

A Critical Review of Talent Management in a Local Context: A Case Study

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Talent management (TM) is the current buzzword for organisations that want to attain competitive advantage globally, including Saudi Arabia. The present study explores the status and the emergence of TM in Saudi Arabia in the last few years based on reviewing the pre-existing literature. In addition, an insight into the challenges specific to the management of talent in Saudi Arabia is discussed. Due to the traditional and conservative society of Saudi Arabia, along with its governmental policies such as Saudization and the *Nitaqat* system, it has become extremely challenging for private organisations to employ TM practices. This study provides insights into various TM practices employed in Saudi Arabia; however, none of the studies have provided any information about the types of TM practices to be employed for a better and more efficient organisational performance in the context of Saudi Arabia. It is concluded that the practice of TM in Saudi Arabia is extremely selective in private organisations and can be considered to be in its infancy. Moreover, the gaps in the research in these areas are identified, and based on those, recommendations are made for the scope of future work. This study contributes to a critical understanding on the suitable TM practices that can be applied in Saudi Arabia as well. It provides insights assisting to further research and practical applications. Our study finds its relevance among TM academicians, human resource (HR) departments, policy makers, government agencies, talent managers, and employers who are either already functional in Saudi Arabia or are planning to open business processes in Saudi Arabia in the near future. This can act as a strategic development when collaborated appropriately with the government authorities.

Keywords: talent management (TM), Saudi Arabia, talent management practices, talent pool, challenges

Introduction

Talent has been described as a special innate or acquired ability possessed by employees, which provides a competitive edge to their organisation over others (Baqtayan, 2014). According to Uygulamasi (2014), talent combines competencies, experiences, information, aptitudes, abilities, motivations, and many other more positive traits that involve contributing to the goals of the organisation. Raheem (2016) views it as accrued “human capital”, which includes “skills, knowledge and expertise” ingrained in an individual. It is considered as the foundation of organisational values and efficiency (Ashton & Morton, 2005). Therefore, organisations should be prioritising the attainment and the recruitment of the most talented and competent people as a part of their strategic growth process (Kasahara, 2021). Moreover, due to the globalisation, privatisation, and

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commercialisation currently taking place in developing as well as developed countries in modern times, there has been tremendous pressure on organisations to increase their employability power in terms of talented individuals (Fernanedo & Wulansari, 2020). In spite of this, the number of talented workers typically present in any organisation never exceeds 3-5% of the total employee strength (Nikravan, 2011). Moreover, talent is known to vary from industry to industry (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2012). Over a period of time, it has been realised that any deficit in talent affects the organisation's competency, and therefore, there is a call for a "paradigm shift" in the practices used by traditional human resources (HR) into the sustainable management of talent (Alferaih, 2017). Many organisations have already adopted talent management (TM), and its significance has been well documented by researchers (Boštjancic & Slana, 2018; Hanif & Ynufei, 2013; Khoreva, Vaiman, & van Zalk, 2017; Thunnissen, 2016). Nowadays, TM is being adopted by organisations in a bid to enhance their talent pool's ability to cope with organisational challenges and thereby attain organisational success. The process of TM does not revolve around recruiting; it also includes a myriad of other work practices, such as identification, attraction, selection, succession planning, development of leadership skills or any other required skills in the staff, mentoring, regulation of performance, planning of succession and careers, assigning the right position to the right employee, etc. (Alferaih, 2017; Krishnan & Scullion, 2017; Mwanzi, Wamitu, & Kiama, 2017).

The search for talent among employees is an extremely common HR practice among organisations across the whole world, including Saudi Arabia. Indeed, in Saudi Arabia this is particularly important as it is the richest Arab country, and even though it has the 19th largest economy globally, it is the largest within the Middle East region (Kasahara, 2021). Prior to the discovery of oil in this region (i.e., before 1938), the people of Saudi Arabia mostly lived a nomadic life, popularly known as the Bedouin way of living, dealing in traditional occupations (Raheem, 2016). However, drastic economic changes leading to successive urbanisation occurred with the discovery of this "black gold". It was realised that to cope with a rapid rate of economic development in Saudi Arabia, there was an urgent need to recruit a talented immigrant workforce or expatriates from all parts of the world, especially the UK, USA, China, Pakistan, India, and the Philippines, instead of engaging the local population (Baldwin-Edwards, 2011). These expatriates were favoured due to their proficiency in English compared to the local workforce. The prevalence of these expatriates working in Saudi Arabia has become extremely high, increasing to millions (Winckler, Mahowald, & Maher, 2010), and they subsequently comprise the majority of the total labour force (Raheem, 2016). Among the other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations, which include Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, the number of expatriates is highest in Saudi Arabia (Baldwin-Edwards, 2011). Dealing with the diverse background of employees (expatriates) created bigger challenges for the organisations in Saudi Arabia, as these expatriates remained unprepared to deal with the Saudi Arabian environment. This often led to a high turnover among employees, especially at the senior level (Tan & Wellins, 2006).

