



## Talent Management in Higher Education: A Critical Literature Review

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### Abstract

This study aimed to articulate the critical issues related to talent management (TM). A critical literature review was performed to discuss the significance of TM in universities and its role in aligning higher education with industrial labour requirements. TM benefits universities in recruiting the right talents, training, and human capital development retention. Furthermore, these talents improve students' learning experience, and the overall faculty performance, and ensure the students' education success. Higher education institutions need to address several challenges related to the implementation of TM. These challenges contributed to the under-exploited TM compared to other organisations. The findings revealed that TM supported the competitiveness and learning outcomes in the education sector. Furthermore, this study forwarded a novel conceptual framework for integrating higher education with industrial human capital needs. Based on the results, it is recommended that the integration of TM systems in universities and organisations can ensure the university graduates address the industry needs. Therefore, collaborative planning for talent supply management models in universities and industries is vital for developing academic TM systems that align with the extensive national economic, political, and social systems.

*Keywords: Talent management, Higher education, Human resources management, Scorecards model*

### 1. Introduction

TM is a pertinent human resource management concept, which is universally appreciated and recognised. Moreover, TM identifies the potential requirement of talents and measures talent performance. TM further facilitates the development of the talents possessed by the human resource pool currently available in an organisation to ensure the organisation meets its maximal capacity to achieve its goals. Talents recruited that align with the organisations culture offer a competitive advantage in the market and industry. Therefore, TM reflects plans and processes that utilise available talents to achieve the firm's strategic goals and missions. Existing studies (Davies & Davies, 2010; Ingram, 2016) noted that TM is a strategic priority for business institutions and is critical in developing organisational performance.

According to Iles, Preece and Chuai (2010), TM functions, such as succession planning and leadership development, are integral components of organisational TM systems. Alternately, Goleman (2013) postulated that TM acts as an organisational architecture to strengthen leadership through development tools, such as executive training, monitoring, international assignments, action learning, and job rotations. Furthermore, TM could contribute distinctively to the organisations competitive advantage through the systematic identification of the pivotal positions.

In the context of higher education institutes, the reliance on TM among universities can offer excellent opportunities to achieve strategic objectives and plans (Saurombe, Barkhuizen & Schutte, 2017). Several studies have highlighted the significance of TM in achieving the university's functional efficiency and enhancing its competitive advantage (Bhatt & Behrstock, 2010; Conti, 2008). In addition, Saurombe et al.'s (2017) study highlighted that TM among universities is essential to increase the overall performance of the private sector, organisations, and the economic welfare of a country. Therefore, TM exploration in higher education institutions could provide insights into the development and establishment of a systematic TM approach. Consequently, a systematic TM approach will support the business performance of organisations in all sectors and enhance the national economic stability.



Globally, TM has received growing attention from various scholars (Ingram, 2016; Kimathi, 2015; Morley, Valverde & Farndale, 2017). Conversely, there are inconsistencies in the TM definition, characteristics, and nature among human resource practitioners, researchers, and academicians (McDonnell, Collings, Mellahi & Schuler, 2017). Moreover, there are limited TM in academia and higher education studies. This limited knowledge can contribute to the lack of a universal definition of TM. Each TM description varies according to the organisation's strategic objectives, the context within which the definition is provided, and the level of competitiveness in the given industry or market (Hambrick & Fredrickson, 2005).

In several rapidly developing nations, labor markets are currently confronting issues emanating from globalisation, the establishment and maintenance of middle-sized enterprises, and the failure to achieve business targets. There is an urgent need to address these challenges by relevantly defining the TM system. Due to the lack of a universally agreed definition of TM in the academic field, critical questions remain: i) How significant are strategic positions to the success of university strategy implementation?; ii) How can employees be identified, motivated, and develop to possess e skills, knowledge, experience, and motivation needed to occupy the defined critical positions?; iii) How can TM be integrated into the daily activities in the institution? Hence to address these gaps in previous studies, this paper aims to use a critical literature review to articulate critical issues related to TM in higher education. It is expected that apart from extending the current body of knowledge, this study would offer a nuanced understanding of talent management alignments with strategy, metrics, and operations that could guide higher education institutions to develop human resource training and development through the acquisition of the required resources and the most appropriate training objectives.

