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Talent management as a mechanism for retention and sustainable performance

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Abstract

Purpose – This article aims to analyse how talent management is associated with employee performance, retention, job satisfaction, and organizational sustainability, while also identifying the mechanisms that explain variations in prior findings.

Design/methodology/approach – This study employed a systematic literature review approach supported by conceptual synthesis. The literature search was conducted using Publish or Perish, while duplicate removal and screening were supported by Covidence. Microsoft Excel was used to map the selected studies based on author, year, context, method, outcome, and key findings. A total of 14 articles published between 2020 and 2026 met the inclusion criteria and were analysed.

Findings – The synthesis revealed that talent management contributes to organizational outcomes through three interrelated pathways. The first is the psychological pathway, in which talent management practices strengthen employee engagement, thriving at work, job satisfaction, and employee voice. The second is the capability pathway, in which talent management supports innovation, resilience, agility, and competitive advantage. The third is the sustainability pathway, in which talent management encourages sustainable behaviour and process innovation, thereby contributing to sustainable organizational performance.

Research limitations – This study is limited to 14 selected articles, which means that the findings should not be generalized to all organizational contexts without further empirical validation.

Implications – The findings suggest that organizations should design talent management policies beyond recruitment and retention by strengthening learning and development, career management, succession planning, employee voice, and process innovation.

Originality – This article synthesizes fragmented talent management literature into an integrated strategic human resource management framework that explains how talent management creates value for retention and sustainable performance.

Keywords: Organizational Performance, Talent Management, Talent Development

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INTRODUCTION

The changing global business landscape marked by digitalization, technological disruption, competition for highly skilled labour, and sustainability demands has positioned human resources as a strategic asset for organization. In this context, organization are no longer solely focused on operational efficiency, but also on the ability to acquire, develop, and retain individuals with superior competencies to support long-term competitive advantage.

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Contemporary human resources management (HRM) shows that talent is becoming an increasingly scarce resource. So, its management receives attention equivalent to the management of financial and technological capital (Collings et al., 2019; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2022). This condition makes talent management one of the central themes in the development of strategic HRM theory and practice across various organizational sectors.

The development of the talent management concept shows a shift form an administrative approach to a strategic approach integrated with organizational goals. Talent management is understood as a series of practices that include the identification, acquisition, development, placement, retention, and optimization of high-potential individuals to create sustainable value for the organization (Harsch & Festing, 2021; Vaiman et al., 2021). Various studies report that the implementation of talent management contributes to the improvement of work engagement, productivity, innovation, and organizational performance (Abdullahi et al., 2022; Rožman et al., 2022). However, the effectiveness of these practices does not always yield consistent results due to the influence of organizational characteristics, industry context, and the dimensions of talent management applied.

At a more specific level, several studies show differing findings regarding the impact of talent management on various organizational outcomes. Several studies have found a positive relationship between talent management practices and employee performance, retention, and organizational sustainability (Abdullahi et al., 2022; Rožman et al., 2022), while other research indicates that not all dimensions of talent management significantly contribute to sustainable organizational performance (Aina & Atan, 2020). These differing results indicate that the relationship between talent management and organizational outcomes is complex and involves value conversion mechanisms that are not yet fully understood.

Although previous studies have examined the relationship between talent management and various organizational outcomes, the literature still shows conceptual and empirical fragmentation. This approach allows for the integration of scientific evidence from various research contexts, resulting in a stronger synthesis compared to individual findings that are partial in nature (Snyder, 2019; Xiao & Watson, 2019). Some studies emphasize the positive role of talent management in improving engagement, performance, and retention, whereas others indicate that not all dimensions of talent management produce significant effects on sustainable organizational performance. The inconsistency suggests that talent management should not be understood merely as a set of human resource practices, but as a value-conversion mechanism that links human resources, employee experience organizational capability, and sustainability outcomes. Therefore, this study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How has talent management been examined in relation to employee performance, retention, job satisfaction, and organizational sustainability in studies published between 2020 and 2026?

