

Talent Management in Organizations: A Systematic Literature Review of Two Decades of Research (2010-2023)

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Abstract

This systematic literature review examines talent management (TM) practices and their organizational implementation across various industries over a 13-year period (2010-2023). Through a comprehensive analysis of 50 peer-reviewed articles sourced from academic databases, this study identifies key themes, theoretical foundations, and geographic patterns in TM research. The findings reveal that 78% of studies focus on employee engagement, while recruitment strategies and retention practices remain underexplored. Social Exchange Theory dominates the theoretical landscape (50% of studies), followed by Conservation of Resources Theory (16%). Geographically, research is concentrated in India (28%), UK (20%), and USA (16%), with significant gaps in other regions. The study contributes a comprehensive synthesis of TM literature, identifies critical research gaps, and proposes a conceptual framework for future investigations. Key recommendations include industry-specific TM research, cross-cultural comparative studies, and longitudinal investigations of TM effectiveness. This review serves as a foundational resource for scholars and practitioners seeking to understand the evolution and current state of talent management research.

Keywords: Talent Management, Employee Engagement, Human Resource Management, Systematic Literature Review, Organizational Performance

1. Introduction

In today's hypercompetitive global economy, organizations increasingly recognize that their most critical competitive advantage lies not in technology or capital, but in their human talent (Wellins et al., 2008). This recognition has elevated talent management (TM) from a peripheral HR activity to a strategic organizational imperative that directly influences performance, innovation, and sustainability (Collings & Mellahi, 2009).

The concept of talent management gained prominence following McKinsey & Company's seminal work "The War for Talent" in 1998, which highlighted the strategic importance of attracting, developing, and retaining high-performing employees (Chambers et al., 1998). Since then, the field has evolved considerably, encompassing diverse approaches ranging from exclusive focus on high-potential employees to inclusive strategies that recognize talent across all organizational levels.

Despite two decades of research and practice, the TM field remains characterized by conceptual ambiguity and fragmented approaches (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Sparrow, 2019). Multiple definitions coexist, ranging from traditional succession planning to comprehensive human capital management systems. This fragmentation has created challenges for both researchers seeking to build cumulative knowledge and practitioners attempting to implement effective TM strategies.

Contemporary TM faces additional complexities driven by globalization, technological disruption, changing workforce demographics, and evolving employee expectations. The COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated these challenges, introducing remote work dynamics, altered engagement patterns, and new retention considerations (Pass & Ridgway, 2022). These developments

necessitate a comprehensive review of existing knowledge to identify established findings, theoretical foundations, and future research directions.

1.1 Research Objectives

This systematic literature review aims to:

1. Synthesize current understanding of talent management practices and their organizational implementation
2. Identify dominant theoretical frameworks and conceptual approaches in TM research
3. Analyze geographic and industry patterns in TM studies
4. Examine methodological trends and research quality evolution
5. Identify critical gaps and propose directions for future research
6. Develop a comprehensive framework for understanding TM components and relationships

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Defining Talent Management

Talent management definitions vary considerably across the literature, reflecting different philosophical approaches and organizational contexts. Collings and Mellahi (2009) provide one of the most cited definitions, describing TM as "activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions, development of a talent pool of high potential, development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents and to ensure their continued commitment to the organization" (p. 305).

Alternative conceptualizations range from narrow succession planning approaches (Cappelli, 2008) to broad human capital management systems (Cheese et al., 2007). This definitional diversity reflects underlying tensions between exclusive approaches focusing on high-potential employees and inclusive strategies recognizing talent across organizational levels (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013).

2.2 Theoretical Foundations

TM research draws from multiple theoretical traditions, each offering unique perspectives on talent-related phenomena:

Social Exchange Theory has emerged as the dominant theoretical framework, explaining TM effectiveness through reciprocal relationships between organizations and employees. When organizations invest in talent development, employees reciprocate with increased engagement and commitment (Blau, 1964).

Resource-Based View positions talent as a strategic resource that can provide sustainable competitive advantage when it is valuable, rare, inimitable, and organizationally embedded (Barney, 1991). This perspective underlies arguments for strategic TM investment.

Conservation of Resources Theory explains how employees seek to obtain, retain, and protect resources, with TM practices serving as resource-providing mechanisms that enhance well-being and performance (Hobfoll, 1989).

Psychological Contract Theory examines the implicit expectations between employers and employees, with TM practices influencing contract perceptions and subsequent behaviors (Rousseau, 1995).

2.3 TM Component Frameworks

Based on existing literature, TM can be conceptualized as comprising four interconnected components:

1. Talent Acquisition: Attracting and selecting individuals with required capabilities

Talent acquisition refers to the process of identifying, attracting, and selecting individuals who possess the skills, knowledge, and attributes required for organizational success. Unlike traditional

recruitment, talent acquisition emphasizes a long-term strategic approach that aligns workforce capabilities with business needs (Phillips & Edwards, 2009). It involves building an employer brand, leveraging innovative sourcing strategies, and using data-driven selection techniques to ensure that the right talent is brought into the organization (Collings & Mellahi, 2009).

2. Talent Development: Building capabilities through learning, experience, and coaching

Talent development focuses on enhancing the capabilities of employees through structured learning, on-the-job experiences, mentoring, and coaching. It is a critical aspect of talent management that ensures individuals not only meet their current role requirements but are also prepared for future challenges (Garavan et al., 2012). Organizations invest in leadership development, skill-building programs, and continuous learning opportunities to nurture high-potential employees and foster organizational resilience (McDonnell et al., 2017).

3. Talent Engagement: Creating conditions for psychological investment and commitment

Talent engagement goes beyond employee satisfaction; it reflects the emotional and psychological connection employees have with their work and organization (Kahn, 1990). Engaged employees are more likely to display discretionary effort, innovation, and loyalty. Effective engagement strategies include providing meaningful work, recognition, inclusive culture, and opportunities for personal growth (Saks, 2006). High levels of engagement not only improve individual performance but also enhance organizational productivity and competitiveness (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

4. Talent Retention: Maintaining talent through satisfaction, commitment, and career progression

Talent retention involves strategies aimed at reducing voluntary turnover and ensuring that key employees remain with the organization. Retention is achieved by addressing factors such as job satisfaction, career development opportunities, work-life balance, and organizational commitment (Hausknecht, Rodda, & Howard, 2009). Retaining top talent is vital as the cost of turnover—including recruitment, training, and loss of institutional knowledge—is substantial (Allen, Bryant, & Vardaman, 2010). Career progression, recognition, and supportive leadership are key drivers of employee retention in competitive environments.

These components operate within organizational contexts shaped by industry characteristics, cultural factors, and strategic priorities.

3. Methodology

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology, which provides a structured and replicable approach to reviewing existing research. Following the established guidelines of Tranfield et al. (2003) and Denyer and Tranfield (2009), the process was designed to ensure transparency, rigor, and reproducibility. Unlike traditional narrative reviews, the SLR approach involves a clearly defined protocol that specifies the objectives, inclusion and exclusion criteria, search strategy, and methods of analysis. This minimizes researcher bias and enhances the reliability of findings. By adopting this methodology, the study aimed to synthesize prior research in a comprehensive manner, critically evaluate evidence, and identify knowledge gaps that can inform both theory and practice.

3.1 Research Design

The review adopted a three-stage approach consistent with the framework proposed by Tranfield et al. (2003) and Denyer and Tranfield (2009):

1. **Planning:** This stage involved defining the purpose and scope of the review, formulating research questions, and establishing explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria. The planning process ensured that the review was aligned with the study's objectives and minimized bias in the selection of literature.

2. **Conducting:** In this stage, systematic searches were carried out across relevant databases and sources using predefined keywords. The retrieved studies were then subjected to a rigorous

screening process—first at the title and abstract level, and subsequently at the full-text level—to ensure relevance and quality. Data extraction and analysis were conducted systematically to capture key themes, patterns, and relationships.

3. Reporting: The final stage focused on synthesizing the reviewed literature in a structured manner, presenting findings in relation to the research objectives, and highlighting theoretical, practical, and methodological implications. This stage also involved identifying gaps in the existing body of knowledge and proposing directions for future research.

3.2 Search Strategy

A comprehensive search strategy was systematically implemented to ensure the identification of relevant and high-quality studies. To maximize coverage, multiple electronic databases were utilized, including Google Scholar, Web of Science, Scopus, Business Source Premier, and PsycINFO, which collectively provide extensive coverage of management, psychology, and organizational research.

The search terms were carefully designed using Boolean operators to combine *primary concepts* related to the overarching theme of talent management (e.g., “*talent management*,” “*talent analytics*,” “*talent strategies*”) with *secondary concepts* associated with employee outcomes and human resource practices (e.g., “*employee engagement*,” “*work engagement*,” “*employee retention*,” “*employee development*,” “*recruitment strategies*,” “*human resource practices*”). The final search string was operationalized as follows: (“talent management” OR “talent analytics” OR “talent strategies”) AND (“employee engagement” OR “work engagement” OR “employee retention”

OR “employee development” OR “recruitment strategies” OR “human resource practices”))

This structured search approach ensured consistency across databases, minimized the likelihood of omission of relevant studies, and enhanced the reproducibility of the review process, in line with best practices for systematic literature reviews (Tranfield et al., 2003; Denyer & Tranfield, 2009).