## 2. The Concept of Talent Management

The TM concept is a contemporary issue in human resource management, introduced approximately three decades ago. Recent studies have forwarded diverse meanings, characteristics, and nature of TM. According to Lewis and Heckman (2006), there are three main definitions of TM. Firstly, TM is defined as the overall function of human resource management and involves recruiting the most suitable talents and retaining them (McDonnell et al., 2017). Furthermore, TM can be defined as developing the existing talents in the organisation's human resource pool to its maximal capacity to achieve the organisation's goals. Lastly, TM is based on individual employees' performance. Consequently, the organisation evaluates the employee's talents and decides on the expertise to develop and retain. This study noted that talent pipeline processes or TM functions, such as succession planning and leadership development, Talent is defined (Iles, Preece & Chuai, 2010). Moreover, in terms of supply and demand, TM highlights talent identification required in an organisation, determines the available talents, and recognises the gaps between the required talents and the existing talents in a labour force (Lanvin & Evans, 2015).

Talent can also be explained from the supply and demand chain management perspective. Cappeli's (2008) study forwarded four principles to efficiently conduct TM: recruiting and developing talents as an investment, reflecting on the uncertain future, enhancing the cost-efficiency of employee development, and aligning individual goals with the organisations developing investment objectives. An organisation may view TM as part of its investment to evaluate future talent supply and demand uncertainties and consider effective methods to utilise relevant talents within the workforce. In addition, TM can be further defined as an integrated system comprising the recruitment of employees with the right talents, talent development, training, and compensation, and the retention of such talents in the organisation (Boselie & Thunnissen, 2017). Mellahi and Collings's (2010) study devised the concept as a system of strategic intents, plans, and processes that clarifies the pivotal positions needed to increase the organisation's competitive advantage to



integrate the various definitions of TM. Furthermore, TM is a system that identifies the potential talent needs and measures talent performance.

An integrated definition of talent in an organisation is essential to utilise talents to achieve the strategic goals and missions of the organisation. Furthermore, Goleman (2013) developed a framework for TM that requires specific human resource architecture in an organisation to support its structures. The study postulated that TM as architecture is essential for strengthening organisational leadership through development tools, such as executive training, monitoring, international assignments, action learning, and job rotations. Additionally, talents aid organisational leadership. Therefore, to develop and retain internal talents appropriately, the organisation must maintain an accurate and consistent database of the available talent pool within its human capital. Subsequently, this talent pool can be considered potential leaders to take up management and leadership positions. This study supports Hambrick and Fredrickson's (2005) study, which opposes that each TM description varies according to the organisations' strategic objectives, the context of the definition, and the level of competitiveness in the given industry.

### 3. Dimensions and Perspectives of TM

The literature review indicates the existence of a variety of TM definitions and perspectives. Globally, TM has received growing attention among scholars (Ingram, 2016; Kimathi, 2015; Morley, Valverde & Farndale, 2017) and is perceived as a code to aid leaders and managers to achieve their organisational goals (Michaels, Handfield-Jones & Axelrod, 2001). According to Williams (2000), talented people possess exceptional abilities and are successful in a range of activities within a specific field. Managerial talent consists of a sharp strategic mind, leadership abilities, emotional maturity, good communicative skills, and attracting and inspiring other talented people. Additionally, these talents must possess entrepreneurial instincts, functional skills, and the ability to deliver results (Michaels et al., 2001).

From Schweyer's (2004) perspective, TM includes all human resource activities, such as sourcing, selection, deployment, socialisation, maintenance, and the development of talented staff. Moreover, there are three main fields of TM: talent identification and absorption, talent maintenance, and talent development (Schweyer, 2004). From a strategic TM perspective, processes that include systemic identification of crucial positions contribute to the organisations' sustainable competitive advantage. According to Collings and Mellahi (2009), strategic TM includes the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate the filling of existing positions with a high potential talent pool to ensure their commitment towards the organisation. In addition, TM can be further elucidated from a developmental and cultural perspective (Al-Awamleh, 2009; Baublyte, 2010; Li & Devos, 2008) where it is a strategic priority for businesses and is a crucial driver in developing institutional performance (Davies & Davies, 2010; Ingram, 2016). Similarly, Cannon and McGee (2011), Moczyłowska (2012), Silzer and Dowell (2009) highlight TM as a set of procedures, programs, and activities applied to highly qualified individuals characterised by high performance to achieve an institution's current and future goals. Considering the broad spectrum of TM dimensions and perspectives, this study focuses on TM in higher education. This paper comprises of i) integrated talent management (ITM), ii) academic TM, iii) justification for the academic TM system, and iv) TM from a higher education perspective and reviewing the supply chain management.