RQ2: What patterns of consistency and inconsistency can be identified from previous findings on talent management and organizational outcomes?

RQ3: Through what conceptual pathways does talent management contribute to retention and sustainable performance?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Talent management is positioned in this study as a strategic human resource management mechanism that enables organizations to identify, develop, deploy, and retain individuals with high potential and valuable competencies. The theoretical foundation of this review is built on four lenses: resource-based view (RBV), social exchange theory, dynamic capabilities theory, and psychological safety. These theories are not treated as findings from the

reviewed corpus, but as analytical lenses used to interpret the patterns emerging from selected articles.

From the RBV, talent is considered a strategic resource when it is valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, organizationally embedded (Barney, 1991). This perspective explains why talent management is often associated with employee performance, innovation, and competitive advantage. However, RBV also implies that merely possessing talented employees is insufficient. Talent must be developed, organized, and utilized through learning, career management, and succession systems before it can generate sustainable value.

Social exchange theory provides a complementary explanation for the relationship between talent management, engagement, job satisfaction, and retention. Employees are more likely to remain with an organization when they perceive that the organization provides development opportunities, recognition, fairness, and meaningful support (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In this sense, retention is not simply the result of administrative HR policies, but an outcome of reciprocal psychological and social relationships between employees and the organization.

Dynamic capabilities theory helps explain why talent management contributes differently across organizational contexts. Organizations operate in charging environments, so talent management must be connected to the ability to integrate, reconfigure, and renew competencies in response to external demands (Teece et al., 1997). This lens is particularly relevant for interpreting studies that link talent management with innovation, organizational resilience, agility, process innovation, and sustainable performance.

Psychological safety is also relevant because several talent management outcomes depend on whether employees feel safe to express ideas, share knowledge, and participate in organizational improvement. A psychologically safe environment allows employees to speak up, learn from mistakes, and contribute beyond formal job requirement (Edmondson, 1999). Therefore, talent management becomes more effective when supported by trust, voice mechanisms, recognition, and a work climate that protects employees from interpersonal risk.

Together, these four theoretical lenses support the conceptual argument of this study. Talent management creates organizational value not only by acquiring and retaining talent, but also by transforming talent into psychological attachment, organizational capability, and sustainable performance.

METHOD

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) to synthesize empirical evidence regarding the relationship between talent management and organizational outcomes. Unlike a bibliometric review that focuses on publication trends or citation networks, this review emphasizes the conceptual integration of empirical findings to identify recurring patterns, inconsistencies, and explanatory mechanisms across previous studies (Snyder, 2019; Xiao & Watson, 2019). The review was guided by three research questions presented at the end of the introduction.

The literature search process was conducted using Publish or Perish application with keywords “talent management”, “employee performance”, “employee retention”, “organizational performance”, “job satisfaction”, and “organizational sustainability”. All search results retrieved were exported for initial screening. Duplicate records were identified and removed using Covidence to function solely as a reference management and screening tool rather than an analytical tool. Titles and abstracts were evaluated against predetermined eligibility criteria. Finally, the full texts of potentially relevant studies were examined before inclusion in the final review.

To improve transparency and consistency during article selection, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were established before the review was conducted. Articles were included when they (1) were published in peer-reviewed scientific journals between 2020 and 2026; (2) examined talent management as the primary construct; (3) investigated at least one organizational outcome, including employee performance, employee engagement, employee retention, job satisfaction, innovation, organizational resilience, competitive advantage, or organizational sustainability; (4) reported sufficient methodological information to allow interpretation of the findings; and (5) were written in English. Studies were excluded when they were conference proceedings, book chapters, dissertations, editorials, conceptual opinions without analytical discussion, duplicate publications, or articles that did not directly examine the relationship between talent management and organizational outcomes.

The analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel to organize the extracted information and compare similarities or differences across the selected studies, as shown in Table 1. During this process, the findings were progressively categorized according to the organizational outcomes reported by each study. The synthesis ultimately derived from the reviewed studies and subsequently interpreted using the theoretical lenses presented in the literature review section rather than being imposed before the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic synthesis of 14 articles reviewed is dominated by quantitative studies based on SEM/PLS-SEM, with a small number of conceptual, bibliometric, qualitative, and systematic review articles. The general patterns showed that talent management positively correlated with employee performance, employee engagement, employee retention, job satisfaction, employee innovation, organizational resilience, competitive advantage, and sustainable performance (Table 1). However, these patterns were not homogeneous because some dimensions of talent management were not significant in certain contexts, especially attraction and retention when tested against sustainable organizational performance (Table 2).

Table 1. Matrix of relevant articles from the years 2020-2026

No	Author, Year	Title	Journal	Methods	Context	Findings
1.	Abdullahi et al. (2022)	Talent Management Practices on Employee Performance: A Mediating Role of Employee Engagement in Institution of Higher Learning: Quantitative Analysis.	Industrial & Commercial Training	Quantitative / SEM	Malaysia	TM → Employee Engagement → Employee Performance (+sig)
2.	AlQudah et al. (2023)	Examining the antecedents of employee retention among Jordan private universities: The moderating role of knowledge sharing	Cogent Business & Management	Quantitative / PLS-SEM	Jordan	TM → Employee Retention (+sig); Task Complexity → Retention (non sig)
3.	Rožman et al. (2022)	Integrating AI into talent management model to increase work engagement and performance of enterprises	Frontiers in Psychology	Quantitative / SEM	Slovenia	AI-TM → Employee Engagement → Firm Performance (+sig)

No	Author, Year	Title	Journal	Methods	Context	Findings
4.	Maley et al. (2024)	Performance management in a rapidly changing world: implications for talent management	Management Decision	Conceptual / VUCA Framework	Multina-tional	PM → TM (reciprocal relationship, VUCA context)
5.	Syah et al. (2025)	Talent management, thriving at work, and employee voice shape turnover intentions	Cogent Business & Management	Quantitative / PLS-SEM	Indonesia	TM → Thriving → Turnover Intention (–sig); TM → Employee Voice (+sig)
6.	Aina & Atan (2020)	The impact of implementing talent management practices on sustainable organizational performance	Sustainability	Quantitative / SEM	UAE	Talent Attraction & Retention → SOP (non sig); L&D + Career Management → SOP (+sig)
7.	Alqarni et al. (2025)	Effect of talent management on employee innovation, organizational resilience and competitive advantage	Sustainability	Quantitative / Path Analysis	Saudi Arabia	TM → Employee Innovation (+sig); TM → Org. Resilience (+sig); TM → Competitive Advantage (+sig)
8.	Saleh & Atan (2021)	The involvement of sustainable talent management practices on employee's job satisfaction: Mediating effect of organizational culture	Sustainability	Quantitative / SEM	Lebanon	TM → Job Satisfaction (+sig); Knowledge Sharing → Job Satisfaction (–sig, indirect)
9.	Al-Dalahmeh (2020)	Talent Management: A Systematic Review	Oradea Journal of Business and Economics	Systematic Literature Review	Global	TM enhances organizational performance through talent attraction, development, retention, and succession planning
10.	Harsch & Festing (2021)	Dynamic talent management capabilities and organizational agility—a qualitative exploration	Human Resource Management	Qualitative / Grounded Theory	Germany	Dynamic TM Capabilities → Organizational Agility (+sig, qualitative)
11.	Smagina & Stitch (2025)	Talent development in higher education institutions: SLR and research agenda	Human Resource Development Review	SLR / PRISMA	Global	TD as part of TM in HEI
12.	Mujtaba & Mubarik (2022)	Talent management and organizational	Journal of Cleaner Production	Quantitative / SEM	Pakistan	TM → Sustainable Behaviour →

