective in recognizing achievements of employees. But the standard deviation is moderate which implies that recognition experiences are varied which could be because of inconsistencies in its application by supervisors. The study by Jo and Shin (2025) contributes to the fact that the recognition programs should be implemented regularly to provide significant changes in morale and engagement.

In the sense of belonging, 35 percent agreed while 18 strongly agreed indicating that recognition programs make them feel more part of the organization (mean = 3.47, SD = 0.70). These results imply that recognition initiatives can have an impact on the emotional involvement of employees, which is a significant predictor of retention and productivity.

The practices of performance feedback seemed to be a major issue. 30 percent strongly disagreed while 34 percent disagreed indicating that the organization does not undertake performance feedback on a regular basis (mean = 3.39, SD = 0.72). This is in accordance with the literature that highlights the need to have structured feedback as a means of ensuring employee development, clarity, and accountability (Gnepp et al., 2020). Lack of regular appraisals may inhibit development and lower the morale of employees towards being supported by the managers.

The issue of compensation practices also played a major role in the recommendation of the organization to the employees. 33 percent strongly disagreed while 12 percent disagreed that they would be less inclined to recommend the organization on its compensation policy (mean = 3.37, SD =0.74). Though, the responses do not sound too negative, there is a note of significant dissatisfaction. This observation is consistent with that of Iqbal et al. (2017), who say that the transparency and fairness of compensation has a strong impact on the reputation of the employer.

On the question of whether the compensation practices demonstrate that the organization places value on its employees, 32 percent agreed while 15 strongly agreed (mean = 3.29, SD = 0.78), which is moderately skeptical. Non-financial benefits are

also not sufficient. 35 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed that while 33 percent disagreed meaning they are not offered (mean = 3.42, SD = 0.70). This highlights the necessity of holistic compensation plans that incorporate wellness plans, leave benefits, career support and flexible jobs. Nevertheless, there were no alarming results on overall satisfaction with compensation as 33 percent of the respondents agreed while 17 percent strongly agreed (mean = 3.41, SD = 0.72). This implies that the compensation practices are not viewed as exemplary, but it might be sufficient to a great number of employees.

The research determined perceptions of employees on wellness programs, work-life balance, flexibility and accessibility as well as usefulness of employee assistance program (EAPs). The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive Results of Employee Work-life Balance Practice

Item	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	M	SD
My organization has wellness programs that enable me to have a healthy work-life balance.	4	10	27	41	18	3.59	0.70
My working schedule enables me to manage my job and the personal life quite well.	5	12	28	39	16	3.50	0.73
The company is flexible in scheduling of work	3	8	26	45	18	3.67	0.69
My employer is a supporter of the use of employee assistance program in order to help staff improve their well-being.	6	11	29	38	16	3.47	0.74
In case of personal and work-related issues I can access employee assistance programs (EAPs).	8	13	27	36	16	3.39	0.75
The EAPs that my organization offers have benefited my performance and well-being at work.	4	10	28	42	16	3.56	0.70
The organization is willing to invest in safety and wellness of their employees, and this affects my loyalty and job satisfaction	3	9	26	44	18	3.66	0.68
My organization has wellness programs that help me to stay physically and mentally healthy.	5	11	29	38	17	3.52	0.72
Wellness programs at the organization do not demonstrate its commitment to supporting employee well-being	42	28	17	4	9	3.59	0.71
I do not know about any assistance programs to employees present in my workplace.	41	27	17	5	10	3.56	0.70
Overall						3.49	0.72

Most of the respondents stated that organizational wellness programs help them to achieve work-life balance. Precisely, 41 percent agreed with the statement while 18 percent strongly agreed (mean = 3.59, SD = 0.70. This implies that wellness programs are favorable to majority of the employees and moderate standard deviation means that most respondents hold similar perceptions. This is in line with the findings of a study done by Cohen et al. (2023) which focus on well-constructed wellness programs, to the extent that burnout rates are reduced and employee satisfaction increases. Work-life balance due to scheduling was also fairly supported, with 39 percent of respondents agreeing while 16 percent of the respondents strongly agreeing that their schedules give them an opportunity to balance work and personal life (mean = 3.50, SD = 0.73).

Although 5 percent strongly disagreed and 12 percent disagreed, the general trend is that the practices of schedule seem to be supportive. This type of findings is indicative of the claim made by

Cohen et al. (2023) that predictable and manageable schedules play an important role in employee well-being and retention. Flexibility of work was seen in even a better way. 45 percent agreed that there is flexible scheduling in the organization while 18 percent strongly agreed (mean = 3.67, SD = 0.69). The standard deviation is low and this implies a wide agreement on this matter. This implies that the organization has flexibility as a strength, which is an indication that flexibility serves as a major source of organizational commitment and morale (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021).