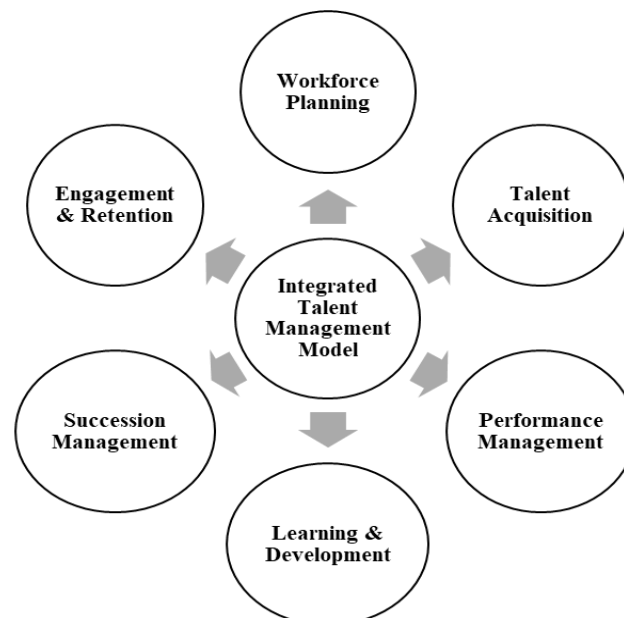
### 4. ITM

The ITM is achieved by developing structured systems that align with the talents and the organisation's overall strategic objectives. Furthermore, ITM involves aligning the TM with organisational stakeholders' goals and plans (Goleman, 2013). Structured TM enhances business outcome efficiency and the financial stability of the organisation. Additionally, ITM reduces the retrenchment rate due to poor



performance by developing a highly skilled and qualified labour force. The TM term is widely debated in human resource management, yet there is no agreeable definition. Conversely, the term integration denotes the process of blending or coordinating different parts into one functional unit with a defined role (Boselie & Thunnissen, 2017).

Talent is defined as a competency, skill, or knowledge in performing a given task that is unique to an individual. Management is described as the means to achieve a given objective (DeTuncq & Schmidt, 2013). Collectively, ITM refers to preparing administrators and academicians associated with higher learning institutions to achieve learning outcomes aligned with the labour market and achieve superior organisational performance essential for national economic sustainability (Tafti, Mahmoudsalehi & Amiri, 2017). According to Tafti et al. (2017), ITM is a requirement for organisational success. Additionally, through human capital development, ITM must be implemented through a systematic process to align the organisation's human resource performance with its strategic objectives. Consequently, DeTuncq and Schmidt (2013) developed a conceptual framework to achieve the ITM (Figure 1).