No	Author, Year	Title	Journal	Methods	Context	Findings
		sustainability: role of sustainable behaviour				Organizational Sustainability (+sig)
13.	Sinisterra & Salanova (2024)	Connecting TM, employee engagement, and turnover intention: systematic review	Frontiers in Psychology	SLR / Mixed-method	Global	TM → Employee Engagement (+sig) → Turnover Intention (–sig)
14.	Tunio et al. (2024)	Impact of talent management on organizational sustainable performance: a moderating role of process innovation	Educational Administration: Theory and Practice	Quantitative / SEM	Pakistan	TM → Sustainable Performance (+sig); Process Innovation positively moderate

Table 2. Inconsistent findings identified from the reviewed studies

No.	Research Gap	Finding	Author	Method
1.	There are differences in research findings regarding the impact of talent management on employee engagement	Positively significant	Abdullahi et al. (2022)	SEM
			Alqarni et al. (2025)	Path Analysis
		Not significantly influential	Aina & Atan (2020)	SEM
		Not significantly influential	Maley et al. (2024)	Conceptual
2.	There are differences in research findings regarding the impact of talent management on organizational commitment and performance sustainability	Positively significant	Mujtaba & Mubarik (2022)	SEM
			Tunio et al. (2024)	SEM
			Alqarni et al. (2025)	Path Analysis
		Not significantly influential	Aina & Atan (2020)	SEM
3.	There are differences in research findings regarding the impact of talent management on employee engagement	Positively significant	Abdullahi et al. (2022)	SEM
			Rožman et al. (2022)	SEM
			Sinisterra & Salanova (2024)	SLR
		Partial effect	AlQudah et al. (2023)	PLS-SEM
4.	There are differences in research findings regarding the impact of talent management on employee retention and turnover intention	Positively significant	AlQudah et al. (2023)	PLS-SEM
		Indirect (as mediator)	Sinisterra & Salanova (2024)	SLR
		Negatively significant	Syah et al. (2025)	PLS-SEM
5.	There are differences in research findings regarding the impact of talent management on employee innovation and competitive advantage	Positively significant	Alqarni et al. (2025)	Path Analysis
			Rožman et al. (2022)	SEM
		Depend on L&D	Aina & Atan (2020)	SEM
		Negatively significant	Aina & Atan (2020)	SEM
6.	There are differences in research findings regarding the impact of talent management on job satisfaction	Positively significant and indirect (through organizational culture)	Saleh & Atan (2021)	SEM

The thematic synthesis of the 14 selected studies indicates that the reported organizational outcomes can be systematically classified into three recurring pathways. This categorization emerged inductively during the literature mapping process after comparing the reported constructs, mediating mechanisms, and organizational outcomes across studies. Rather than representing predetermined theoretical categories, these pathways summarize the dominant empirical patterns identified from the reviewed articles. Table 3 presents the evidence mapping that links each reviewed article to the corresponding pathway.

Table 3. Evidence mapping of talent management pathways identified from the reviewed studies

No.	Author, Year	Psychological Pathway	Capability Pathway	Sustainability Pathway
1.	Abdullahi et al. (2022)	Employee engagement and employee performance	-	-
2.	AlQudah et al. (2023)	Employee retention	-	-
3.	Rožman et al. (2022)	Work engagement	AI-enabled performance	-
4.	Maley et al. (2024)	-	Performance management	-
5.	Syah et al. (2025)	Thriving, employee voice, turnover retention	-	-
6.	Aina & Atan (2020)	-	Learning and development	Sustainable organizational performance
7.	Alqarni et al. (2025)	-	Innovation, resilience, competitive advantage	-
8.	Saleh & Atan (2021)	Job satisfaction	-	-
9.	Al-Dalahmeh (2020)	Talent development	Succession planning	Organizational performance
10.	Harsch & Festing (2021)	-	Organizational agility	-
11.	Smagina & Stitch (2025)	-	Talent development	-
12.	Mujtaba & Mubarik (2022)	-	-	Sustainable behaviour
13.	Sinisterra & Salanova (2024)	Engagement and turnover retention	-	-
14.	Tunio et al. (2024)	-	Process innovation	Sustainable performance