The views about employee assistance programs, in turn, were more ambivalent. In response to the question on whether the employer actively encourages the use of EAPs, 38 percent of the respondents agreed whereas 16 percent of the respondents strongly agreed with the issue (mean = 3.47, SD = 0.74). This implies that even though there is promotion, there can be discrepancies in the effectiveness of information being given to employees. The same trend was observed with access to EAPs where 36 percent agreed while 16 percent strongly agreed indicating that they have access (mean = 3.39, SD = 0.75). The standard deviation is high, which implies that the experiences of the employees are varied, and it may be due to the differences in departments or language barriers. Such results match those of Long and Cooke (2023), who discovered that awareness and communication have a considerable influence on the use of employee support programs. Irrespective of these, the views of the effects of EAPs were positive. 42 percent of the participants agreed while 16 percent strongly agreed that EAPs had a positive impact on their performance and well-being (mean = 3.56, SD = 0.70). The uniformity of the answers shows that employees that use EAPs find them helpful and, in line with the findings of Long and Cooke (2023) employee assistance programs enhance mental health, decrease absenteeism and raise productivity.

Organizational commitment also seems to be affected by wellness program as 44 percent agreed while 18 percent strongly agreed that safety and wellness programs make them more loyal and job satisfied (mean = 3.66, SD = 0.68). This excellent agreement indicates that wellness programs have a significant influence on the formation of employee attitudes and organizational attachment, as it is also the case with Cohen et al. (2023). However, a fairly large proportion of the participants indicated that they were skeptical about the organization in its well-being commitment. 42 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed while 28 percent disagreed that the wellness programs were not reflective of the actual organizational commitment (mean = 3.59, SD = 0.71). Such inconsistency means that despite the advantage of wellness programs with many employees, other employees feel that they are too restricted, or that they are token. In addition, 41 percent of respondents strongly disagreed while 27 percent disagreed that they were unaware of the existing EAPs (mean = 3.56, SD = 0.70), meaning that there is a good communication channel.

The research examined the perceptions of the employees regarding the engagement in the organizational processes, effectiveness of communication, the style of leadership, and recognition.

Table 4: Employee Involvement Practice Descriptive Statistics

Item	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	M	SD
Being a worker, I would suggest my organization as a good workplace to work in, due to its practice of employee involvement	4	9	28	41	18	3.60	0.68
My input and feedback are valued in the decision-making process	3	8	29	43	17	3.63	0.67
My supervisor promotes and believes in having open conversations and appreciates employee input.	5	10	30	38	17	3.52	0.69
In my organization, there is lack of proper communication between employees and the management.	28	12	6	37	17	3.47	0.71
I am provided with effective and timely communication on workplace policies and decisions.	4	8	29	41	18	3.61	0.68
My organization has a supportive and interactive work environment due to its leadership style.	3	7	27	44	19	3.69	0.66
One does not have a strong emotional attachment to the organization.	30	39	4	9	18	3.57	0.69
Employees have faith in the leadership in the organization	5	10	29	39	17	3.52	0.70
believe that my supervisor does not support or acknowledge my work	3	42	7	30	18	3.63	0.67
It gives me a sense of appreciation within my organization as I am recognized in what I do.	3	8	29	42	18	3.64	0.68
Overall						3.48	0.67

The results in Table 4 are mostly positive and indicate that employees experience is positive in these areas, although some contradictions show that the areas could be improved through the enhancement of communication and recognition practices. Most of the respondents had positive views towards employee involvement. In particular, 41percent agreed while 18 percent strongly agreed to recommending the organization as a great place to work based on their involvement practices (mean = 3.60, SD = 0.68). 4 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed while 9 percent disagreed indicating that majority of the employees perceive involvement initiatives positively. This is in line with other studies that revealed inclusive decision-making provides morale and organizational commitment (Li & Tang, 2022).

The input of employees seems to be important in the decision-making process with 43 percent of them strongly agreeing and 17 percent agreeing that their input is taken into account (mean = 3.63, SD = 0.67). The standard deviation is low and this means that the responses are relatively consistent implying a high culture of participation. These results are connected to the previous research conducted by Kariuki and Thungu (2020), which also emphasized the positive impact of participatory leadership on empowerment and ownership of organizational goals. The moderation of supervisor support towards open discussion was moderate. 38 percent of the respondents agreed while 17 percent strongly agreed that their supervisors promote free communication and appreciation of contributions (mean = 3.52, SD = 0.69). The general trend also portrays an enabling supervisory environment despite 15 percent of those disagreeing. This is in line with the conclusions of Men et al., (2022) who noted that supervisory communication is significant in enhancing employee trust and engagement.