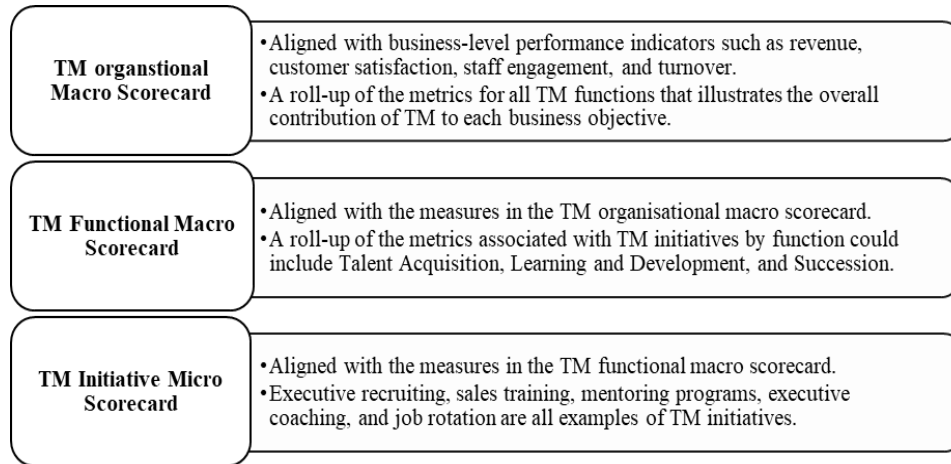


**Figure 1** The ITM Functions Model

Adapted and taken from DeTuncq & Schmidt, 2013

Based on Figure 1, specific ITM functions are executed through the organisation's operational management. Additionally, ITM at the executive level leads to high organisational performance. Conversely, ITM functions include workforce forecasting through planning, talent acquisition, performance management, learning and development, succession management, engagement, and retention when implemented at the operational level.

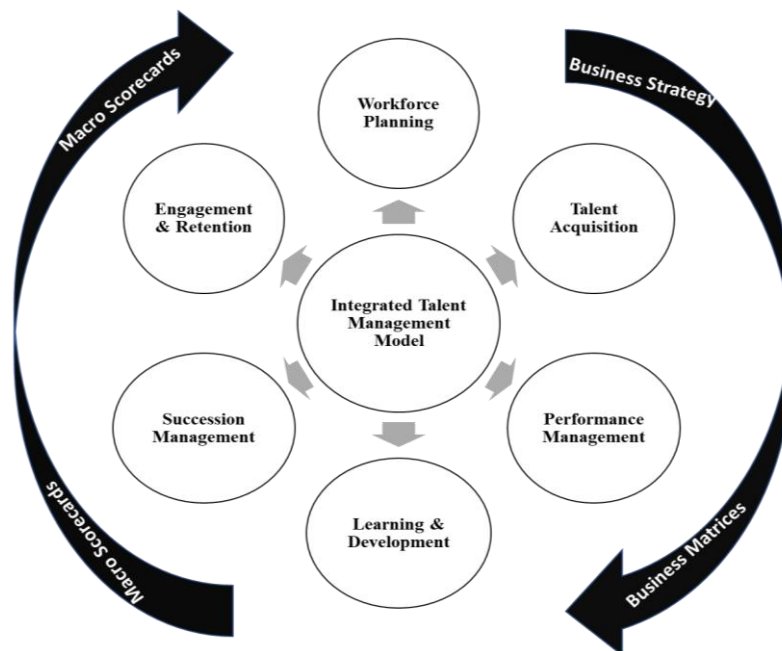
The talent incorporation into the daily operations does not guarantee the success of the organisation. A straightforward process and system of integrating TM into an organisation's operations, activities, and functions are required (DeTuncq & Schmidt, 2013). Additionally, TM needs to be aligned with the strategic objectives of the entire organisation, its partners, and stakeholders through the organisation scorecards. Furthermore, an organisation needs to collect and monitor the impact of such processes on business performance to ensure an effective ITM. Figure 2 illustrates the three levels of business scorecards applied in this study.



**Figure 2** The ITM Scorecards Model

Adapted and taken from DeTuncq & Schmidt, 2013

Based on Figure 2, the business scorecards include TM macro scorecard (organisational and functional) and the TM micro initiative scorecard. At the TM corporate macro scorecard level, the overall business objectives such as turnover, revenues, and customer satisfaction are analysed (DeTuncq & Schmidt, 2013). Moreover, the metric roll-up aims to determine if the TM aligns with achievement and postulates the TM role in achieving specific business objectives. The TM functional macro scorecard focuses on the specific function of an organisation, for example, talent recruitment, training and development, and succession management (DeTuncq & Schmidt, 2013). Subsequently, the TM initiative micro scorecard focuses on the microenvironment functions, such as executive training, coaching, and sales training. Figure 3 illustrates the ITM function and scorecards based on the organisation's strategies.