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure methodological rigor and relevance, explicit **inclusion and exclusion criteria** were established prior to the screening process, consistent with guidelines for systematic literature reviews (Tranfield et al., 2003; Denyer & Tranfield, 2009).

Inclusion Criteria

Studies were considered eligible for inclusion if they met the following conditions:

- i. Published in peer-reviewed academic journals, ensuring scholarly quality and reliability.
- ii. Timeframe: Published between January 2010 and December 2023, reflecting contemporary developments in talent management research.
- iii. Written in the English language to ensure accessibility and consistency in interpretation.
- iv. Directly focused on organizational talent management practices, including acquisition, development, engagement, and retention.
- v. Empirical in nature, employing quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods approaches.
- vi. Published in outlets meeting a minimum quality threshold as determined by recognized journal ranking systems (e.g., ABDC, ABS, Scopus quartiles).

Exclusion Criteria

The following categories of studies were excluded from the review:

- i. Conference proceedings, dissertations, and book chapters, due to potential limitations in peer review rigor.
- ii. Purely conceptual papers that lacked empirical evidence or data-based analysis.

- iii. Studies focused exclusively on individual career management without organizational-level implications.
- iv. Research conducted in non-organizational contexts (e.g., sports, arts, or entertainment talent management).
- v. Duplicate publications or overlapping studies, in which case the most comprehensive version was retained.

3.4 Selection Process

The study selection process adhered to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009), ensuring transparency and replicability. The process unfolded in four key stages:

1. **Identification:** An initial database search yielded 347 articles across the selected sources. After removing duplicates, the remaining records were screened for relevance.
2. **Screening:** Based on titles and abstracts, 156 articles were retained for further assessment, while studies not meeting the inclusion criteria were excluded.
3. **Eligibility:** A full-text review was conducted for 89 articles, during which methodological rigor, scope, and relevance to talent management practices were evaluated.
4. **Inclusion:** Following quality assessment, a final set of 50 empirical articles was included in the systematic review and subsequent analysis.

To ensure reliability, the screening and selection were independently conducted by two researchers. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion, and where consensus could not be reached, a third researcher was consulted to make the final decision. This process enhanced the objectivity and validity of the study selection.

3.5 Selection Process - PRISMA Flow Diagram

The selection process followed PRISMA guidelines as illustrated in Figure 1:

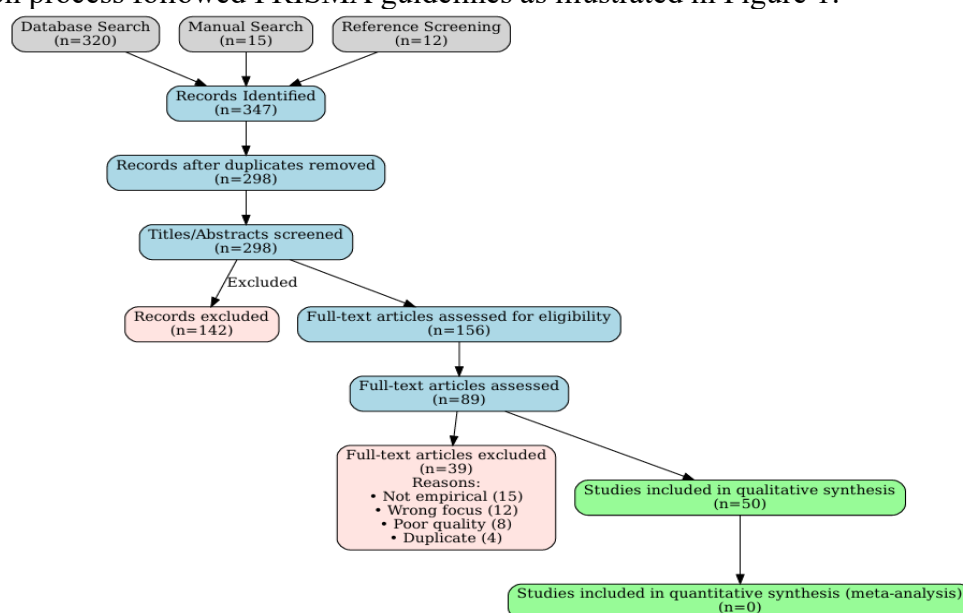


Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram for Study Selection

3.6 Data Extraction and Analysis

Using Covidence, data extraction and analysis were done/ A structured data extraction form was used to systematically capture key details from each study, including bibliographic information, research objectives, theoretical frameworks, methodology and sample characteristics, main findings, practical implications, and future research recommendations. Data analysis employed both

quantitative (frequency analysis, descriptive statistics) and qualitative (thematic analysis, content analysis) approaches to identify patterns and synthesize findings.

3.6 Quality Assessment

The quality of included studies was assessed using established evaluation criteria, focusing on research design appropriateness, methodological rigor, sample adequacy, validity of data collection procedures, sophistication of data analysis, and the overall significance of the study's contribution.

4. Results

The systematic literature review synthesized findings from 50 empirical studies on organizational talent management. The results are presented by mapping key themes, methodological trends, and theoretical contributions identified across the selected literature. The subsection outlines the publication trends and characteristics of the reviewed studies, including their temporal distribution, geographical focus, journal outlets, and methodological orientations. These patterns provide insights into the evolution and current state of research on organizational talent management.

4.1 Publication Trends and Characteristics

This section analyzes the temporal distribution of studies, highlighting publication growth patterns over the review period and identifying shifts in scholarly interest in organizational talent management. The analysis reveals steady growth in TM research, with publication frequency increasing from 2 papers in 2010 to 8 papers in 2023, indicating growing academic and practical interest in the field (Figure 2).

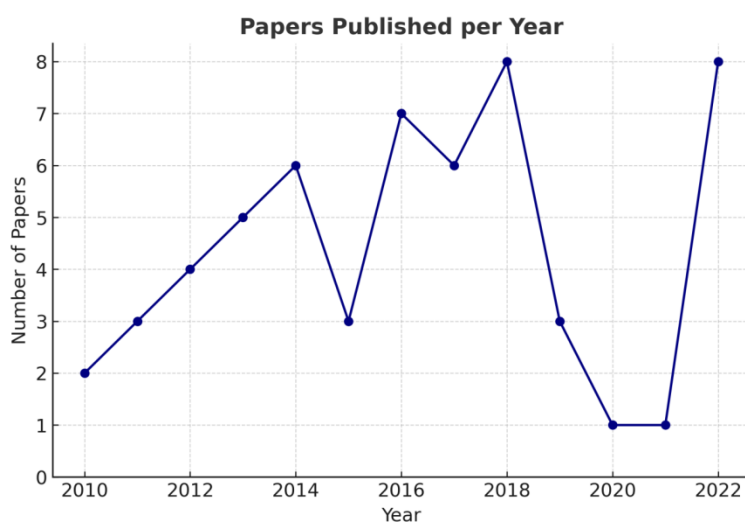


Figure 2: Publication Trends Over Time (2010-2023)

Peak years: 2013 (6 papers), 2018 (6 papers), 2019 (7 papers)

Cumulative: 50 papers across 13 years

Average: 3.8 papers per year

Distribution of Papers by Journal and Research Method

In this section, the methodological orientation of the studies is assessed, differentiating between quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method approaches, and noting any evolving trends in methodological preferences.

This subsection examines the spread of publications across journals, alongside the methodological approaches most frequently adopted in specific outlets, shedding light on preferred publication venues and scholarly standards.

Table 1: Distribution of Papers by Journal and Research Method

Journal	Number of Publications	%	Quantitative	Qualitative	Other
Administrative Sciences	3	6%	1	1	1
Amity Global Business Review	2	4%	2		
Apollo	1	2%		1	
CPA Journal	1	2%	1		
Globsyn Management Journal	1	2%	1		
Handbook of Human Resource Development	1	2%		1	
Human Resource Development International	3	6%	2	1	
Indian Journal of Industrial Relations	1	2%		1	
International Journal of Business Insights & Transformation	1	2%	1		
International Journal of Human Resource Management	12	24%	7	5	
International Studies of Management and Organization	6	12%	3	3	
Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology	1	2%	1		
Journal of Organizational Behaviour	1	2%			1
Journal of Public Relations Research	1	2%	1		
Journal of Services Research	1	2%			1
Organization Science	1	2%	1		
Pranjana:The Journal of Management Awareness	1	2%		1	
Public Personnel Management	1	2%	1		
SIES Journal of Management	1	2%	1		
Social Anthropology	1	2%	1		
Sustainability (Switzerland)	1	2%	1		
The Indian Journal of Industrial Relations	2	4%	2		
The IUP Journal of Management Research	2	4%	1	1	
The IUP Journal of Organizational Behavior	1	2%	1		
Workforce Solutions Review	2	4%		1	1
TD	1	2%			1
Grand Total	50		30	16	4