The following discussion interprets the empirical patterns identified from the reviewed studies through theoretical lenses introduced in the literature review. Accordingly, RBV, social

exchange theory, dynamic capabilities theory, and psychological safety are employed as explanatory frameworks rather than as empirical findings derived from the reviewed corpus. This distinction is important because the present study synthesizes empirical evidence while using established organizational theories to explain why similar talent management practices produce different organizational outcomes across contexts.

Psychological Pathway

The first pathway identified in this review is the psychological pathway, which explains how talent management influences organizational outcomes by shaping employees' psychological conditions and work experiences. Across the reviewed studies, talent management consistently strengthens employee engagement, job satisfaction, thriving at work, employee voice, and retention intentions. However, the empirical evidence also demonstrates that these psychological outcomes do not emerge uniformly across organizational contexts. Therefore, the following discussion focuses on the two principal inconsistencies identified within this pathway.

Inconsistency 1

The literature shows that talent management consistently contributes to the improvement of individual performance through increased work engagement and employees' capacity to perform their tasks. Research by Abdullahi et al. (2022) and Rožman et al. (2022) indicated that talent management practiced can enhance employee engagement, which in turn drives productivity and performance. However, this relationship did not fully apply at the organizational level. Aina and Atan (2020) found that the dimensions of talent attraction and talent retention did not have a significant impact on sustainable organizational performance, whereas learning and development as well as career management show a stronger contribution. These findings suggested that the presence of talent did not automatically generate organizational value without a structured process of competency development and career management.

The differences highlighted the weakness of the approach that treats talent management as a single construct. The resource-based perspective emphasized that competitive advantage did not only stem from the ownership of resources but from the organization's ability to develop and utilize them effectively (Barney, 1991). In the context of talent management, the process of talent development becomes a more valuable capability compared to mere acquisition or retention activities. This interpretation aligns with the study by Collings et al. (2019), which positioned talent management as a strategic system for creating value through the development of high-potential individuals, rather than merely retaining their presence within the organization.

Inconsistency 2

The relationship between talent management and employee retention portrayed a more complex pattern compared to the traditional assumption that talent management practices directly reduce the intention to leave the organization. AlQudah et al. (2023) stated that employee engagement, job satisfaction, and talent management contributed to employee retention, while task complexity did not have a significant impact. Similar results were found by Syah et al. (2025) and Sinisterra and Salanova (2024), who emphasized the importance of engagement, thriving, and employee voice in explaining retention success. These findings indicated that employees' decisions to stay were more influenced by positive work experiences than by the mere existence of talent management programs.

From a theoretical perspective, retention is a consequence of the reciprocal relationship between the organization and employees as explained in Social Exchange Theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Employees tend to maintain their work relationships when they feel support,

opportunities for development, appreciation, and fair treatment. This condition explains why talent management practices that do not result in meaningful work experiences often fail to build long-term commitment. Thus, sustainable retention is more accurately understood as a psychological outcome arising from attachment, individual growth, and the quality of work relationships rather than merely the organization's success in administratively retaining the workforce.

Capability Pathway

The second pathway identified from the reviewed studies concerns organizational capability development. Unlike the psychological pathway, which emphasizes employee attitudes and behaviours, this pathway explains how talent management contributes to organizational capabilities, including innovation, resilience, organizational agility, knowledge integration, and competitive advantage. Nevertheless, the reviewed studies indicate that these capabilities are influenced by contextual organizational factors, resulting in several inconsistencies discussed below.