**Figure 3** ITM Functions and Scorecards to Align with Organisation's Strategy

Adapted and taken from DeTuncq & Schmidt, 2013



Based on Figure 3, it is evident that the ITM function and scorecards play a critical role in integrating TM in organisations' daily operations. Scorecards are imperative to align employee activities with the strategic objectives of the organisation. Furthermore, ITM functions and scorecards enable the business to monitor its progress towards achieving strategic goals and focus on the most critical projects, services, and products. Scorecards communicate the strategic business goals to the employees and other stakeholders. Therefore, employee commitment is enhanced through the development, implementation, and institutionalisation of scorecards. The organisational goals and objectives are linked to each employee's roles, and utilising scorecards can effectively monitor their long-term performance.

## 5. Academic TM

Recently, universities are meeting the challenge to attract students to enrol in academic programs and obtain funding opportunities. Moreover, universities prefer a considerable level of autonomy with limited influence from the government and other stakeholders (Awwad, 2013). Universities and other higher education institutions can utilise TM to transform their systems to achieve their goals effectively. Human talents in higher education, such as principals, department administrators, and the school deans, safeguard the university's conventional autonomy from interference while significantly contributing to the institution's optimal performance (Nasser, 2019). It is established that reliance on TM among universities offers opportunities to achieve the universities' strategic objectives and plans (Saurombe, Barkhuizen & Schutte, 2017). Furthermore, TM provides opportunities for universities to gain a competitive advantage and achieve functional efficiency if well utilised (Bhatt & Behrstock, 2010; Conti, 2008). In addition, TM among universities is vital for the overall performance of a country's private sector, organisations, and economic welfare (Saurombe et al., 2017).

Higher education institutions need to address several challenges related to the implementation of TM. These challenges contributed to the under-exploited TM compared to other organisations. Higher education institutions are not closely associated with organisations interested in employees with specific skill sets and high performance due to high fragmentations (Nasser, 2019). Additionally, it is critical to ensure TM is applied at both the executive and managerial levels. Conversely, the higher education administration must remain overly concerned about academics and not the human resource management of universities (Awwad, 2013).

The current contemporary academic environment in universities is challenging for TM implementation as students enrol in educational programmes based on ambitions (Nasser, 2019). Nonetheless, the student's academic choice should be informed by the dynamic industrial environment. Therefore, to meet the students' academic ambitions, universities have developed several complex academic programs. Consequently, to execute the TM approach in the universities, highly qualified staff are needed to function effectively in a complex and dynamic environment. An effective TM system consists of several unique characteristics (Nasser, 2019). This study postulates that TM benefits universities in recruiting the right talents, training, and human capital development retention. Furthermore, these talents improve students' learning experience, and the overall faculty performance, and ensure the students' education success (Bradley, 2016). Nevertheless, talent retention in higher education institutions still faces a substantial challenge as institutions need to develop talent among students for industrial absorption.

## 6. Justification for the Academic TM System

Higher education institutions require a specific TM program. Furthermore, to gain a competitive advantage, the institutions need to identify the existing talents within the institutions' labour force. Higher education institutions should address the future external labour market uncertainty, country demographic variations, and future leadership issues by developing their existing talents (Barkhuizen, Schutte & Nagel, 2017). Due to the lack of effective TM in universities, these institution's expertise, and talent are underutilised. The workforce market remains unsuitable and is unable to meet the industry's needs (Szabó, 2019). Therefore, this study denotes that effective TM systems placed in higher education institutions are beneficial.



The TM systems in universities can improve the quality of services and products offered by the staff to meet the student's, industry, and other stakeholders' needs. Moreover, TM systems in universities would enhance customer retention, who is satisfied with their services and products. TM can reduce recruitment costs by minimising staff turnover, as existing staff will be motivated, and developed to perform efficiently (Rutledge, LeMire, Hawks & Mowdood, 2016). The reduction in employee turnover rates indicates positive human resource recruitment, training, and development. In addition, TM programs in universities are critical for knowledge and skill transfer among staff to increase overall organisation performance mutually.