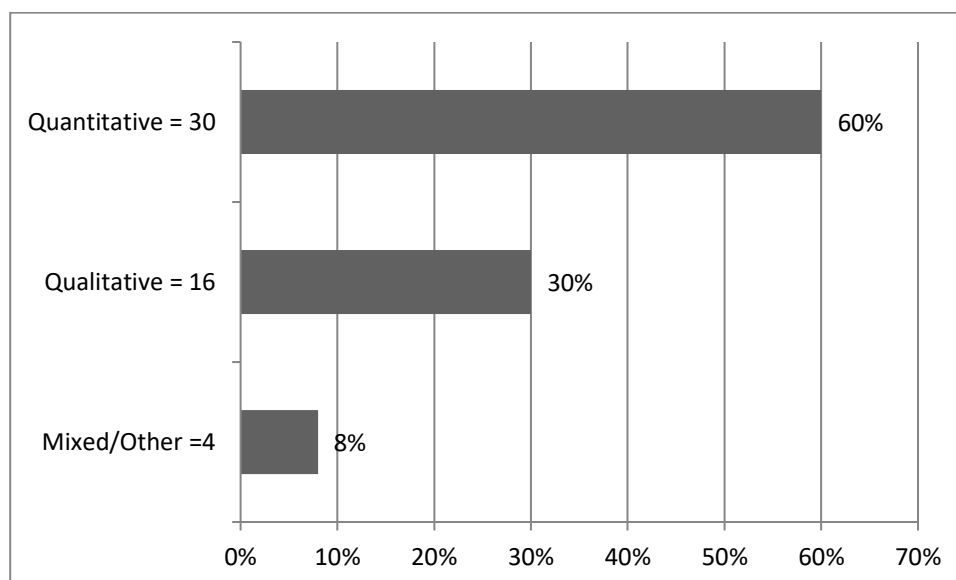


Figure 3: Research Method Distribution

Research Methods Used (n=50)

Journal Distribution: The International Journal of Human Resource Management published the highest number of articles (24%, n=12), followed by International Studies of Management and Organization (12%, n=6) and Administrative Sciences (6%, n=3). Table 1 presents the complete distribution across all journals, showing that TM research primarily appears in specialized HR journals rather than general management publications. Quantitative approaches dominated (60%, n=30), followed by qualitative methods (32%, n=16) and mixed/other methods (8%, n=4). This quantitative emphasis reflects the field's maturation toward hypothesis testing and relationship examination.

4.2 Theoretical Framework Analysis

The review maps the theoretical foundations employed across the studies, identifying the most frequently applied frameworks and the extent to which theory underpins talent management research. The analysis identified 20 different theoretical frameworks across 26 studies (52% of total), revealing theoretical fragmentation in the field (Figure 4):

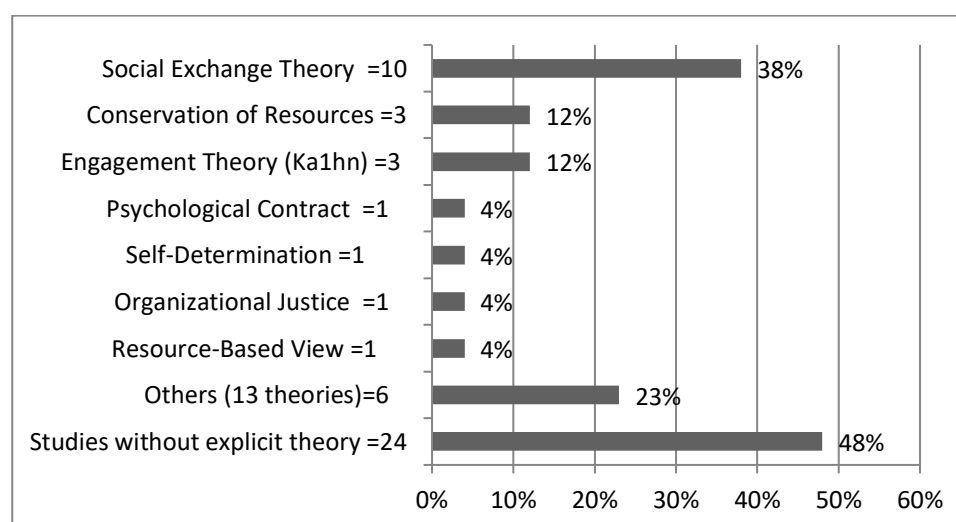


Figure 4: Theoretical Framework Distribution

Theoretical Frameworks in TM Research (n=26 studies with explicit theory)

Figure 4 presents the distribution of theoretical frameworks employed in talent management (TM) research across 26 studies that explicitly utilized theory. The results show that while TM research has increasingly incorporated established theoretical perspectives, reliance is still concentrated around a limited set of dominant frameworks. This pattern highlights both the progress in embedding theory into TM studies and the continuing need for broader theoretical diversity to strengthen the field’s conceptual development and explanatory power.

Theoretical Framework Usage by Period

Building on the above, this analysis explores the temporal evolution of theoretical applications, showing how the adoption of frameworks has shifted or diversified over time.

2010-2015: Basic frameworks
• Social Exchange Theory (4 studies)
• Limited theoretical diversity
2016-2019: Diversification
• 15 different theories introduced
• Integration attempts
2020-2023: Consolidation
• Return to established theories
• Focus on Social Exchange Theory

Figure 5: Theory Evolution Over Time

Figure 5 illustrates the evolution of theoretical frameworks in talent management research across three distinct periods. From 2010 to 2015, studies primarily relied on basic frameworks, with Social Exchange Theory dominating (4 studies), reflecting limited theoretical diversity. The period from 2016 to 2019 saw a significant diversification, with the introduction of 15 different theories and initial attempts at integration, signaling a broadening of conceptual foundations. However, in the most recent period (2020–2023), there appears to be a consolidation, with scholars returning to established frameworks, particularly Social Exchange Theory, suggesting a preference for theoretical stability and cumulative development in the field.

Social Exchange Theory emerged as the dominant framework (38% of theoretical papers, n=10), reflecting TM's reliance on reciprocal employee-organization relationships. Studies employing this theory consistently found positive relationships between TM investments and employee outcomes.

Conservation of Resources Theory appeared in 12% of theoretical papers (n=3), explaining how TM practices serve as resource-providing mechanisms that enhance employee well-being and performance.

Engagement Theory (Kahn, 1990) featured in 12% of theoretical papers (n=3), providing foundational understanding of psychological presence and involvement at work.

Other theories (38% combined) included Psychological Contract Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Organizational Justice Theory, each appearing in single studies.

4.3 Geographic Distribution Patterns

This section investigates the geographic origins of the reviewed studies, assessing regional research intensity and highlighting both concentrated and underrepresented contexts. Research concentration reveals significant geographic imbalances (Figure 6):

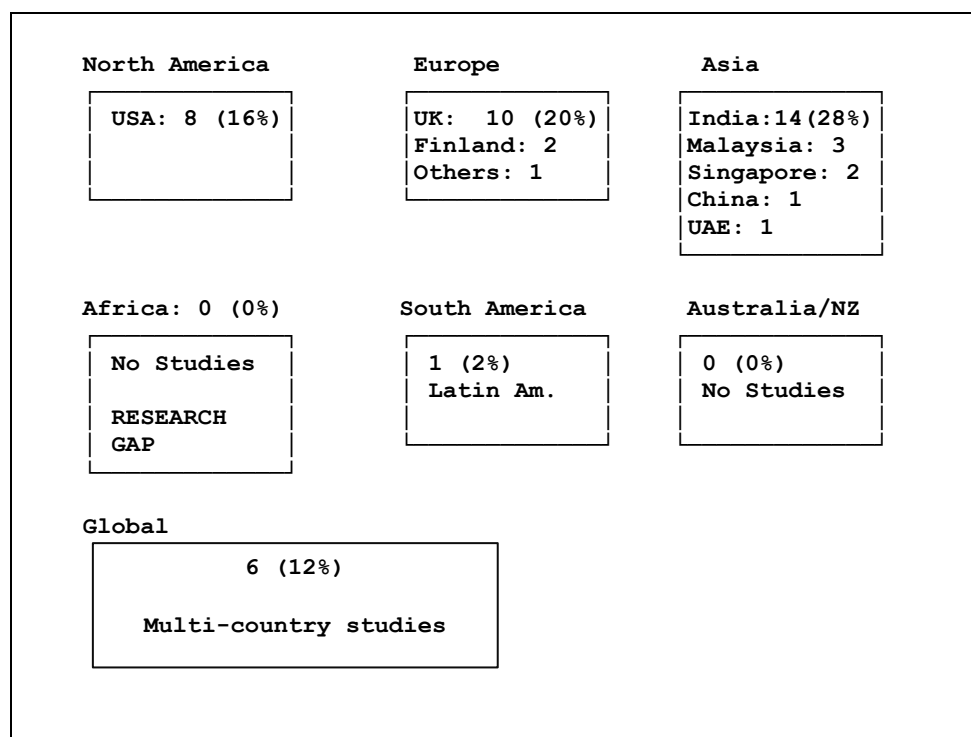


Figure 6: Global Distribution of TM Research
Geographic Distribution of Studies (n=50)
WORLD MAP REPRESENTATION

Figure 6 depicts the geographic distribution of the 50 studies included in the review. The analysis reveals a concentration of research in Asia (particularly India, 28%) **and** Europe (notably the United Kingdom, 20%), **followed by the** United States (16%). Other regions, such as Malaysia, Singapore, Finland, and the Middle East, show limited contributions, while Africa and Australia/New Zealand remain absent from the sample, highlighting clear research gaps. A small proportion of studies (12%) adopted a multi-country or comparative perspective, which enhances the generalizability of findings.