Even though the Saudi government prioritized the development of skilled Saudi employees to boost performance efficiency and to eventually curtail the dependence on foreign expertise (Sidani & Al Ariss, 2014), the concept and practice of TM is scarcely being followed or employed by the local firms in Saudi Arabia (Mwanzi et al., 2017). The incorporation of TM is crucial, as TM seems to be one of the prominent solutions for addressing growing competition and to meet the demands for talent on a global level. Therefore, to improve the scenario, a study exploring TM in Saudi Arabia is urgently required. Both empirical and conceptual studies on Saudi Arabia covering this topic are limited. Moreover, there is little research into how the concept of

“talent” is applied in Saudi corporations facing a shortage of skilled manpower. This issue and gap need to be addressed immediately as the lack of in-depth insights into factors prompting the effectiveness of practices can induce negative consequences for organisations as well as employees. These consequences include high talent turnover rate, lower employee motivation, reduced job satisfaction, low level of employee commitment, and ultimate reduced performance and value of the organisation. To avoid any such negative outcomes, the local and multinational companies in Saudi Arabia need to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the different factors that can play a potential role in enhancing their attraction and retention of talent. Thus, in order to improve the efficiency of organisational performance, meet the requirements of the Saudi market, and overcome any obstacles in the implementation of TM practices in Saudi Arabia, it is important to identify the different factors that play a significant part in attracting and retaining talented employees working in local and multinational private sector organisations located in Saudi Arabia. Firms need to understand the critical factors that can influence effective TM and shape employees’ perceptions towards the practices of those companies, thus motivating them to stay in the organisations.

The aim of the current study is to understand the TM practices taking place in Saudi Arabia and the constraints that restrict their usage among private organisations in particular, thereby contributing to the limited literature on this topic. The research objectives of the present study are stated below:

1. To provide an insight into the TM practices followed by organisations in Saudi Arabia.
2. To identify the challenges faced by Saudi organisations due to the Saudi Arabian labour market.

Methodology

To achieve the aim of this study, the following methodology was adopted. Relevant literature was selected from various databases depending upon its relevance to the objectives of the study. Thus, the paper first reviewed the emergence and evolution of TM along with its various definitions, followed by a summary of theories and outcomes of TM, before consolidating the common challenges that may be faced by the organisations in Saudi Arabia as well as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region or the GCC. Any gaps in the research were identified and based on these, the concluding section provided suggestions for future directions of research in this area.

Talent Management

The Emergence and Evolution of Talent Management

The meaning of talent has evolved over the last thousand years from being considered a part of virtue in the 13th century, to attaining a monetary valuation during the 17th century and, beyond that, to being considered a special competency or potential that may be natural or acquired (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, & González-Cruz, 2013; Tansley, 2011). Talent comes in multiple forms, including core, key, universal, and peripheral talents, and the differentiation is directly proportional to the amount of contribution to the organisation (Abdallah, 2017). The process of gathering, strategising, and functioning of these talented capital resources to improve the overall performance of the organization forms TM (Bani-Hani, 2021; Bersin, 2008; Lewis & Heckman, 2006). However, there is a lack of a proper definition of TM, and it depends significantly upon the type of organisation and its goals (Boštjančič & Slana, 2018; Meyers, van Woerkom, Paauwe, & Dries, 2020; Sidani & Ariss, 2014). Some of the early definitions include assigning the right position to the appropriate individual (Jackson & Schuler, 1990). Barney (1991) described TM simply as the “development of