### **7. TM From a Higher Education Standpoint**

Higher education plays a crucial role in the overall country's development. Higher education graduates are responsible for their country's social, cultural, political, and economic transformation. Additionally, human resources are a crucial resource in any organisation. Consequently, producing talented graduates for the labour market is essential (Barkhuizen et al., 2017). Higher education institutions must ensure that education is accessible, equitable, affordable, and accountable for all. Higher education institutions are teaching, entrepreneurship, research, and innovations hubs that ultimately develop and improve technology, culture, and society. Moreover, universities are responsible for preparing graduates for global business challenges, such as technological advancement, innovation, and globalisation (Bradley, 2016). These institutions need to produce highly skilled employees capable of filling the gaps in meeting the industry needs. Higher education institutions need to develop innovative and talented labour to survive in the collective national and global industries. Therefore, universities and the industry must become long-term strategic partners. A higher education institution produces skilled labour to support industries to achieve their strategic goals, while the industries aid the universities with education needs (Bradley, 2016).

### **8. Talent Supply Chain Management (TSCM)**

The TSCM is a strategic approach to secure and enhance talent supply to ensure the industry's human capital demands are met. Universities require TM to manage the risks, uncertainties, and volatility faced. TM is a systematic avenue in which the labour force can respond to the global market's needs (Planning, 2017). Nonetheless, the stakeholders responsible for ensuring the supply of an adaptive and responsive labour force that meets the dynamic industry needs must be recognised. The higher education institutions and the industry are responsible and should collaborate to meet these needs. Therefore, this collaboration derives from applying the TM models nationally and globally (Shet, 2020) to produce the talent required by the industry. Consequently, this will provide industries with a competitive advantage, contributing to the national economy.

The supply chain management models can strategically provide capable human resources through TM in higher education institutions. In addition, Makarius and Srinivasan (2017) built upon the collaborative planning, forecasting and replenishment CPFR approach (Makarius & Srinivasan, 2017). This CPFR approach ensures excellent customer service and education between the suppliers and customers. Additionally, CPFR is universally applied in the collaborative planning for talent supply management model (CP-TSCM).

This CP-TSCM model aims to supply labour forces responsive to economic uncertainties, acute skills shortages, and globalisation. The CP-TSCM has four main stages: strategy and planning, demand and supply management, execution, and analysis (Cao & Li, 2018). The strategy and planning stage maps the current talent gaps in organisations and defines the nature of skill and talent lacking. Subsequently, the organisation then determines if the labour will be sourced internally or externally. Internal labour sourcing is suitable if there is a continuous need for skills that can be achieved through training and development (Makarius & Srinivasan, 2017). The second stage is mapping the level of workforce demand. The current demand state is identified, the previous trends are analysed, and the projected demand is forecasted. Next is the execution phase of building a partnership between the labour force source and the industry. The potential labour sources include higher education institutions and the external general labour market. Lastly,



continuous analysis of labour supply and the use of human resource information systems to predict future demand is carried out (Cao & Li, 2018). The data is shared among the associates of the talent supply management system. Figure 4 illustrates the model applied to develop academic talent management systems in an economic, social, and political context.



Figure 4 (CP-TSCM) Model

\*Adapted and taken from Erin E. Makarius & Mahesh Srinivasan, 2017

## 9. Conclusion

There is limited knowledge of the TM concept. There is no consensus among researchers on the definition of TM. Moreover, there are various studies on TM in business organisations, yet, there is a limited context in academia, significantly higher education. This review revealed that ITM involving students, administrators, and faculty members of higher education institutions is required to nurture TM. Universities are the primary source of human capital to meet industry objectives and to develop a country politically, socially, and economically. The supply chain TM must be a collaborative approach through partnerships between talents in higher education suppliers and the industry talents. The supply chain TM will enable the development of structured TM systems in universities. In addition, supplying talents or university graduates will assist organisations in achieving their goals within the economic, social, and political context. This study enriches the existing knowledge on TM, particularly in higher education institutions. Moreover, this study presents a novel conceptual framework for integrating higher education with industrial human capital requirements. This study will be critical in establishing and developing strategies and initiatives that align with higher education systems, programs, and the current needs of the industry. Based on this review, it is recommended that collaborative planning for talent supply management models in universities and industries is appropriate for developing academic TM systems that align with the extensive national economic, political, and social systems. \*For future research, it is suggested to apply TM to many fields due to its vital and unique role in human resources development.

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