Inconsistency 1

Most of the HRM literature links knowledge sharing with the enhancement of organizational learning and the creation of collective value. However, Saleh and Atan (2021) showed that although TM increases job satisfaction, the mechanism of knowledge sharing could produce consequences that were not always beneficial. The findings indicated that knowledge-sharing activities had the potential to create perceptions of injustice when individual contributions did not receive commensurate recognition or when the knowledge-sharing process added to the workload without clear compensation.

This phenomenon can be explained through the perspective of Psychological Safety, which emphasizes the importance of a safe work environment for sharing ideas and experiences without the risk of detrimental social consequences (Edmondson, 1999). In less supportive conditions, knowledge sharing can be perceived as a loss of personal advantage or a form of knowledge exploitation. The implication is that the effectiveness of talent management is not only determined by the ability to encourage knowledge exchange but also by the organization's capacity to build reward, trust, and recognition systems that maintain a balance between individual contributions and collective benefits.

Inconsistency 2

Research by Alqarni et al. (2025) and Tunio et al. (2024) showed that talent management contributed to the improvement of innovation capability, organizational resilience, competitive advantage, and sustainable performance. However, Tunio et al. (2024) found that the influence became stronger when supported by process innovation. These results indicated that talent competencies did not automatically translate into sustainable organizational performance without processes capable of transforming individual potential into valuable innovations. The explanation is in line with the Dynamic Capabilities Theory, which places the organization's ability to integrate, develop, and reconfigure resources as the main factor in creating sustainable competitive advantage (Teece et al., 1997). Talent management provides a superior human resource base, but the transformation toward sustainability requires organizational mechanisms that enable knowledge, creativity, and competence to be translated into process changes and innovations. These findings indicated that sustainable performance was the result of the interaction between talent quality, organizational innovation capacity, and the ability to adapt to dynamic business environment changes.

Sustainability Pathway

The third pathway emerging from this review is the sustainability pathway. Unlike the previous pathways, which focus primarily on employee attitudes or organizational capabilities, this pathway explains how talent management contributes to long-term organizational sustainability. The reviewed studies consistently indicate that sustainable organizational performance is achieved when talent management is integrated with learning and development, career management, sustainable behaviour, and process innovation. Accordingly, sustainability should not be interpreted as a direct outcome of talent acquisition alone, but rather as the cumulative result of psychological attachment, capability development, and adaptive organizational mechanisms. This synthesis provides the conceptual basis for the talent-value conversion framework proposed in this study.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

This study concludes that talent management offers a generally positive direction toward performance, retention, engagement, job satisfaction, innovation, and organizational sustainability, but the effects are not always direct and not always consistent across dimensions. The article's objective to identify gaps was addressed by identifying that the main gap is not in the lack of variables, but rather in the weak explanation of the value conversion process from talent management practices to individual and organizational outcomes. The talent-value conversion framework confirms RBV while enriching it through SET and Dynamic Capabilities Theory. Thus, the new concept offered is that talent management becomes strategic only when talent development practices result in engagement/thriving and are supported by the organization's adaptive capabilities.

Limitations

The limitation of this study lies in the use of a review method that includes 14 articles as the main basis, so the scope of the literature still needs to be expanded to avoid generalization in every context. Additionally, more in-depth empirical studies for each variable are needed to ensure validity and avoid bias. Future research should move beyond examining the direct relationship between talent management and organizational performance by empirically testing the value-conversion mechanism proposed in this review. Specifically, future studies may investigate whether employee engagement, thriving at work, employee voice, organizational resilience, process innovation, or sustainable behaviour function as mediating mechanisms linking talent management to sustainable organizational performance.

Research Implications

The implications of this conceptual article indicate that organizations need to design talent management policies that do not stop at recruitment and retention, but emphasize learning and development, career management, succession planning, voice mechanisms, and process innovation. HR practitioners need to measure the success of talent management through psychological and organizational indicators simultaneously. Theoretically, this article verifies that RBV is still relevant to explain talent management as a source of organizational excellence, but at the same time falsifies the simple assumption that all dimensions of talent management automatically result in performance.

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