human talent in the organizations”; however, in the case of Rothwell (1994), sustenance of a continued leadership was considered talent. For Creelman (2004), TM is synonymous with “mindset”, while for Pascal (2004), TM was the “meeting of supply, demand and the flow of talent”. Acquiring talent was considered a pioneering step by Hansen (2007), while Collings and Mellahi (2009) emphasised the functioning of properly assigned duties and positions. In some cases, TM is considered to be the same as human resource management (HRM), which involves exclusive people and positions, social capital, and inclusive people HR practices (Iles, Chuai, & Preece, 2010) or as a component of HRM (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2007; Chaudhuri, Hirudayaraj, & Ardichvili, 2018; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Cooke, Saini, & Wang, 2014). For Khatri, Gupta, Gulati, and Chauhan (2010), TM practices involve buying strategies and nurturing talents through training and mentoring. Altınöz, Cakiroglu, and Cop (2013) described TM as comprising eight steps, commencing with defining the goals and strategies and demarcating the key positions. After this, the talent profile for each employee is created and their potentials defined. This forms the talent pool for the organisation. Once these profiles have been consolidated, any gap in the required list of talents is identified, and this gap is addressed either by providing appropriate training or by fresh recruiting. The candidate’s performance is evaluated, based on which any promotion is processed. Studies on TM practices have suggested four main steps for TM: talent attraction, selection, retention, and talent development (Rabbi, Ahad, Kousar, & Ali, 2012). Psychological contracts, career paths, and talent culture were considered to be TM by Baqutayan (2014), while Aggrawal and Jain (2015) included workforce planning, onboarding, strategic plan/goal alignment, performance management, 360 evaluations, executive coaching, leadership, career and professional development, recognition programmes, compensation, succession management, brand, diversity or inclusion, engagement, competencies, and retention. Recently, recruitment and succession planning were also included as a part of TM practices (Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen, & Scullion, 2020; Younas & Bari, 2020). Nangia and Mohsin (2020) differentiated TM practices into high priority and low priority categories during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employee engagement practices using constant communication, virtual celebrations, creation of employee profiles, and other creative practices enhancing mental and physical wellbeing were considered to be a high priority. Along with this, the employee development process, by introducing virtual training sessions, upscaling of skills and abilities, and increase of internal efficiency, was also highly prioritised. Talent acquisition in the form of virtual recruitment was considered a low priority during these difficult times. Table 1 provides brief definitions and the practices that constitute TM as reported by researchers over the past five years.

Table 1

Definitions and Practices of TM

Sl.	Definition of TM	Talent management practices	Reference
	No uniform definition of TM was provided.	Talent categorisation, along with attraction, recognition of talented workers, communication within them, their development and effectiveness	Boštjancic and Slana (2018)
	Strategies that emphasise organisational responsibilities by developing and nurturing talents of employees through opportunities and by managing their weaknesses for sustainable outcomes.	Responsible talent attraction, recognition, development and retention	Anlesinya and Amponsah-Tawiah (2020)
	A strategic approach associated with HR practices to enhance organisational performance.	Attraction, selection, engagement, development and retention	Bani-Hani (2021)

Theoretical Perspectives on Talent Management

Theories have been defined as notions, principles, suggestions, and general assumptions that describe any concepts (Don-Solomon & Tiebiri, 2015). Even though organisations have already started the practice of TM, unfortunately, there has been a lacuna in the development of theoretical perspectives in this regard (Boštjancic & Slana, 2018; Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Njis, Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, & Sels, 2014). Some of the prominent studies comparing the theories on TM are discussed below.

Mellahi and Collings (2010) elaborated on two interrelated theories that affect TM, such as agency theory and the bounded rationality concept. In this regard, agency theory is useful to the managers of multinational corporation subsidiaries, whereas the bound rationality concept is beneficial in decision making for TM. A theory of organisations depending upon TM, reported by Rabbi et al. (2012), focuses on talent as the only means of attaining competitive advantage. In this case, the organisation integrates the talent to become the head of the firm. In comparison, in resource-based view (RBV) theory, the internal resources provide competitive advantage to the firm. Sadeli (2012) integrates multiple theories, such as traditional HRM, strategic HRM (SHRM), along with social exchange theory (SET), to understand the relationship between TM and overall employee engagement. Al Ariss, Cascio, and Paauwe (2014) presented a four-level theory describing TM at various levels and contexts, comprising individual, organisational, institutional, and national/foreign levels and specific themes. Within the individual level, action plans and understanding of skills influence the development of talent; however, at the organisational level, the policies of the organisations affect TM. At the institutional level, the political and legal frameworks institutionalising TM make a difference. The findings of this study predicted some of the following trends, such as the scarcity of talented individuals at a local level, intergenerational differences, and increased diversity and variation in work attitudes among the workforce. Don-Solomon and Tiebiri (2015) considered HRM theory as the basis for understanding TM. Along with RBV, institutional theory has also been taken into consideration while studying the motives of TM (Tatoglu, Glaister, & Demirbag, 2016). Thunnissen (2016) employed an HRM process-based model, where the first step involved strategising any of the TM objectives. Mwanzi et al. (2017) pointed out that talent identification and nurturing were based on RBV theory, while cultural diversity and workplace atmosphere have their basis in brand equity theory. Vroom expectancy theory and Locke's goal theory formed the basis for employee motivation in a study on employees' perceptions of their retention. In a study on the TM of medium- and large-sized companies, TM involved acting according to the values of the organisation, personality, higher level of performance, intellectual ability, and good job-related attitude (Boštjancic & Slana, 2018). Moreover, staff development occurred using workshops, training programmes, inter-project work, problem-solving discussions, mentoring, and job rotation. In addition, it was anticipated that SET would affect the association of TM and employee attitude, where perceived organisational support (POS) was considered part of TM practice (Mensah, 2019). In a separate study, SET combined with equity theory formed the basis for the theoretical foundation of the relationship between TM and employee engagement (O'Connor & Crowley-Henry, 2019). In a recent study, Meyers et al. (2020) suggested mental models theory for understanding the prevalence of talent philosophies. In addition to SET, two other theories, namely human capital theory (HCT) and equity theory, were also found to be relevant to TM (Ebrahim, 2020). In HCT, it was emphasised that investment drives the practices of organisations; this includes investment made by the employer for training purposes. In contrast, equity theory introduces motivation through perceived equality, fairness, and justice. Anlesinya and Amponsah-Tawiah