A mixed response was more towards communication between management and staff. 37 percent agreed in contrast to the 28 percent of them who strongly disagreed on the fact that they

experience poor communication (mean = 3.47, SD = 0.71), which represents divided experiences. The standard deviation average indicates the disparity in the quality of communication within a department or a team. This contradiction can be attributed to Ma (2022), who mention that the organizational communication channels often lack information.

Despite the communication problem, 41 percent of the employees agreed while 18 percent strongly agreed that they are made well and timely informed about aspects relating to policies and organizational decision making (mean = 3.61, SD = 0.68). This is to show that management communication can be deemed poor by some individuals, however, there is a possibility of some proper official communications being presented. These contradictions exist, which proves the significance of having an improved relationship with each other, not with the help of official declarations.

The attitude to the leadership was favorable as well, with 44 percent of the participants agreeing on the fact that leadership provides a good working environment and it makes working interesting and 19 percent strongly agreeing (mean = 3.69, SD = 0.66). The small value of standard deviation indicates the similarity in perception which implies leadership cohesiveness. This agrees with the findings of a study conducted by Men et al., (2022), where the supportive leadership is significant in job satisfaction and organizational alignment.

Inferential Analysis

This section presents the inferential analysis results on the relationship between industrial relations practices and employee retention at Airtel Kenya. The analysis began with Pearson correlation, whose results are in Table 5.

Table 5: Pearson Correlations Matrix

	EER	EC	WLB	EI	ER
Employer_Employee_Relations (EER)	1	-.078	-.021	.092	.088
		.000	.001	.000	.001
Employee Compensation (EC)	-.078	1	.073	.010	-.004
	.000		.000	.030	.000
Work_Life_Balance (WLB)	-.021	.073	1	.000	.014
	.040	.001		.001	.001
Employee Involvement (EI)	.092	.010	.000	1	.039
	.001	.040	.000		.001
Employee Retention (ER)	.088	-.004	.014	.039	1
	.001	.000	.001	.001	

The Pearson correlation results show the strength and direction of the relationship between the independent variables and employee retention. Employer-employee relations had the strongest positive correlation with employee retention, although the relationship was still very weak, r = .088. This means that better employer-employee relations are associated with slightly higher employee retention. Employee involvement also had a weak positive relationship with retention, r = .039, suggesting that involving employees in decision-making may slightly support retention.

Work-life balance had a very weak positive correlation with employee retention, r = .014, meaning that improvements in work-life balance are linked to a small increase in retention. Employee compensation had a very weak negative correlation with retention, r = -.004, showing that compensation had almost no direct relationship with employee retention in the correlation results. Overall, the correlation values are close to zero, meaning the relationships are weak, even where they are statistically significant.

Table 6 presents the model summary for the regression analysis, showing how well the independent variables explain changes in employee retention.

Table 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig.
1	.774[a]	.599	.593	.504	.001

The model summary shows that the regression model had an R value of .774 and an R Square value of .599. This means that the four industrial relations practices explain 59.9% of the variation in employee retention. The Adjusted R Square value of .593 also shows that the model has a good level of explanatory power after adjusting for the number of predictors. Therefore, the model suggests that employer-employee relations, compensation, work-life balance and employee involvement jointly explain a substantial part of employee retention at Airtel Kenya.

Table 7 presents the ANOVA results, showing whether the overall regression model significantly predicts employee retention.

Table 7: ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.440	4	.360	1.773	.001[b]
	Residual	157.899	251	.629		
	Total	159.340	255			

The ANOVA results show whether the overall regression model is statistically significant. The reported results show F = 1.773 and p = .001. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the model is statistically significant. This means that the independent variables, when considered together, significantly predict employee retention. Therefore, the model is useful in explaining how industrial relations practices influence employee retention.

Table 8 presents the regression coefficients, showing the individual effect of each independent variable on employee retention.

Table 8: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.024	.486		6.223	<.001
	Employer-Employee Relations	.293	.069	.086	4.356	.000
	Employee Compensation	.201	.071	.001	2.015	.001
	Work-Life Balance	.218	.069	.016	3.254	.001
	Employee Involvement	.267	.075	.031	3.496	.001

The regression coefficients show that all four industrial relations practices had a positive and statistically significant effect on employee retention at Airtel Kenya. Employer-employee relations had the strongest effect, B = .293, β = .086, p < .001, meaning that better communication, respect, fairness and trust between management and employees increase the likelihood of employees staying in the organisation. This finding agrees with the view that positive workplace relations improve morale, commitment and loyalty because employees are more likely to remain where they feel valued and fairly treated (Muma et al., 2021; Ahmad et al., 2023). It also supports the argument that well-managed employer-employee relations

strengthen engagement and satisfaction (Arimie, 2019).