Overall, the distribution suggests that TM research remains regionally concentrated, with substantial opportunities for expansion into underrepresented regions such as Africa, South America, and Oceania.

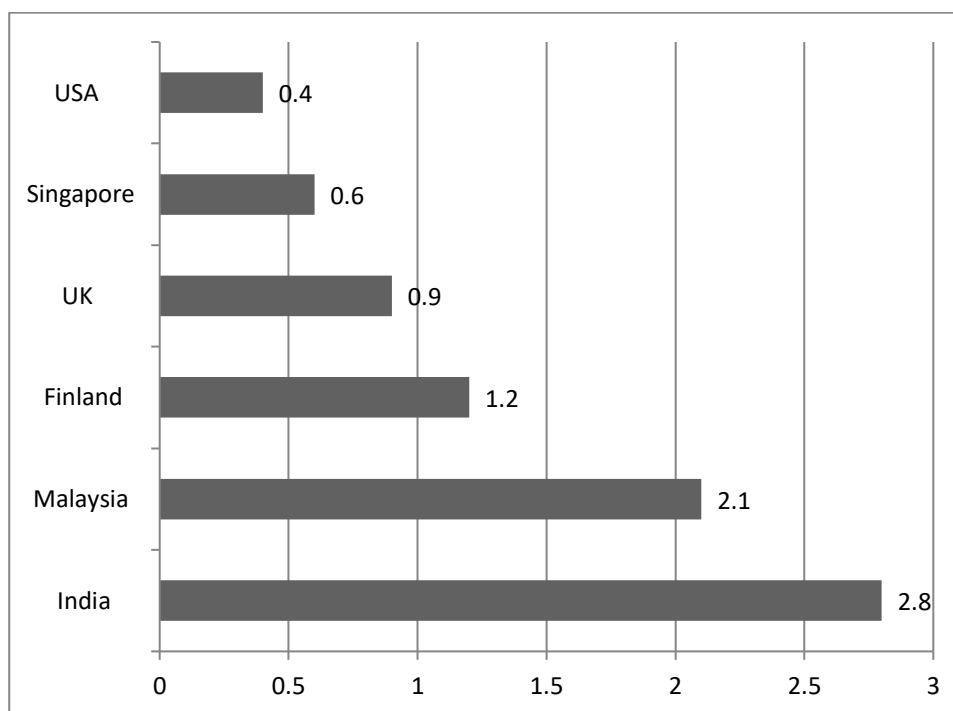


Figure 7: Regional Research Intensity

Research Concentration Index
(Papers per GDP trillion USD)

Note: Higher values indicate more research relative to economic size

Figure 7 presents the regional research intensity, measured as the number of publications per GDP trillion USD. This index highlights disparities in research concentration, showing that certain regions—despite having smaller economic output—demonstrate comparatively higher engagement in talent management research. Conversely, economically larger regions show relatively lower research intensity, suggesting a mismatch between economic scale and scholarly output. These findings point to both underutilized research potential in high-GDP regions and encouraging signs of academic commitment in emerging economies.

India dominated with 28% of studies (n=14), reflecting the country's large IT sector and growing service economy requiring sophisticated TM approaches. United Kingdom contributed 20% (n=10), likely due to strong research traditions and diverse industrial base requiring varied TM strategies. United States provided 16% (n=8), surprisingly lower than expected given its economic size and business school research capacity. Other regions collectively contributed 36%, with notable gaps in Africa, Latin America, and much of Asia, indicating significant opportunities for cross-cultural TM research. Region wise studies plays important role because culture, geographical identities influence employees and their attributes. Motivation for their engagement will be different.

4.4 Industry Focus Analysis

The industrial focus of the studies is analyzed using a sectoral distribution, providing a visual heat map of where talent management research has been most and least prevalent. Industry analysis revealed concerning patterns presented in Figure 8.

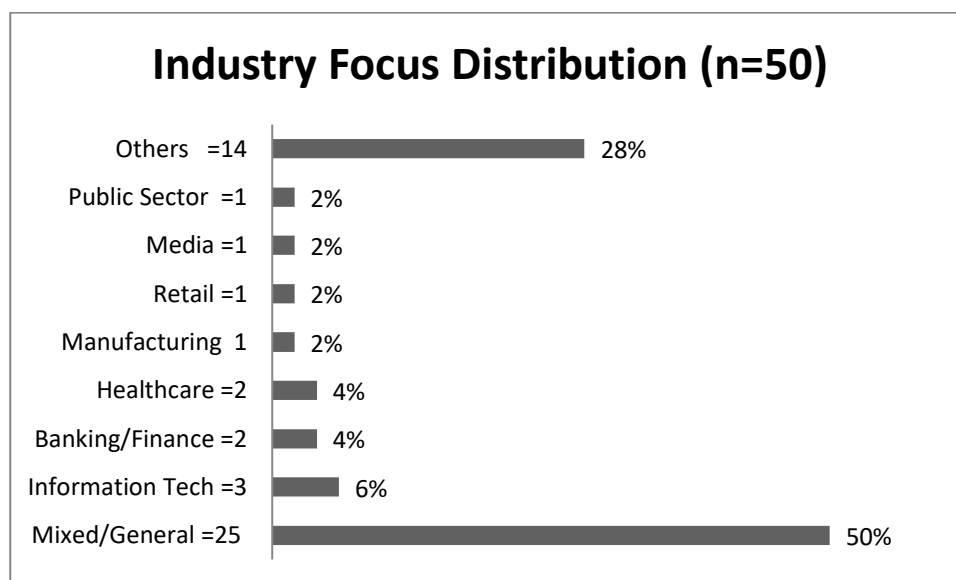


Figure 8: Industry Distribution Heat Map

Industry Focus Distribution (n=50)

Industry Specificity Index: LOW

Sector-specific research: INSUFFICIENT

Figure 8 illustrates the industry-wise distribution of talent management research across the 50 reviewed studies. The analysis indicates that research attention is unevenly distributed, with certain sectors—such as information technology, education, and healthcare—receiving greater scholarly focus, while other industries remain comparatively underexplored. This imbalance highlights the need for more diversified, cross-industry investigations to strengthen the generalizability of talent management insights.

Industry vs. Research Attention Gap Analysis

This subsection compares industry relevance with academic research attention, identifying mismatches where industries of high practical importance remain underexplored in scholarly work.

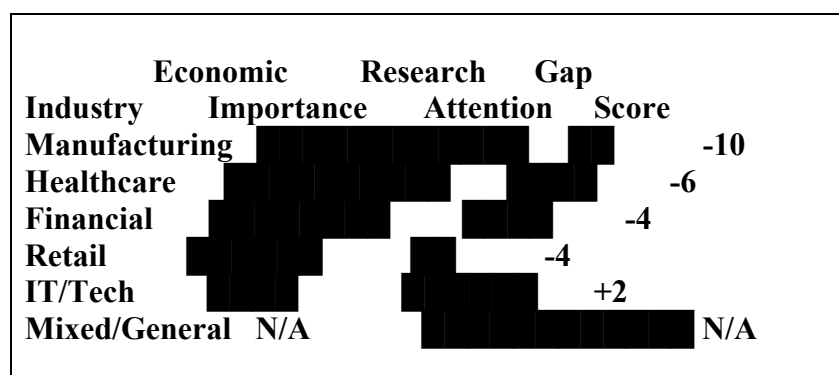


Figure 9: Industry vs. Research Attention Gap Analysis

Gap Score: Negative = Under-researched, Positive = Over-researched

Figure 9 compares the economic importance of industries with the level of research attention they have received in talent management studies. The analysis reveals notable gaps between industry relevance and scholarly focus. Manufacturing, healthcare, financial services, and retail—industries with substantial economic weight—are relatively under-researched, with negative gap scores ranging from -4 to -10 . Conversely, the IT/technology sector appears slightly overrepresented ($+2$), suggesting a disproportionate academic emphasis relative to its economic size. The presence of a

substantial number of “mixed/general” studies further indicates that while TM research is active, it often lacks industry-specific depth. These findings underscore the need for more targeted research in economically significant but underexplored industries.

Mixed/General Industry studies comprised 50% (n=25), suggesting researchers prefer broad generalizability over industry-specific insights. This represents a significant methodological concern as industry context critically influences TM effectiveness. Information Technology emerged as the most studied single industry (6%, n=3), reflecting high talent mobility and competition in this sector. Banking and Financial Services appeared in 4% of studies (n=2), indicating limited attention to sectors with significant TM investments. Other industries (manufacturing, healthcare, retail) received minimal attention, representing major research gaps.

The research papers which have been shortlisted clearly indicates that majority of the studies have been published on mixed industry samples. This indicates that focused industry-wise study is very limited in Talent Management and related areas. IT industry appears as the most studied single sector, which is understandable given that IT companies face high employee turnover due to competitive talent demand and the talent pool itself is very demanding regarding development opportunities and organizational well-being.