(2020) reported three theories, namely stakeholder concept, inclusive TM philosophy, and organisational justice, as forming the theoretical foundation for responsible TM practices. Further research is critical to validate these theories that are associated with TM.

Outcomes of Talent Management

Outcomes can be described as the final negative or positive consequence of any event or phenomenon, which validates the impact of the event on the population. Since TM has been perceived as being significant for organisations in terms of business efficiency (Baqutayan, 2014; Cascio & Boudreau, 2016; Hartmann, Feisel, & Schober, 2010; Mellahi & Collings, 2010; Mwanzi et al., 2017; Thunnissen, 2016), success in careers, and a productive work attitude (Baqutayan, 2014), the typical outcomes of TM have been centred on organisational performance (Boštjancic & Slana, 2018; Devi, 2017). The ultimate and continued success of TM can be validated by the benefits experienced by both stakeholders: that is, the organisation and talented employees (Khoreva et al., 2017). Table 2 presents the list of outcomes reported in various TM-related studies. It can be observed that along with organisational performance, TM has been used as a strategic tool for managing a talented workforce. In many organisations, it has significantly enhanced performances related to finance (Jyoti & Rani, 2014); strategic thinking (Bani-Hani, 2021); core competencies (Bani-Hani, 2021; Rutledge, LeMire, Hawks, & Mowdood, 2016); decent work; physical, psychological, and social wellbeing of employees and organisations (Anlesinya & Amponsah-Tawiah, 2020); job satisfaction; work effort (Gelens, Hofmans, Dries, & Pepermans, 2014); employee engagement (Sadeli et al., 2015); superior values; incremental growth; and enhanced employee commitments and motivations (Lee & Bruvold, 2003; Lewis & Heckman, 2006; McDonnell, Collings, Mellahi, & Schuler, 2017). In the case of Gelens, Dries, Hofmans, and Pepermans (2013), perceived organisational justice moderated the relationship between TM practices and workforce differentiation at the employee level. Elaborating on the psychological consequences of employing TM, Baqutayan (2014) reports that employee innovations will increase, and that employees will become more emotionally intelligent, develop a positive mindset and work attitude, regularly take part in teamwork, and have heightened professionalism and aspirations. It was observed that talent-perception congruence and talent-differentiation strategies mediate the impact of perceived TM practices on psychological-contract fulfilment. Likewise, actual and perceived TM practices influence perceived distributive justice, which in turn affect the level of employee engagement. This association is moderated by perceived procedural and interactional justice (O'Connor et al., 2019). Employee engagement mediates the impact of TM on organisational performance (Devi, 2017).