Employee compensation also had a positive and statistically significant effect on employee retention, B = .201, β = .001, p = .001. Although the standardized beta value was very small, the result shows that compensation still contributes to retention. This means that fair pay, rewards and recognition can encourage employees to remain in the organisation, but compensation alone may not be the strongest factor. This supports Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which views compensation as a hygiene factor that prevents dissatisfaction, while other factors such as recognition, responsibility and growth strengthen motivation. The finding is also consistent with studies showing that fair rewards and compensation practices support employee retention (Kamau & Omondi, 2020; Sorn et al., 2023).

Work-life balance had a positive and statistically significant effect on employee retention, B = .218, β = .016, p = .001. This means that flexible, safe and supportive working conditions help employees manage work and personal responsibilities, making them more likely to stay. The result agrees with literature which argues that work-life balance improves employee well-being, reduces stress and supports productivity (Sindhuja & Subramanian, 2020). However, its weaker beta value suggests that work-life balance supports retention, but it may work better when combined with strong leadership, communication and employee support.

Employee involvement also had a positive and statistically significant effect on retention, B = .267, β = .031, p = .001. This means that employees are more likely to remain in the organisation when they are included in decision-making, problem-solving and organisational activities. This finding supports Social Exchange Theory because employees who feel trusted and involved are likely to respond with stronger commitment and loyalty. It also agrees with studies showing that participation, consultation and empowerment make employees feel valued and reduce turnover intentions (Wabomba, 2019; Sharina et al., 2023).

Overall, employer-employee relations had the strongest standardized effect, followed by employee involvement, work-life balance and employee compensation. Since all predictors had p-values below 0.05, all four null hypotheses were rejected. This means that employer-employee relations, employee compensation, work-life balance and employee involvement each have a statistically significant influence on employee retention. The findings suggest that retention at Airtel Kenya is not influenced by one factor alone, but by a combination of fairness, communication, recognition, flexibility and employee participation. Therefore, Airtel Kenya can strengthen retention by improving industrial relations practices, especially workplace relationships and employee involvement.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study examined how industrial relations practices impact employee retention in the telecommunication industry in Kenya. Employer-employee relation practice is very key in Airtel Kenya and this contributes immensely to retention. The use of respect, trust, open communication, and active listening helps to establish psychologically safe environment and value among employees. These positive relations create loyalty and lower turnover. When there is clear communication and agreed measures that are mutually agreed, there will be confidence among the employees in the organization. Thus, good retention policies, commitment, and motivation to work in the organization are enhanced by good relationship practices.

Employee compensation is a retention factor though it is not as effective as other factors. While competitive remuneration. An open pay system creates a level of confidence and aids in retaining high performers, which enables to have a more dedicated and enthusiastic workforce. Flexibility and personal well-being are important to the

employees and therefore work-life balance is essential in retention. Supportive policies lessen stress, enhance contentment, and enhance loyalty. In Airtel Kenya, there is a lack of perception towards poor working environments, which influences retention levels. The use of flexible work hours, work at home opportunities and burnout prevention strategies improves morale and eliminates absenteeism. Work-life balance is an important retention strategy when employees have the ability to balance between personal and professional life and they are more likely to be productive, engaged and less likely to leave.

Employee engagement significantly leads to retention through employee ownership, engagement, and emotional commitment. The morale increases, and the turnover decreases when the staff is involved in the decision making and feel that their input is taken into consideration. Responsibility and association with the organization is enhanced as people are encouraged to take part in goal-setting, problem-solving, and innovation. In Airtel Kenya, inclusion culture can be encouraged to increase the level of satisfaction and minimize disengagement. Engagement high reduces employee power and contributes to increased recognition and long-term commitment and retention in the organization.

Based on the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance employee retention through improved industrial relations practices at Airtel Kenya and other industries or organizations. These include but are not limited to Airtel Kenya; Airtel Kenya should enhance communication channels between management and employees to boost transparency and trust. These channels should allow for open feedback and continuous dialogue. In addition, decentralization of the decision-making process would make employees feel valued and that their opinions matter, and it would improve retention. Likewise, reviewing compensation structures to reflect market standards and employee expectations would promote loyalty. Moreover, there is a need to develop institutional policies that formalize employee engagement practices, making them part of performance management and leadership development strategies. Likewise, Airtel Kenya should incorporate retention-focused objectives in HR policy frameworks, linking employee involvement initiatives to organizational performance metrics and rewards.

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