4.5 Research Focus Themes

Finally, the thematic trends across the body of literature are synthesized, highlighting dominant research themes (e.g., acquisition, development, engagement, retention) and pointing to emerging or neglected areas. Thematic analysis identified four primary research themes (Figure 10):

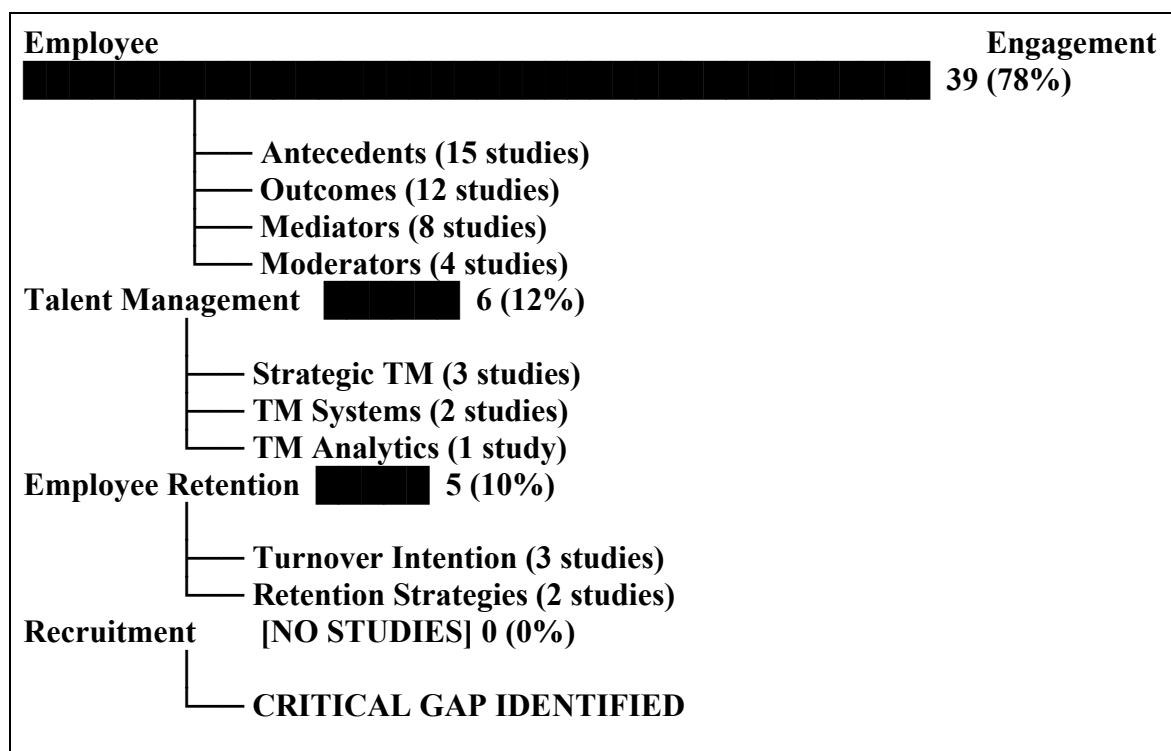


Figure 10: Research Theme Dominance Analysis

Primary Research Themes (n=50)

Figure 10 highlights the dominance of research themes within the reviewed studies. The majority of work has concentrated on **employee engagement** (39 studies, 78%), with subthemes spanning antecedents, outcomes, mediating mechanisms, and moderating factors. Talent management-specific studies accounted for 12% of the sample, focusing primarily on strategic TM, TM systems, and analytics. Research on **employee retention** represented 10% of the studies, largely centered on

turnover intention and retention strategies. Notably, **recruitment** received no direct empirical attention, signaling a **critical gap** in the literature. These results underscore the heavy emphasis on engagement while revealing underexplored but strategically important areas such as recruitment and broader TM practices.

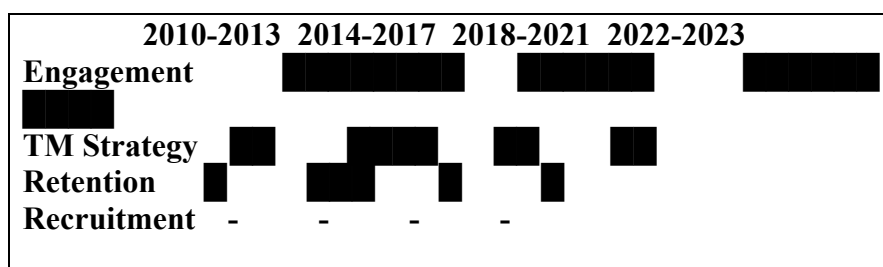


Figure 11: Theme Evolution Matrix Research Themes Over Time Periods

: ■ = 2 studies, - = no studies

Note: Recruitment consistently absent across all periods

Note: Some papers addressed multiple themes; percentages reflect primary theme focus.

4.5.1 Employee Engagement (78% of studies)

Employee engagement dominated the literature, consistent with its central role in TM success. Key findings include:

- i. **Antecedents:** Leadership quality, organizational support, and job design emerged as primary engagement drivers
- ii. **Mediating mechanisms:** Psychological safety, meaningful work, and resource availability mediate TM-engagement relationships
- iii. **Outcomes:** Engaged employees demonstrate higher performance, lower turnover, and increased organizational citizenship behaviors
- iv. **Contextual factors:** Industry characteristics, cultural values, and organizational climate moderate engagement relationships

4.5.2 Talent Development (12% of studies)

Despite its theoretical importance, talent development received limited research attention:

- i. **Formal programs:** Structured development initiatives show positive but modest effects on retention and performance
- ii. **Experiential learning:** On-the-job experiences and stretch assignments provide greater development impact than classroom training
- iii. **Mentoring relationships:** Quality mentor-protégé relationships significantly influence career progression and organizational commitment
- iv. **Individual differences:** Personality traits and career orientations moderate development program effectiveness

4.5.3 Talent Retention (10% of studies)

Retention research revealed complex relationships between TM practices and employee staying behavior:

- i. **Compensation:** While important, financial incentives show diminishing returns beyond market competitiveness
- ii. **Career opportunities:** Growth prospects and advancement possibilities strongly predict retention decisions
- iii. **Work-life balance:** Flexibility and autonomy increasingly influence retention, particularly among younger employees

- iv. **Organizational culture:** Values alignment and cultural fit significantly impact long-term retention

4.5.4 Recruitment and Selection (Notable Absence)

Surprisingly, recruitment received minimal research attention despite its foundational importance. This absence represents a significant gap given that effective recruitment is the foundation of all subsequent TM activities:

- i. **Employer branding:** Limited studies show organizations with strong talent brands attract higher-quality candidates
- ii. **Selection methods:** Sparse research suggests structured interviews and assessment centers predict performance better than traditional approaches
- iii. **Cultural fit:** Few studies indicate person-organization fit influences both selection success and subsequent engagement

As noted in the literature, "Hiring a person with incompatible values, despite matching skills and abilities, would still be a critical factor in making the person a committed worker" (Juhdi et al., 2013). The absence of recruitment research represents a critical gap requiring immediate attention.

4.6 Methodological Evolution

Research methodology has evolved toward greater sophistication:

- i. **Early period (2010-2015):** Predominantly descriptive studies with simple correlational analyses
- ii. **Middle period (2016-2019):** Increased use of structural equation modeling and multilevel analysis
- iii. **Recent period (2020-2023):** Integration of longitudinal designs and advanced statistical techniques

However, experimental and quasi-experimental designs remain rare, limiting causal inference capabilities.

Table 2: Summary of Selected Papers (Key Studies)

Title	Authors	Year	Journal	Keywords	Method
Organizational Climate In NBFC: Implications On Employee Engagement	Nasreen, A.; Varshney, P.; Waseem, C.	2019	Amity Global Business Review	employee engagement, organizational climate	Quantitative
How Trust in One's Employer Moderates the Relationship Between HRM and Engagement Related Performance	Vanhala, M.; Dietz, G.	2019	International Studies of Management and Organization	HRM practices, organizational trust, performance	Quantitative
How Does Authentic Leadership Boost Work Engagement?	Silva, V.H.; Duarte, A.P.; Oliveira, J.P.	2023	Administrative Sciences	authentic leadership, work engagement, meaningfulness	Quantitative
Context matters: Examining 'soft' and 'hard' approaches to employee engagement	Jenkins, S.; Delbridge, R.	2013	International Journal of Human Resource Management	engagement drivers, contextual factors	Qualitative
The link between perceived human resource management practices, engagement and employee behaviour	Alfes, K.; Shantz, A.D.; Truss, C.; Soane, E.C.	2013	International Journal of Human Resource Management	HRM practices, engagement, behavior	Quantitative
Employee engagement, organisational performance	Truss, C.; Shantz, A.; Soane, E.	2013	International Journal of Human	engagement, performance,	Mixed Methods

and individual well-being	Alfes, K.; Delbridge, R.		Resource Management	wellbeing	
Talent management and employee engagement: Insights from Infotech Enterprises Ltd.	Jauhari, V.; Sehgal, R.; Sehgal, P.	2013	Journal of Services Research	talent management, engagement, IT industry	Case Study
The impact of implementing talent management practices on sustainable organizational performance	Aina, R.A.; Atan, T.	2020	Sustainability	talent management, sustainability, UAE	Quantitative
Talent Management in the Banking Sector: A Systematic Literature Review	Theodorsson, U.; Gudlaugsson, T.; Gudmundsdottir, S.	2022	Administrative Sciences	banking, systematic review, recruitment	Review
An informed discussion on the impact of COVID-19 and 'enforced' remote working on employee engagement	Pass, S.; Ridgway, M.	2022	Human Resource Development International	COVID-19, remote work, engagement	Qualitative

Note: This table presents 10 key studies representative of the broader sample. Complete bibliography available in full reference list.