Khoreva et al. (2017) reported that the association of TM practice effectiveness on commitment to leadership competence development is mediated by psychological contract fulfilment. In a recent study, Anlesinya and Amponsah-Tawiah (2020) established that employee wellbeing and decent work mediated the impact of TM practices on organisational wellbeing. Life satisfaction, job engagement, burnout, and work satisfaction formed the parameters for employee wellbeing, while organisational wellbeing comprised sustainable financial gains, competitiveness, increased reputation, social legitimacy, talent retention, learning, and innovation. Appropriate earnings, job security, meaningful work, and perceived fairness in the organisation form the parameters of decent work. Meanwhile, Younas and Bari (2020) reported that TM practices, such as mentoring, strategic leadership, social media, and knowledge sharing, significantly influenced competency development and intention to stay. Similarly, strategic thinking played the role of the moderator in the association of TM and core competency (Bani-Hani, 2021). Strategic thinking was evaluated in terms of the

perspective of systems, focus of intent, timely thinking, hypothesis-driven, and intelligently opportunistic, whereas unique resources, processes, and capabilities formed the core competence.

Table 2

Outcomes of Talent Management

Sl.	TM practices	Outcome	Reference
	Mutual beliefs and perceptions of employer and employee, career growth, encouragement of talent	Psychological outcomes in employees	Baqutayan (2014)
	Perceived TM practices	Psychological contract fulfilment	Sonnenberg et al. (2014)
	Talent identification, succession planning, talent development and retention	Financial performance as well as non-financial performances at employee and organisation level	Jyoti and Rani (2014)
	TM practice effectiveness	Commitment to leadership competence development	Khoreva et al. (2017)
	Talent identification, succession planning, talent development, talent retention	Organisational performance	Devi (2017)
	Employee empowerment, remuneration, training, business coaching and receiving of appraisals and feedbacks	Retention	Johennesse and Chou (2017)
	Role conflict, extrinsic rewards, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, talent retention, and engagement	Turnover intention, job performance, organisational performance	Alferaih (2017), Alferaih et al. (2018)
	16 practices listed by the CIPD*	Affective commitment and intention to quit	Mensah (2019)
	Exclusive TM practices of the organisation	Employee engagement	O'Connor et al. (2019)
	Responsible TM practices, including attraction, demarcation, development and retention	Decent work, employee and organisational well being	Anlesinya and Amponsah-Tawiah (2020)
	Succession planning, employee engagement, job rotation	Organisational growth in terms of talent pool management, skill mapping, decision making, reduction of stress	Abioro et al. (2020)
	Talent retention, attraction, development.	Social domain, organisational excellence, performance management, talent acquisition, coaching talent, leadership growth, benchmarking, work satisfaction, non-monetary rewards, employee empowerment and employee motivation	Mohammed et al. (2020)
	Attraction, selection, engagement, development, and retention	Strategic thinking and core competence	Bani-Hani (2021)

Note. *CIPD: The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

Talent Management: Case Study of Saudi Arabia and Other GCC Countries

An insight into the labour market of Saudi Arabia shows the presence of a dual market due to the expeditious level of economic growth as a result of the discovery and commercialisation of oil, which attracted MNCs (Tlaiss & Elamin, 2016). This further led to an increased number of job opportunities in Saudi Arabia. However, the local Saudi population was marginalised, and this recruitment gap was primarily filled by expatriates coming to Saudi Arabia from all parts of the world (Raheem, 2016). Thus, the labour market of Saudi Arabia is different from western labour markets due to the variation in the attitude of the employees and the work environment. This may also be due to the fact that Saudi Arabian society remains quite conservative and traditional (Tlaiss & Elamin, 2016). This may imply that the concepts of HR or even talents and the management of organisations are still at elementary levels. Oladapo (2014) construed that the concept of TM is relatively new in Saudi Arabia, and therefore, literature pertaining to TM in Saudi Arabia is indeed scarce.

Some of the studies regarding the management of talent in Saudi Arabia and the surrounding GCC countries have been considered for review in this paper.

Singh, Jones, and Hall (2012) described the scope of talent present in GCC wherein it was observed that there is a scarcity of local human capital. Therefore, to make the recruiting culture in private organisations more attractive, rewards and recognition practices have been used for the engagement and retention of a talented workforce. To understand the level of TM, a *qudurat* questionnaire was prepared using a six-point Likert scale considering the aspects of employee and managerial engagements, psychological competencies, and job satisfaction. The sample population in this study comprised 4,599 employees from 40 organisations, mostly concentrated in Bahrain, the UAE, and Qatar. The findings of the study show that employee engagement was low in the case of locals, and the majority of the workers in the private sector were expatriates. Based on this, it was recommended that the private organisations should improve their job motivation factors for an enhanced level of employee engagement and low turnover intentions. However, this study was full of limitations, as there was hardly any proper representation from Saudi Arabia and Oman in the survey. Moreover, there was no segregation of any specific TM practices that were followed in these organisations. Therefore, the practices that may be attractive were not identified. In another study covering the GCC countries, Sidani and Al-Ariss (2014) interviewed 48 managers working in MNCs and regional and local firms located in GCC areas. It was found that a two-tier system was present, which was distinguished between local and foreign talents. Therefore, the firms were running TM programmes differently between those two groups. Attraction and retention were considered equally important, but there was a significant lapse in the implementation programme. Even though there has been drastic change in the perspective related to gender, female talented workers are still not welcomed, leading to a wastage of talent. It was also realised that instead of the traditional styles of HR practices, which do not work in this region, other aspects of TM, such as institutional pressures, organisational challenges, and HR policies, decide the outcomes of TM.

TM practices in Oman were reported by Glaister, Al Amri, and Spicer (2019) based on 26 semi-structured interviews obtained from banking and petroleum firms. The findings of this study show that the organisations in Oman have rationalised the effect of Omanization and that they understand the need for TM. Therefore, semi-inclusive TM practices have been introduced for better productivity. It was implied that the organisations also need to keep in mind the balance between the social and religious differences of the locals and the expatriates, which may lead to a multi-tiered workforce. Tlaiss (2020) empirically explored the association of talent philosophies and TM processes in Lebanon, a country in the Middle East. The findings of this study showed that TM practices are being followed in the banking, hotel, hospital, and retail sectors. This was the first study to explore TM trends in Lebanon.

Among studies specifically on Saudi Arabia, Stadler (2011) evaluated the competency strength of 59 executives and senior managers as part of the talent review using a talent map in a case study on the effectiveness of succession management that formed part of TM practice in a Saudi Arabian mining organisation. The findings of the study showed that 38% of the sample population had well-developed competency, followed by 32% that had reasonable competency strength. The majority (59%) met the performance expectations; however, only 28% had high potential, whereas 7% of the employees with the highest potential performed below expectations. The future high potential owners were identified and considered for succession. The extent of TM in the banks of Saudi Arabia was studied by Al Ruwaili, Bright, and Alhameed (2013) using thematic analysis. The sample population comprised 18 HR employees working for

the banks. Most confirmed the existence of the HR department and their being responsible for the implementation of training. It was also established that TM practices are evident in the banking services. In another study, Abalkhail and Allan (2015) compared the outlook of 44 female managers located in Saudi Arabia with those in the UK, employing qualitative interviews. The findings demonstrate that there is a huge difference between the treatments of talented female workers within these two countries. There was a complete lack of mentoring or networking among female managers, thereby highlighting the gender disparity that exists in Saudi Arabia. Alferaih (2017) developed a conceptual framework to evaluate the turnover intention and organisational performance of talented employees working in tourism-related firms in Saudi Arabia. It was suggested that subjective norm role conflict, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and engagement and retention of talent may influence the overall turnover intention, which will regulate future organisational performance. In a recent study, Bani-Hani (2021) indicated the impact of TM on the core capabilities of 310 managers working in private hospitals situated in Saudi Arabia. The significance of TM for achieving competitive benefits in the area of hospital management was realised. The TM practices were evaluated by applying 28 items covering practices in terms of attraction, selection, engagement, development, and retention. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was conducted to validate the formulated hypotheses. The findings of the study established that TM has a positive significant influence on the core competencies of the firms, which was moderated by strategic thinking. Thus, it was suggested that enhancing TM will also enhance the strategic thinking of these managers, which in turn will increase the level of core competence. In addition, a positive relation between strategic thinking and core competencies was also established.

Talent Management Challenges in Saudi Arabia and Other GCC countries

Even though the importance of TM across the world has been realised (Agarwal & Jain, 2015; Collings, 2014; Mwanzi et al., 2017; Przytula, 2014), certain challenges have been associated with the implementation of TM (Alamri et al., 2019; Olckers & Plessis, 2012; Schuler, Jackson, & Tarique, 2011; Tafti, Mahmoudsalehi, & Amiri, 2017). Most of the time, there is a lag in the presence of committed managers who can incorporate TM practices, or there is no collaboration between work teams and organisations, or there is a lack of senior leaders to make critical decisions (Guthridge, Komm, & Lawson, 2008). Alamri et al. (2019) elaborated on the various types of challenges, which vary among individuals, organisations, sectors, or even regions. Along with these, other challenges have been shown to be highly region-specific and can only be associated with Saudi Arabia and the surrounding GCC countries. Due to the formation of a dual market system in Saudi Arabia (Raheem, 2016), there is a high level of heterogeneity in the workforce (Sidani & Alriss, 2014). The work attitude as well as the strong employment preferences of the local population is inclined towards attaining a more relaxed work atmosphere, which could be obtained through joining the public sector instead of the private sector (Raheem, 2016). This has led to increased levels of unemployment among locals due to their unwillingness to join private organisations, along with waiting for appropriate public sector vacancies (Baldwin-Edwards, 2011). This high rate of unemployment has led to a decrease in the total income of the local workforce (Alferaih, 2017; Biygautane & Al Yahya, 2014). It can be concluded that local talent is wasted, and private organisations have no other choice but to recruit expatriates. Moreover, the employee salary structure also varies according to the type of citizenship of the employee and their country of origin. It was found to be favourably skewed towards the local population, followed by expatriates from the western nations, and the lowest salaries were given to expatriates coming from low-resourced labour-rich countries (Mellahi & Al-Hinai,