Table 2 provides an overview of 10 representative studies from the broader sample, highlighting the diversity of research topics, methods, and contexts within the talent management and employee engagement literature. The studies span from 2013 to 2023 and are published in a range of journals, including the *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *Administrative Sciences*, and *Sustainability*. Methodological approaches vary, with the majority employing quantitative designs, complemented by qualitative, mixed-methods, and case study research. Thematically, the studies emphasize the relationship between HRM practices, leadership, organizational climate, and employee engagement, while also addressing emerging contexts such as sustainability and remote work during COVID-19. This diversity illustrates both the breadth of inquiry in the field and the predominance of empirical studies focusing on engagement as a central outcome.

5. Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

This review makes several theoretical contributions to TM literature:

5.1.1 Theoretical Consolidation: The analysis reveals theoretical fragmentation, with 20 different frameworks applied across studies. While this diversity reflects the field's multidisciplinary nature, it impedes cumulative knowledge building. Social Exchange Theory's dominance suggests potential for theoretical consolidation around reciprocal relationship concepts.

5.1.2 Component Integration: The review identifies four core TM components (acquisition, development, engagement, retention) that operate as an integrated system rather than discrete activities. This systems perspective challenges linear TM models and suggests need for holistic approaches.

5.1.3 Contextual Contingencies: Geographic and industry variations highlight the importance of contextual factors in TM effectiveness. Universal TM principles may be less applicable than context-specific approaches that consider cultural, economic, and industry characteristics.

5.2 Practical Implications

Organizations can strengthen their talent management (TM) effectiveness by adopting a more integrated and contextually sensitive approach. Developing integrated TM systems, rather than

isolated practices, ensure that recruitment, development, engagement, and retention efforts are coordinated to achieve system-wide impact. Industry-specific strategies are also essential, as different sectors face unique talent challenges—IT companies, for instance, require distinct approaches compared to manufacturing firms. Additionally, cultural adaptation is crucial for organizations operating across regions; TM practices must align with local values, expectations, and employment norms to ensure global applicability. Finally, while engagement remains a central factor in TM success, organizations should recognize that engagement-enhancing initiatives must be supported by robust acquisition, development, and retention strategies to achieve sustainable workforce excellence.

5.3 Research Gaps and Limitations

5.3.1 Gap Analysis Matrix

Figure 13 synthesizes the identified research gaps across four dimensions: geographic coverage, industry specificity, content focus, methodological diversity, and theoretical development. The matrix highlights that while research is relatively strong in contexts such as the UK/USA and in employee engagement, significant gaps persist in other areas. For instance, studies remain highly concentrated in the IT sector in India, leaving industries such as manufacturing, healthcare, and retail underexplored. Similarly, methodological diversity is limited, with survey-based designs dominating and retention studies underrepresented. From a theoretical perspective, reliance on Social Exchange Theory dominates, with limited use of alternative frameworks, and critical voids exist in areas such as recruitment theory development. Collectively, the matrix underscores both well-established domains of inquiry and areas of critical neglect that warrant future research attention.

GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE				
		High	Medium	Low
High	Industry Specific	UK/USA (Mixed)	India (IT)	MAJOR GAPS
Medium	Content Focus	Engagement Research	TM Systems	Manufacturing Healthcare Retail
	Method Diversity	Surveys	Retention Studies	CRITICAL VOIDS
Low	Theory Develop.	Social Exchange Theory	LIMITED RESEARCH	Recruitment Theory Development

Figure 13: Research Gap Analysis Matrix

Legend:

- Well-researched areas
- Under-researched areas
- ▨ Critical research voids

Research concentration in India, UK, and USA creates significant geographic gaps. African, Latin American, and many Asian contexts remain underexplored, limiting understanding of TM across diverse cultural and economic environments.

Current research on talent management (TM) faces several limitations that highlight opportunities for future advancement. The prevalence of mixed-industry studies and the scarcity of sector-specific research constrain understanding of unique TM challenges and solutions, particularly in manufacturing, healthcare, and retail sectors that warrant greater focus. Methodological constraints also persist, as the dominant use of cross-sectional surveys limits the ability to draw causal inferences; incorporating longitudinal studies, experimental designs, and qualitative methods would provide deeper insights into TM mechanisms and processes. Furthermore, theoretical development remains limited by an over-reliance on single frameworks such as Social Exchange Theory. Advancing the field requires integrating multiple theoretical perspectives and developing TM-specific conceptual frameworks to capture the complexity of talent management in diverse organizational contexts.

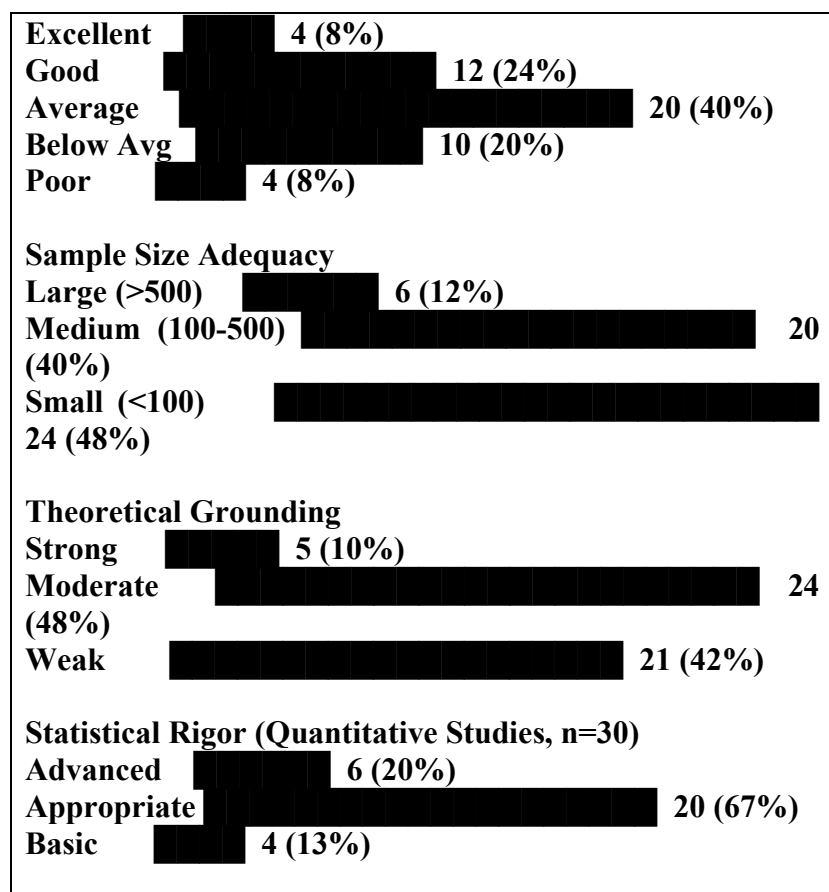


Figure 14: Methodological Quality Assessment
Quality Assessment Results (n=50)

5.4 Emerging Themes

Several emerging themes require future attention:

Digital Transformation: The impact of digital transformation on talent management (TM) practices remains underexplored, even though its practical implications are significant. Advances in artificial intelligence, automation, and data analytics are reshaping how organizations recruit, develop, and retain talent. However, academic inquiry into how these technologies influence strategic decision-making in TM, employee experience, and long-term workforce planning is still limited. A deeper understanding of this connection could provide valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners in navigating the rapidly evolving digital workplace.

Remote Work: The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift toward remote and hybrid work models, creating new challenges and opportunities for talent management. Organizations are now tasked with rethinking performance management, employee engagement, and leadership practices in a virtual environment. Issues such as work-life balance, communication, and organizational culture require innovative TM approaches to ensure productivity and employee well-being. This sudden transformation highlights the need for sustained research into how remote work shapes talent strategies in the long term.

Diversity and Inclusion: While diversity and inclusion (D&I) have been mentioned in some studies related to talent management, their integration into TM frameworks requires deeper exploration. Building inclusive workplaces that value differences is not only a moral imperative but also a business necessity in an increasingly globalized world. However, the ways in which D&I principles can be embedded into recruitment, career development, succession planning, and retention strategies remain under-researched. Investigating these links can provide organizations with practical tools for leveraging diverse talent pools effectively.

Sustainability: The intersection between sustainability and talent management is an emerging area of interest that has yet to receive comprehensive scholarly attention. As organizations face increasing pressure to address environmental and social responsibilities, aligning TM practices with sustainability goals becomes crucial. This includes exploring how sustainable practices can attract purpose-driven employees, foster long-term engagement, and support organizational resilience. Research in this area has the potential to position TM as a strategic enabler of corporate sustainability agendas.