2000; Raheem, 2016). Moreover, there are hardly any laws that safeguard expatriates (Shaham, 2009) and no organisational structure, as these firms are family owned (Phillips & Roper, 2009). This points towards the presence of “structural inequalities” and a lack of promising career options or any evaluation of individual performance in the Saudi Arabian job market, which is highly demotivating for employees. Biygautane and Al Yahya (2014) construed that these conditions cause a significant issue in attracting suitably talented employees at a global level. Other issues include the adjustments required to take account of the demographics of Saudi Arabia, the recruitment of not-so-talented individuals, and migration to other countries (Alamri et al., 2019). Thus, talent retention has become the biggest challenge for private organisations. In order to improve employment rates and to introduce a developmental strategy, the Saudi Arabian government in 1994 enforced the policy of Saudization, where the expatriate workforce is forcibly replaced by the local population (Alamri et al., 2019; Nasief, 2016). Saudization practices include providing compensation, advantages, training for skills upgradation, providing financial aid to organisations recruiting locals over non-nationals, ensuring employment for women, subcontracting or employing part timers for low-level jobs, becoming inclusive towards disabled workers, and conducting mass recruitment (Nasief, 2016). In 2011, the *Nitaqat* system was introduced as a part of Saudization. In this programme, private organisations are forced to employ a certain quota of local workers, and the number of expatriates that can be hired by an organisation is restricted. This has increased the obstacles for the implementation of TM practices, as organisations are obligated to recruit locals at a higher salary and provide other benefits, leading to enhanced labour costs (Tlaiss & Elamin, 2016). Moreover, the *Nitaqat* system has led to the formation of ghost workers, where organisations recruit these locals and have them on their payrolls without them participating in any kind of work (Al-Asfour & Khan, 2014). This undermines the entire motive of Saudization, as it creates the false impression of unemployment being reduced. Tlaiss and Elamin (2016) also question the success of the Saudization policy with respect to the aspects of private organisations and believe that the Saudi government should reconsider the norms of this policy. In addition to this, there are many bureaucratic hurdles for employers to overcome before identifying, selecting, and recruiting talented employees. Another big challenge is the gender disparity, which is commonly observed within Saudi Arabian organisations (Raheem, 2016). These challenges hamper TM practices in Saudi Arabia and so need to be considered before implementing TM.

Issues of Concern to Be Explored

Even though TM has been one of the more popular topics for studies in the field of HRM at a global level, a shortage of talent is one of the core issues encountered by private organisations (Kasahara, 2021). The focus lies in the management of talented and highly skilled employees, which includes attracting, identifying, selecting, recruiting, developing, and retaining them for the benefit of the organisation. Nonetheless, there is still a huge level of ambiguity with respect to the definition of TM (Boštjančič & Slana, 2018; Meyers et al., 2020). Moreover, the methodologies of most of the reported TM studies do not provide information in terms of the organisational context (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020). Variations in employee engagement with respect to the type of organisation have been observed (Collings, Mellahi, & Cascio, 2017). Through this review, it has been demonstrated that reliable information on useful TM practices is still missing. More specifically, it also demonstrates that the TM practices in Saudi Arabia are highly understudied (Sidani & Al-Ariss, 2014). This is also supported by the region-wise analysis of the bibliometric content study of Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013), where the findings show that even though the spread of TM studies had reached 35 countries, there are few