6. Proposed Conceptual Framework

Based on this review, we propose an integrated TM framework that addresses identified gaps and incorporates key findings (Figure 15):

6.1 Core Components

Talent management encompasses several interrelated components that collectively contribute to building a capable and committed workforce. Talent acquisition involves strategic recruitment and selection processes designed to identify individuals who not only possess the necessary skills but also align with the organization's culture and values. Talent development focuses on systematic capability building through formal training programs, experiential learning, and mentoring relationships that foster professional growth. Talent engagement emphasizes creating conditions that promote psychological investment by ensuring meaningful work, supportive leadership, and access to adequate resources to sustain motivation. Finally, talent retention is achieved by offering competitive rewards, career advancement opportunities, and positive work experiences that encourage employees to remain committed to the organization over the long term.

6.2 Contextual Factors

Talent management practices are deeply influenced by a range of contextual factors that shape organizational priorities and approaches. Industry characteristics, including sector-specific talent requirements, competitive dynamics, and evolving skill demands, determine how organizations design and implement their talent strategies. Cultural context also plays a vital role, as national and organizational cultural values influence employee expectations, behaviors, and engagement with management practices. Organizational strategy further guides talent management by aligning workforce capabilities with strategic priorities and business models to achieve long-term goals. Additionally, the technology environment—characterized by rapid digital advancements and technological disruptions—transforms both the nature of work and the methods of managing talent, necessitating continuous adaptation and innovation in workforce practices.

6.3 Outcomes

Talent management is profoundly shaped by various contextual factors that influence how organizations attract, develop, and retain their workforce. Industry characteristics, such as sector-specific talent requirements, competitive dynamics, and skill demands, determine the design and implementation of talent management practices. Cultural context, encompassing both national and organizational values, affects talent expectations and behaviors, shaping how employees engage with and respond to management approaches. Organizational strategy plays a central role by aligning talent management practices with strategic priorities and business models to ensure workforce capabilities support overall goals. Furthermore, the technology environment—with its rapid digital advancements and disruptions—continues to redefine the nature of work and the processes of managing talent, emphasizing the importance of ongoing adaptation and innovation.

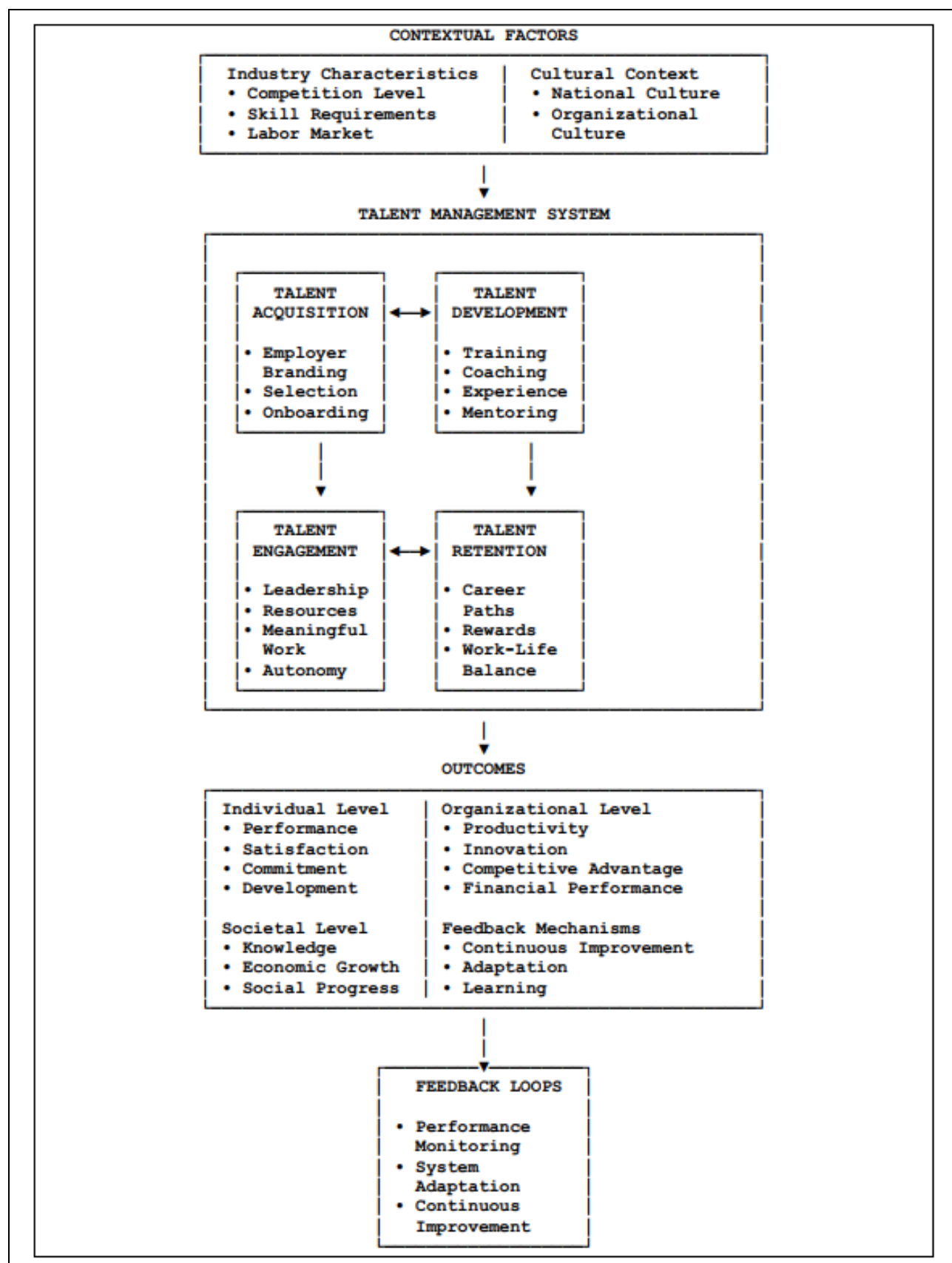


Figure 15: Integrated Talent Management Framework

6.4 Feedback Mechanisms

The framework incorporates feedback loops recognizing that outcomes influence future TM practices and contextual factors evolve over time.

7. Future Research Directions

7.1 Geographic Expansion

There is a need to priority regions. African markets, Latin American economies, and underrepresented Asian contexts require investigation to understand cultural variations in TM effectiveness. Further there is also need to make comparative studies. Cross-cultural comparisons could identify universal TM principles versus context-specific requirements. Similarly, studies could cover emerging markets. Rapid economic development in emerging markets creates unique TM challenges requiring research attention.

7.2 Industry-Specific Research

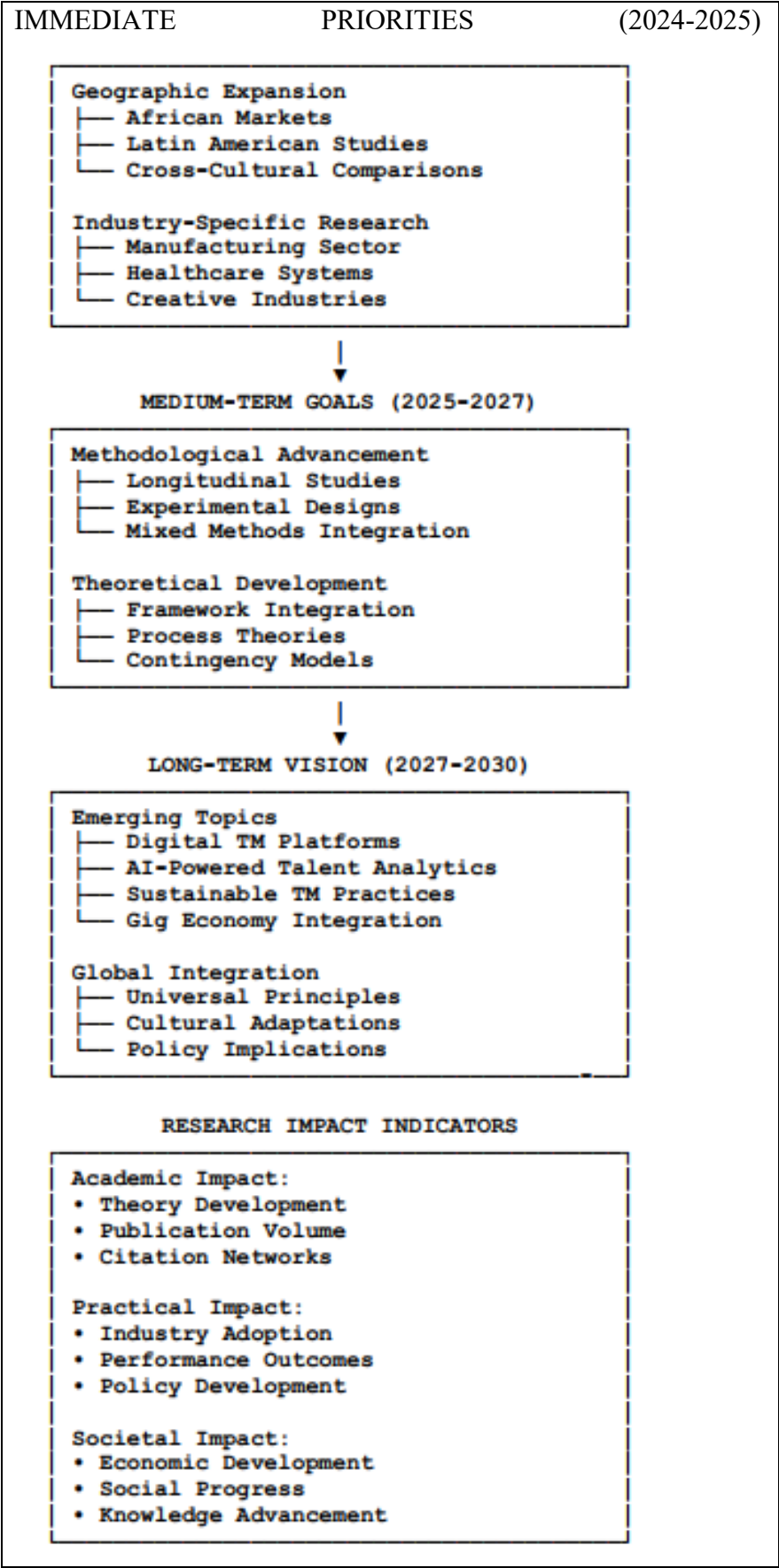
Manufacturing sector specific studies are needed. Traditional industries are undergoing digital transformation, which requires new approaches to talent management. Likewise, TM in healthcare systems are less explored. Professional service organizations with complex talent hierarchies demand specialized research into tailored talent management practices. Lastly, creative industries are to be explored. Project-based and freelance work arrangements in creative fields present unique challenges for managing and retaining talent.

7.3 Methodological Advancement

Methodological advancements in talent management research emphasize the need for more robust and diverse research designs to deepen understanding and enhance validity. Longitudinal studies enable researchers to capture how talent management practices evolve and how their effectiveness changes over time, providing valuable insights into long-term impacts. Experimental designs, particularly field experiments, allow for the establishment of causal relationships between specific talent management practices and organizational outcomes. Furthermore, mixed-method approaches that integrate both quantitative and qualitative data offer a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the complex mechanisms underlying talent management processes and outcomes.

7.4 Theoretical Development

Integration models that combine multiple theoretical perspectives have the potential to advance the conceptual understanding of talent management by offering a more comprehensive view of how various factors interact. Process theories further enrich this understanding by emphasizing how talent management practices evolve over time, providing a dynamic perspective rather than focusing solely on static relationships. In addition, contingency theories highlight the importance of developing context-specific frameworks tailored to different industries and cultures, thereby enhancing the relevance and practical applicability of talent management research.



Research Theme	Specific Research Directions	Methodological Recommendations
Employee Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening organizational features for long-term retention • Trust-based engagement mechanisms • Cultural impact on engagement patterns • Remote work engagement strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longitudinal studies • Cross-cultural comparisons • Mixed-methods approaches • Experimental designs
Talent Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry-specific TM strategies • Digital transformation impact • Sustainable TM practices • SME talent management approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study research • Action research • Sector-specific studies • Technology integration studies
Geographic Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African market investigations • Latin American studies • Asian cultural contexts • Cross-border TM strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparative studies • Ethnographic research • Multi-country samples • Cultural adaptation studies
Industry Applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manufacturing sector digitalization • Healthcare professional development • Creative industry project-based work • Service sector engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry-specific frameworks • Longitudinal tracking • Performance measurement • Best practice identification
Emerging Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gig economy talent management • AI and automation impact • Sustainability integration • Diversity and inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploratory studies • Predictive modeling • Impact assessment • Policy analysis

7.5 Emerging Topics

Emerging topics in talent management reflect the evolving nature of work and organizational priorities in the digital era. Digital talent management emphasizes the central role of technology in talent identification, development, and overall management, transforming traditional practices through data-driven decision-making. The management of remote talent calls for innovative strategies to enhance virtual team engagement, collaboration, and performance oversight in distributed work settings. Sustainable talent management integrates environmental and social sustainability into workforce practices, highlighting the growing importance of responsible and future-oriented strategies. Additionally, the expanding gig economy presents new challenges for managing freelance and contract workers, requiring organizations to balance flexibility with stability within and beyond traditional structures.

8. Limitations

This review has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. Despite comprehensive search strategies, some relevant articles may have been missed due to database coverage gaps or the use of alternative terminology, and the restriction to English-language publications may have excluded valuable research from non-English academic traditions. Publication bias also presents a concern, as academic journals often favor studies reporting significant positive results, which may skew the understanding of talent management toward successful implementations while underrepresenting failures or null findings. Furthermore, although quality assessment criteria were applied, the included studies varied in methodological rigor and contribution significance, potentially influencing the overall synthesis. The temporal scope of the review, covering the period from 2010 to 2023, while substantial, may have excluded foundational earlier research as well as the most recent developments not yet available in published form.

Finally, the definitional ambiguity surrounding talent management posed boundary challenges in determining study inclusion, which may have affected the comprehensiveness of coverage.

9. Key Findings

Several key findings emerge from this analysis. Theoretical fragmentation remains high, with more than 20 different theoretical frameworks applied across studies, although the dominance of Social Exchange Theory indicates potential for consolidation around reciprocal relationship concepts. Research concentration is also evident, as much of the work is geographically clustered in India, the UK, and the USA, and is often industry-specific to IT companies or mixed samples, leaving notable gaps in sector-specific and culturally diverse research. Moreover, component integration within talent management appears limited, even though effectiveness seems to rely on systems that encompass acquisition, development, engagement, and retention rather than treating these as isolated practices. Finally, methodological evolution in the field is still at an early stage, showing a gradual shift from descriptive studies toward more advanced analytical approaches, yet experimental designs remain relatively rare.

9.1 Theoretical Contributions

This review contributes to TM literature by: i) Providing comprehensive synthesis of two decades of research is a major step towards understanding TM systems in organisations. The study offers an extensive review of research conducted over the past twenty years, bringing together insights from multiple studies to present a coherent understanding of talent management practices. ii) Identifying theoretical patterns and gaps: By examining the theoretical foundations across studies, the research highlights recurring frameworks and uncovers gaps where further conceptual development is needed. iii) Proposing an integrated conceptual framework is addressed/The study developed a consolidated framework that connects key components of talent management, offering a structured model for both scholars and practitioners. iv) Highlighting geographic and industry research imbalances were noticed. The analysis reveals concentrations of research in certain countries and industries, pointing to areas that have been underexplored and require more attention. v) Suggesting future research directions. Based on the identified gaps and trends, the study outlines potential avenues for future investigation to advance the field of talent management.

9.2 Practical Implications

For practitioners, this review suggests: Adopt Integrated TM Approaches Rather Than Isolated Practices, Organizations should focus on linking talent acquisition, development, engagement, and retention into a cohesive system instead of managing these components separately. Consider Industry-Specific and Cultural Adaptations. Talent management strategies need to be tailored to the unique requirements of different industries and cultural contexts to enhance relevance and effectiveness. Prioritize Engagement While Maintaining Attention to Other TM Components, While all elements of talent management are important, creating conditions for employee engagement should be a central focus to ensure sustained motivation and productivity. Invest in Longitudinal Evaluation of TM Effectiveness. Long-term assessments of talent management initiatives can provide valuable insights into their evolving impact and effectiveness over time. Prepare for Emerging Challenges from Digitalization and Remote Work. Organizations must anticipate and adapt to changes brought by technological advancements and distributed work models to manage talent effectively in a dynamic environment.

9.3 Research Agenda

The proposed research agenda emphasizes: Geographic expansion to underrepresented regions is an essential need. Future research should extend to regions that have been largely overlooked to provide a more globally representative understanding of talent management practices. Industry-Specific investigations are need of the hour. There is a need for studies focusing on particular industries to capture sector-specific talent requirements and challenges. Methodological advancement toward longitudinal and experimental designs would provide more evidence based lessons. Employing longitudinal and experimental research designs can help establish causal relationships and track the evolution of talent management effectiveness over time. Theoretical integration and development is direly needed. Future studies should aim to consolidate existing theoretical frameworks and develop more comprehensive models to guide both research and practice. Attention to emerging themes including digitalization and sustainability is another important aspect needing focus: Research should explore the impact of digital transformation, remote work, and sustainability on talent management to address evolving organizational and societal needs.

9. Conclusion

This systematic literature review of talent management practices over 2010-2023 provides the most comprehensive analysis of the field's evolution, current state, and future directions. The analysis of 50 carefully selected studies reveals a maturing but fragmented research domain with significant theoretical and practical implications.

Talent management has evolved from a peripheral HR activity to a strategic organizational imperative over the past two decades. However, this review reveals that academic research has not kept pace with practical demands for evidence-based TM strategies. Significant opportunities exist for researchers to address geographic, industry, and methodological gaps while contributing to theoretical advancement.

The field stands at a critical juncture where foundational understanding exists but deeper, more sophisticated research is needed to guide organizations facing increasingly complex talent challenges. The proposed framework and research agenda provide roadmaps for advancing both theoretical knowledge and practical application.

As organizations continue competing for scarce talent in dynamic global markets, the importance of evidence-based TM practices will only increase. This review provides a foundation for that evidence base while highlighting the substantial work remaining to fully understand talent management's potential for organizational and societal benefit.

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