published papers on TM with regard to Saudi Arabia (Al Ruwaili et al., 2013; Sidani & Alriss, 2014; Stadler, 2011). This may be because the behaviour of the organisations may vary due to the internal pressures and difficult policies present in Saudi Arabia (Raheem, 2016). This may be primarily because TM may not be fully functional in Saudi Arabian organisations (Biygautane & Yahya, 2014). Amongst the published reports, the majority of the findings have been explored only at the theoretical level and are yet to be empirically tested (Alferaih, 2017; Sidani & Al-Ariss, 2014). None of the studies have evaluated the level of talent present in the employees nor has anyone determined the optimum level for describing it. Most of the studies in this regard have focussed on organisations related to the banking and petroleum industries, and other industries have not yet been explored (Glaister et al., 2019). Moreover, these studies were restricted to talent or HR managers, with the perspectives of employees being overlooked (Glaister et al., 2019; Tlaiss, 2020). Furthermore, in most of the cases, there was a chance of bias in the responses of the employers, as most of these studies were conducted in offices (Tlaiss, 2020).

In addition, it was also noticed that gender studies need to be conducted to understand the lacuna in the TM practices of Saudi Arabia, where the talent is going to waste due to gender discrimination (Abalkhail & Allan, 2015). Based on this, it was found that a major research gap exists in the literature. Empirical studies need to be undertaken to fill this research gap. Moreover, none of the studies empirically evaluate the differences between the usual TM practices, nor identified relevant ones for future studies. The research is limited in understanding the role of many influencing factors, especially the demographic factors of employees and other significant criteria of TM. Studies are also highly restricted considering the ways the MNCs address the challenges globally as well as in Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries (Kasahara, 2021; Sidani & Al-Ariss, 2014). Thus, there is an urgent need to define TM in terms of the workforce present in Saudi Arabia and understand the TM practices that will enhance the work efficiency of talented individuals from Saudi Arabia, so that the requirement of expertise from expatriates is reduced. Our study can help identify the challenges faced by organisations—especially MNCs in Saudi Arabia—when implementing TM. This forms the foundation for understanding and improving business acumen in Saudi Arabia. A holistic and comprehensive study of the TM regime in the country is urgently required, that also covers the Saudization and *Nitaqat* aspects, in order to give a clearer picture of the understanding of TM and its successful implementation.

Conclusion

Our study critically reviewed the practices of TM management at a global level and the theories affecting them. Moreover, the benefits of TM were discussed in the form of outcomes. It was revealed that these TM practices are required for the betterment of organisation-related performance parameters, even in economically rich countries such as Saudi Arabia, as the unemployment rate is increasing significantly despite government policies such as the Saudization and *Nitaqat* systems. Based on the above studies, it can be implied that the use of TM practices in Saudi Arabia is extremely selective in private organisations and can be considered to be in its infancy. There are very few studies detailing the TM practices suitable for this region. Moreover, studies also lack any reporting from the perspective of talented employees and their comparison with locals. There seems to be a mismatch between the employee and employer understanding of the concept of TM. However, this can be improved by addressing the challenges demarcated in this study.

This paper is restricted by the usual limitations observed in any review paper. These articles can be a subject of potential bias as the knowledge is completely based on the previously published research material.

Since studies related to TM in Saudi Arabia are highly uncommon, there the extent of knowledge is limited. Moreover, the quality of these papers also a matter of risk. However, this can be easily overcome by selecting articles from good journals.

Recommendations for Future Studies

The world needs to understand the business dynamics that would be successful in Saudi Arabia, as the GCC countries have a different work mindset compared to the western world, and as such, need to be thoroughly understood. This is crucial for the future of organisations in Saudi Arabia. Our study forms the foundation for an in-depth evaluation of the practices that need to be adopted by the private organisations operating in the country. Moreover, our study encourages the formation of talent pools for easy transitions during times of crisis. Our study also emphasises that TM can be of considerable benefit in Saudi Arabia when employers understand the reasons for the failure of TM practices and act accordingly to address them. It can also be implied that by applying TM, there is a direct overall benefit to employees. It is highly recommended that future studies concentrate on developing TM practices that are aligned with the work culture of Saudi Arabia.

Contribution of This Study

Besides adding a theoretical foundation to TM practices and their associated challenges in Saudi Arabia, our study will be useful for building core competencies for the relevant organisations. Along with TM academicians, this study has implications for policy makers, governments, talent managers, and employers who are already functional and face issues associated with TM, or for employers who are planning to start their business endeavours in the near future in Saudi Arabia. This paper can form the basis for developing a theoretical framework that would be suitable for the Saudi Arabian work environment. This may involve the strategic development necessary to improve the situation in Saudi Arabia, thereby enhancing organisational efficiency.

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